He angled his head away just enough for her attempt to miss, before he brought both her arms down in front of her, so he could wrap his hand around both of her wrists. With his free hand, he cupped her face, forcing her to look at him.

“It’s done.” He had a warning tone in his voice. “Yield.”

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MMA fighter, Kylo Ren is suspended from the league and sentenced to community service at his uncle’s martial arts academy. There he meets Rey Niima, a recent graduate with a natural ability and incredible potential.
Rey Niima rode her ’71 Bonneville down a stretch of highway. The vintage motorcycle had seen better days, but it was a classic she had salvaged with her minimal earnings and fixed up herself. A
self-taught mechanic, Rey had recently completed her degree at California Polytechnic State University. The university had been one of her few options, offering work study programs and scholarships. Even with the assistance, Rey had had to continue to work for her foster father, Unkar Plutt through graduation in order to pay her tuition bills.

After obtaining her degree, she had left Jakku, the small town she had grown up in. She had moved to Corellia. The larger city was well known for it’s manufacturing. Rey was hoping to find a job at one of the numerous repair shops. She had always had a talent for working with machines. Fixing came easily to her, as did learning any new skill. During her courses at university, she rarely had gotten less than perfect scores on any of her exams. The professors were all full of high praise for the little nobody from nowhere. She was their budding star, their diamond in the rough.

Plutt had been less than enthusiastic. He made it his job to ensure she knew where her true place — under his thumb. There had been nights when she came home from classes and a double shift at his junkyard, and he had refused to give her dinner. He’d claim she should have been intelligent enough to eat at school or, if he was feeling especially cruel, told her she needed to lose weight.

She had always been a lean child. Plutt’s crude parenting kept her thin and frail. She was less of a threat to him like that, less of a runaway risk. Her clothes were rags compared to those of her peers. She never had the funds or time to go out after class for a burger or a drink. She had never even been on a date. Her guardian had kept her busy, using her love of learning as yet another way to manipulate her into staying with him after she had turned eighteen. She had wanted to attend university, but she had needed money. Unkar Plutt had been the only one in town who would hire her.

But that was all behind her now.

She was finally free.

Corellia was distinctly different than Jakku. For starters, it was vibrantly colorful, not a droning, unchaining tone of tan. The buildings were all gigantic metal structures, soaring high above the pedestrians on the sidewalks. There were hundreds of people out, traversing to work, shopping, to the gym, and to school. Rey allowed her eyes to dance from person to person, briefly imagining a story for each one, their life according to her. It was a game she had played with herself since she was a child.

Having been abandoned at the innocent age of four, she fancied creating happy endings for those she watched. There may have been dramatic twists and pain-points along the way, but each person she crafted a made-up life for, got a love, a soulmate to watch over and protect them. It was how it was meant to be. No one should be alone in life. Everyone deserved someone.

The downtown city district was always busy. It was densely populated and loud. Rey had only been in it for a couple of weeks, but it was enough to convince her she needed to be somewhere a bit quieter, on the outskirts of the main city. She turned her Triumph down 6th street, passing Resistance, the non-profit Senator Leia Organa-Solo had started nearly thirty years earlier.

It was a second chance organization for people from all walks of life looking for a way back to start. Over the years they had managed to help alcoholics, drug addicts, victims of domestic abuse, and even a handful of refugees from other countries. It was truly impressive. Rey had written one of her papers on the Senator’s work. It had been for a Humanities credit she needed to complete her degree, but she had found she actually enjoyed conducting the research. She had learned far more about the woman than what the tabloids mentioned.
Despite her vast contributions in both the Resistance and the nation’s capital, the Senator’s life had been plagued with controversy. Her father had been accused of murdering his wife, her mother, and he had lost custody of the Senator and her twin brother as a result of the investigation. Leia had married a smuggler. Popular with those dealing in Black Market trade, Han Solo had turned over a new leaf when he met her. He started smuggling people out of war zones, provisions into areas devastated by illness, and aiding those whose own government had forgotten about. The last point in the trifecta, that was Leia’s news-worthy issues, was her only child, her son, Ben Solo.

He had filed to be emancipated at the age of fifteen, after an altercation with his parents and had fallen off the radar. Every year or so, the tabloids posted pictures of blurred men, baring a slight resemblance to him, stating he was having a fling with a model in Milan, or had an entire family in the Dominican, or (Rey’s favorite) had had a sex change and was Lady Gaga. Each year the stories became more and more ridiculous. She hoped the Senator found them amusing, instead of painful.

She had seen the Senator last week for the first time in person. Rey had been working odd jobs at Resistance while she crashed with her college friends. A handyman — or woman, as it were — was always needed. She had been constantly called upon to fix anything and everything from a broken router to a clogged toilet. Though most fixes were common sense rather than mechanical engineering, the paycheck which appeared at the end of each week was more than enough compensation to keep her working the long hours.

It had been on a Thursday morning when she had run into Leia Organa-Solo. The woman, though slightly shorter than Rey, had an absolutely regal presence. She commanded a room with no effort. There was something about her manner and her way of speaking. It struck people, made them want to fight for her, with her. Rey could understand how she had won her elections.

The interaction had been brief. Leia had been making the rounds. She came by every month or so to walk through the building, greeting new recruits, speaking to the leadership, and generally checking up on her foundation. When she had come upon Rey, her face had been warm and understanding. They exchanged a handshake, all the while neither breaking the eye contact they shared. Rey had found herself wishing this woman had been her mother, this stranger who looked at her with more concern than the person who had abandoned her.

Working at the Senator’s non-profit was sure to open doors. Or so Rey had thought. She had been scouting jobs in Corellia since graduation, two weeks prior. After several interviews, she still hadn’t landed a position. There weren’t many openings for a mechanical engineer with no field experience. Firms in the city didn’t count her years working for Plutt as reputable work. It was yet another thing he had ruined for her. Still, she continued to search.

When nothing panned out by the end of June, she decided to jump into the job search full-time. It was risky. She didn’t have much, but she was determined. Rey had chosen to look outside the city, in the suburbs. Perhaps there were some smaller firms willing to acknowledge her skill and past experience.

Cruising along, she entered Tatooine. The residential area was along the commuter belt. It was lined with developments all sporting cookie-cutter style homes with the same fences and shrubbery decorating the lawns. Rey had never grown up in such a community. It was almost too picture perfect to be believable. As she drove along, she began to sense something in the back of her mind. Though she had never been to Tatooine before, she became aware of a familiar feeling.

At the next stop sign, she turned left, following the side street down until she came across a martial
arts studio. Rey slowed her bike, pulling into the empty parking lot. The sign out front looked worn. It was in desperate need of a new coat of paint and some sandblasting, not in that order. It read ‘Ach-To Academy’. There was further lettering beneath, but it had faded to where it was not legible. Rey put her kickstand down and turned the bike off.

Approaching the front door, she peered inside. There was a small waiting room with chairs facing a large studio. There were a handful of standing bags, various weapons, and some targets. The floor was covered in mats and the opposite walls was floor to ceiling mirrors. Like the sign, it was a bit outdated. There was another smaller studio in the back. There was no equipment there, but it did have matted floors and mirrored walls. Closest to her left was a closed door, presumably where the office was located.

Rey scanned around, before her eyes fell onto the hours sign. The majority of classes were at night, with only one or two classes in the early morning. She had missed the early session. The studio wouldn’t be opened again until four in the afternoon, if they would open at all. Some businesses were closed for the upcoming July fourth holiday.

Of course, she thought, slightly annoyed. Why hadn’t she considered the holiday before leaving the city?

She wasn’t sure who she was mad at, herself for stopping or the owner for not being here so she could ask about what kind of training they offered. Her college curriculum had required two physical activity credits. Rey had taken women’s self-defense and tae kwon-do. Since it was for her degree, she wanted to make the classes worthwhile. As with her academic courses, she had found she picked up the material quickly. Her instructor had been the same for both courses, pleased to have her continuing her study. Rey was interested in learning more, if she was able to secure a good-paying job and a cheap apartment. She’d have to keep this place in mind.


Rey whipped around to see a petite older woman walking her dog. “Is he the owner?”

“Yes,” the woman called back. “He just went on his weekly grocery run, but he should be back in about an hour.”

Perfect.

“Thank you,” Rey waved.

“I hope you find what you’re looking for.”

Jumping back on her Triumph, Rey decided to check out the town. With any luck, she could get her name in at a few places over the next hour. She’d check back in with this Luke guy before she ventured to the next suburb.

It only took her a few minutes to get to the town center. There was the typical fair, bookstore, boutiques, and a coffee shop. Most cafes had message boards where help wanted flyers were posted. The one on her campus always had. So Rey decided to try her luck with this one. Also, her roommates preferred coffee to tea, so she was dying for a fix. She parked her bike and headed inside.

The cafe was quaint with brightly colored wooden chairs and the menu done up on large chalkboards. String lights were woven through rod iron bars that criss-crossed about the ceiling,
having a low-light affect. It was rather soothing. Rey took her place behind a man in a business suit and a middle-aged woman who was busy typing away on her cell.

As she surveyed the board, a tall, muscular man walked directly in front of her, blocking her view. He was about half a foot taller than her and broad. From the angle, she couldn’t make out his facial features, but his ears were poking out of his hair. They looked almost too big for his face.

He was dressed in designer label items from head to toe. Rey had never owned a brandname anything before, but she could recognize most. She even had a few favorites, based purely on the quality. Growing up with very little, she had learned to appreciate when things were made to last. Higher-priced, brand named objects usually did hold up…or at least they should.

She paused for a moment, before clearing her throat. "Excuse me. There is a line."

The man turned and lowered his Ray-Bans with one hand, glaring at her over the top of the black rims. "Pardon me. I didn't realize they served coffee to little girls."

His voice was deep with an edge of arrogance. Rey had no qualms about standing her ground. She had been fighting her entire life in one arena or another. Rich, self-entitled jerks like this man were nothing new. She had come across plenty at the university. Most of them were there to party and nothing more. They were already slotted to join their fathers in the family business and just checking a box when it came to earning their degree. While she found it appalling, she also felt slightly sorry for them. They would never earn the satisfaction she felt when she had crossed that stage on graduation day, knowing she was the sole reason for her success. No one else could take credit for what she had accomplished.

"I'm twenty-two," she stated, evenly, moving past him to secure her spot as the next customer.

"I don't recall asking for your life history."

Wow, this guy is unbelievable!

Briefly, she considered moving aside and letting him order before her. Maybe if he scored his hit of caffeine, he’d act like a decent human being. Taking in his attire, she doubted the coffee would have any lasting affect on his attitude. He was dressed from head to toe in black. His hair fell just above his shoulders, framing his face and accented by facial hair on his upper lip and chin. He could give Satan a run for his money.

Probably his job title too, she thought.

“Good morning,” the barista greeted her with a cheery smile.

“Morning.” Rey grinned back.

“Oh, I love your accent!” the girl gushed. “Are you from England?”

“Yes, Westminster, actually,” Rey replied.

“I've never been, but it's on my list to see before I die.”

“I’d like my coffee, before I die,” a familiar, rude voice interrupted.
The girl blinked back her alarmed expression at his open hostility, before the smile reappeared on her face. "What can I get for you?"

"Green tea with honey, please."

"Coming right up. That will be $2.59, please." Rey dug into her pocket, pulling out a crumbled five. She handed it over to the girl, telling her to keep the change. She figured the barista was still in school. Tips meant paying rent and tuition on time. "Thank you."

Rey stepped aside to wait for her beverage. The impatient jerk behind her muttered something under his breath that sounded like 'finally' before he barked his order (coffee, black — like his soul, apparently) at the girl. Rey stood near the condiments counter, idly scrolling through her phone.

Another item on today’s to-do list was finding a new residence. She didn’t have a car, so that wasn’t an option and while she was sure she could continued to stay at her friends’ place for a few more nights, she didn’t want to make a habit of it. She wanted to make it on her own here.

During her freshmen year at the university, she had met Poe Dameron, who was studying electrical engineering for airplanes. He was a year ahead of her, but they had similar coursework. He had his pilot's license already, but wanted to expand his knowledge. He told Rey he wanted to be able to fix any problems he encountered. Rey found it fascinating. He had offered to take her up one weekend, when she was free, but of course Unkar hadn’t allowed for that. Still, she managed to spend time with Poe during their shared classes, normally pairing up with him.

Eventually, she had met his boyfriend, Finn. He was her age and was very animated. Rey hit it off with him instantly. He even started to refer to her as “Peanut,” a nickname he had dubbed appropriate pointing out how petite she was. Poe had supported the name and their quick friendship. The trio had soon become inseparable. It was their influence that had convinced Rey to finally leave Plutt. She had begun hiding her extra funds at their apartment, so Unkar wouldn’t find it. Though she had barely scraped by over the last three years, in the end, it had been worth it when she had finally moved out.

The look on Plutt’s face when she had come home from graduation to pack her bag was forever ingrained in her mind. He hadn’t been able to speak, only sputtering sounds at her, as he watched. Poe and Finn had come for backup, too concerned with his manipulative history to allow her to go on her own. While she had appreciated them being there, she had no greater satisfaction than the moment she walked past her former guardian with a wave and said “See ya.”

She wondered how long he had stood there, unable to fathom how she had done it. Rey giggled to herself at the memory.

“Teenagers.” The bitter judgment came from the monotone-clad man to her left. Rey resisted the urge to roll her eyes, instead tucking her phone into her pocket and turning her attention to the coffee collars on the table. She knew she’d need one for her tea. As she reached for it, she grabbed a second. Mr. I’ll-Take-My-Coffee-Black would no doubt need one as well.

*Kill ’em with kindness.*

“Green tea with honey for Rey,” the barista called out, setting the steaming cup down on the counter.

Rey bounced forward, thanking the girl again, before slipping the cardboard ring around her beverage. As she passed, the devil-man, she held out the second collar. “For you.”
His eyes widened behind his sunglasses, as his eyebrows arched impressively high.

Ha!, she cheered, smugly.

“Have a nice day.” She gave him the same “See ya” wave she had left Unkar Plutt with.

The baffled expression was still on his face as she strolled out the door.

By the time Rey arrived back at Ahch-To Academy, she was no longer the only vehicle in the parking lot. A beat-up, sand-colored Landspeeder was sitting by the entrance. Rey took it as confirmation Luke had returned. She went to the door and knocked.

“It’s unlocked,” a gruff voice hollered.

Rey furrowed her brow, unsure his reason for such a rough tone. She walked in, tentatively.

“Hello?”

A bearded man stuck his head out of the office door. He gave her a confused look. “Who are you?”

“Rey Niima.” She extended her hand for a shake. There was a long pause, as he stared at her before he took it.

“Apologies, Rey Niima,” he released her hand. “I was expecting someone else.”

For a moment, they stood together in silence, both regarding the other. Rey was wondering why he looked so familiar while he seemed to be sizing her up. He had kind eyes, blueish gray, like the coast after a particularly bad storm. His hair was long for someone his age, adding to his weathered look when combined with his lengthy facial hair. He reminded her of an old cowboy instead of a serene sensei, but she couldn’t deny the eerie sense of calm he emitted.

“I saw your sign and was interested in learning more.”

“Really?” She wasn’t sure if his tone was pleased or amused. He was wearing a strange smirk that lent itself to either option.

“Do you have any experience?”

“Only a little,” she admitted. “I completed a couple of courses at University.”

“And what degree have you obtained?”

“Bachelors of Science.”

His eyes filled with mirth. “I’m not sure what good that will do you here.” Her face fell, until he added, “But let’s see what you’ve got.”

“What now?”
“No time like the present.”

He led her into the larger room. Instructing her to stand in the middle, he retrieved a bow staff from the wall of weapons. “I want you to spar with me,” he told her, taking another staff for himself. “Don’t overthink anything. Just react.”

“Ok.”

She wasn’t sure what was happening. Did she need to try out in order to attend classes at this place? She had no experience to draw upon, outside of her college classes, so she wasn’t sure how students at true martial arts studios did it. She hoped this Luke guy would go easy on her. It had been over a year since she had taken tae kwon-do.

“Ready?”

Rey nodded.

In the next instant, he was advancing on her, striking out with various angles. Rey managed to block each one. She wasn’t sure how she knew which block to use or how to counter each line of attack. It wasn’t a conscious decision. It felt more akin to breathing, as if she had always done this. During her courses at California Polytechnic State, they hadn’t used weapons. It had all been hand to hand combat techniques. Having the staff in her hand made her feel whole, as if it was an extension of herself.

Her surroundings faded. She experienced a type of tunnel vision. All she could see was Luke and his staff. There was a stillness in the air around her. It was as if everything happening was in slow motion. She heard her breath echoing in her ear drums, her heart beat became the constant tempo in the back of her mind. She blinked. And when she opened her eyes again, she spun away, shielding herself from another jab.

A few minutes into parrying with him, she stopped defending herself and began attacking. As with her defense, the moves flowed through her. She barely registered the commands. She simply felt it. She was fluid. She was effortless. She was free. Her motions directed Luke about the room. She moved him into the far corner, until she had him trapped. Then she swung her staff, aiming for his throat. The end of her weapon stopped a mere inch from its target.

“Good.”

His praise broke her out of her trance. Rey had to blink a few times before she was able to comprehend what she had just done.

“I’m sorry,” she said, quickly. “I shouldn’t have done that, sir.”

“Don’t apologize,” he told her, sternly. “You may call me Luke or Master Skywalker. Sir is too formal. Makes me sound old.”

She tried to hide her giggle at the last part. He didn’t miss it. She bit back her bottom lip, trying to figure out what to do next. Was her stunt in the studio a trial run? Would he allow her to take classes or would he tell her she was too hostile to train with others? Rey swallowed against the lump forming in her throat.

Eyeing her once more, with the same expression as earlier, he asked, “Why are you here, Rey
“Niima?”

“I wanted to talk to you about taking a few classes.”

“But why are you here? There are a number of studios in the city.”

Rey wet her lips, trying to decide how to tell him she had been drawn here. There was no easy way to say it. It sounded crazy. In the end, she shrugged. “It’s too loud. I can’t hear myself think when I’m there.” It wasn’t a lie. It just wasn’t the full truth.

Luke seemed tickled by her confession. “Ever considered teaching classes?”

“I don’t think I’m qualified. I haven’t been trained.”

He sighed and gave a small nod before taking the staff from her. He returned both staffs to their rightful place on the wall. “You have raw, natural talent. If I was still in my prime, I would jump at the chance to train you, however, I’m no longer that person.”

“Excuse me?”

“Do you know anything about MMA, Rey?”

She shrugged. “I never watched a lot of TV, but I’ve heard talk. It’s fighting, like the NFL of fighting or something, right?”

“Close,” he chuckled. “Follow me.”

He led her back to his office, where he took a seat behind his desk. When the door swung open, Rey gasped. There were pictures all over the walls, trophies, medals, and banners. She recognized a younger version of him in all of the photos. He had the same kind eyes, but his face was lighter, full of more hope. He was surrounded by other celebrities, fighters, and even some kids from his time doing charity work. But there were no photos of his family. And then she made the connection.

“You’re the Luke Skywalker? As in the son of Anakin Skywalker, the former champion? And the undefeated rival of 1983?”

“Was.”

“I had no idea.” Rey felt embarrassed. Even living under a rock like Jakku, she had heard tales of Luke Skywalker, the underdog fighter turned pro and then champion. Only after he had won his first title in 1977 did the press discover his heritage. He was fighting royalty, the only son of the six time champion, Anakin Skywalker. Which also made him…

“You’re the Senator’s brother?”

“Yes.”

“I used to work for her,” Rey admitted, still admiring all of his awards. At least now she understood why he looked so familiar. He and his sister looked alike. “Well, part-time anyway. Being a handyman wasn’t exactly my dream job.”

“Ahch-To is my dream job. It’s my life’s work,” he informed her, gesturing for her to take a seat across from him. “Passing on what I have learned to the next generation, that is my goal.” He
explained, pulling out a class schedule and sliding it across the table to her. She noticed several of the classes had ‘TBD’ listed under the instructor portion. “I’d like you to be a part of it.”

“You’re offering me a job?”

“It doesn’t pay much,” he replied quickly, but honestly. “As a consolation prize, I do have a vacant apartment upstairs. You’d be welcome to take residence there, if you’d like. Makes the commute easier.”

Rey pinched herself, much to his amusement. She had to be dreaming. First she had an out of body experience as some kind of martial arts prodigy, then she met the legendary Luke Skywalker, and (as if that wasn’t enough for one day) he had offered her a job AND a place to live. Rey pinched herself again.

“It’s not a dream,” Luke reassured her. “I’ve been looking for someone to help me out around here for months. Not one person has come in here with the ability to do what you just did.”

“But I don’t even know what I just did.”

“You will,” he grinned. “I can guide you.”

She was barely able to process what was happening. This morning she had decided to venture out on the chance she’d find a few leads, possibly get an interview. She had never expected to score a job so soon. It seemed surreal. She recalled the feeling she had when she entered Tatooine. This place had called to her. Perhaps this was where she was meant to be. It had to be destiny.

“Thank you.”

Those two words felt pathetic in comparison to how grateful she truly felt. She didn’t know how to convey what she was feeling. Those words would have to do for now. She vowed to work hard and learn as much as she possibly could. The best way to demonstrate how appreciative she was to Luke was to be the best employee and student he had ever had.

“So, when can you start?”

“Oh now too soon?”

Luke laughed. She realized she liked his laugh.

“Here are your keys. This one is the master for the studio, and these two are for the apartment. This one is for the main doorknob, and this is for the deadbolt. You can run upstairs to check it out, if you’d like.” He dropped the keys into her hand, gesturing to the staircase behind him.

“Seriously? Just like that?”

“Sure, why not?”

“Can I call my friends?” she asked, getting up from her seat. She wasn’t going to ask him twice, lest he reconsider hiring her right off the street. “I’ve been crashing at their place while job-hunting.”

“Whatever you want, but before that, I do need to make you aware of one last thing.”
Rey sunk back down into her chair. There was a strain in Luke’s voice. She could tell there was a heaviness for what he needed to say next. “My nephew will be joining the teaching staff this week.” Rey wanted to ask why that was an issue, but kept her mouth shut, when she saw the conflict look in Master Skywalker’s eyes. “He’s gotten into some trouble recently, courts were involved, and I offered him a place here while he-.” There was a pause, as he hesitated how to phrase the next part. “While he reassess certain choices he’s made.”

“Are you concerned I’m taking his job?” Rey asked, unclear why Luke was telling her this.

“No, no, of course not. He will only be here for six months.” Master Skywalker focused not on her, but somewhere off to the side, thinking. “He’s not the easiest to get along with. He has a temper and most people find him….intimidating.”

“I’m sure he’s a good person.”

Luke cast her a disbelieving look. “He was…once. Hopefully, he can be again.” He held her gaze a moment longer, before his grave manner yielded to his normal calm face. “Call your friends. We can begin going over some basics once you’ve shared the news with them.”

“Thank you.”

Rey followed the stairs up to the apartment, shooting a quick text to Finn. The apartment had a small, loft design. Though modest, it was surprisingly modern. The floors were hardwood and had been well maintained. There was a small kitchen coming off from the main living area, hidden behind a staircase, leading up to the bedroom area. On the other side was the door to the bathroom. Rey’s favorite part of the entire place was all the windows. Even in the bedroom section, there were a few skylight windows allowing sun beams through. As an added bonus, there was a tiny balcony coming off the main living area, overlooking the back of the studio grounds.

Excitedly, Rey ran out the sliding glass door. Peering over the railing, she saw Luke had created a rock garden out back. It was very zen of him. There was a small pond, surrounded by various shrubs and a few solar lamps, but the primary construction was rocks of varying shapes and sizes. There was one particularly large one overlooking the pond. It was large enough for a person to sit on. She wondered if Master Skywalker often sat out there. He had seemed so peaceful, so content until he had spoken about his nephew.

She cast the thought away, not wanting to dwell on the uncomfortable feeling that had sprung up in her at the mention of the troubled individual. Instead, she chose to go back inside to continue scanning her new place. The bathroom was stark white with a few gray accents. She would need to get some colorful towels and accessories to spruce it up, otherwise she’d feel as if she was in a medical wing.

The bedroom area didn’t leave much space for a bed and there wasn’t a closet, but there was a large wall of shelves. She was confident she could use the boxed out areas to her advantage. After all, she had very few personal belongings. Once she had started to get regular pay checks, she’d start scavenging at the local thrift shops for decor to make this place more her own. She was nothing, if not resourceful, and she was confident she could bring this little nest to life. In fact, she was looking forward to it.

Just then, her phone buzzed in her pocket, still on vibrate from when she had been on her motorcycle.
“Finn?”

“Hey Peanut, what’s up?”

“I got a job!”

“Really?” She could hear the excitement in his voice, laced with a bit of surprise. “That’s great. I’m so proud of you. Where at?”

“Ahch-To Academy in Tatooine.”

Finn paused. “Academy? Is it like a teaching facility for engineers?”

“No, for martial arts.”

“Martial arts? I thought you were looking for engineering work?”

Rey went on to fill him in on how she had met the famed Luke Skywalker and how she had impressed him enough for him to give her a job, as well as a home. Finn listened attentively to her tale, not stopping her once. She did hear him switch the phone to speaker, so Poe could listen in as well. As she filled her roommates in, she walked out of the apartment. Master Skywalker was no longer in his office. Scrunching up her face in confusion, she checked the studio, only to come up empty.

“So when are you moving in?” Poe asked.

“Whenever you guys can help me move my stuff,” she laughed.

“Move in party!” Finn cheered. “We’ll bring the wine.”

“And the food,” Poe added.

“You guys are the best,” Rey told them, practically beaming at their support, as she stepped out into the parking lot.

“Well, we have to get back. We were on break for lunch, but text me the address. Ok, Peanut?”

“Ok.”

“See you tonight!” Poe yelled in the background before the call disconnected.

Rey was still riding her excitement when a matte black Aston Martin pulled into the parking lot. Working at Jakku Parts & Repairs had taught her to recognize all brands of cars and motorcycles. This wasn’t just an Aston Martin. It was the new Vanquish S. She didn’t pay attention to the car, assuming it had only pulled into the gravel parking lot to turn around. It was an impossibly expensive vehicle to be in this area.

She returned her attention to her phone, quickly typing her new address into her group text with Finn and Poe. With their help, she could transport her remaining belongings from their apartment in Corellia to the academy. If they came straight from work, she could probably move everything she owned in tonight and then the three of them could focus on celebrating over dinner. There wasn’t much to move, so it was doable.
“Ah, you’re finally here,” Luke greeted someone over her shoulder.

Rey turned slightly, as she put her phone away and met a penetrating glare. She should have known. This had been too perfect, too simple. The universe never gave so effortlessly. Black hair, black clothes, black coffee, black car… Only one pretentious asshole would be strutting around in such a vehicle.

Fuck.

“Rey,” Luke continued, unaware of the tension rising between his two new instructors. “I’d like you to meet Ben Solo, my nephew.” The owner of Ahch-To, patted his impossibly tall nephew on the back. The younger man barely registered the touch. He was staring daggers at her. “Ben, this is Rey Niima, my newest instructor. You’ll be working with her while you are here.”

His eyes widened slightly, the first indication he had heard a word of what his uncle was saying. He echoed Rey’s earlier thought.

“Fuck.”
Chapter Summary

Kylo Ren returns to Ahch-To Academy intending to take over the family business, only to find out his uncle already has other plans, featuring the same woman who snapped at him earlier that morning.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.
"Watch your language!"

The sound of his uncle's hand slapping the skin of his arm echoed through the studio porch. He cursed again, his eyes on the girl, as she attempted to cover up her laugh.
"I should tell your mother," Luke muttered.

"Go ahead," Kylo grumbled, noticing how the girl's expression changed slightly. There was a flicker of recognition, then interest. She was regarding him with a strange curiosity — part fear and part humor. There was an intensity in her eyes. He hadn't ever seen anyone look at him with such an intensity. Yet, he couldn't look away. He was too transfixed on her eyes. It was disconcerting.

"Classes don't start until after the holiday." His uncle explained. Kylo kept himself trained on the girl. She didn't break from him either. "I trust you will use the next few days to re-acclimate yourself with the place." The last statement was pointed at Kylo and he finally pulled his gaze away.

Kylo didn't reward his uncle's barb with a response. Instead, he brushed past him and the girl to enter the academy. The school appeared unchanged since his days there many years prior. He removed his designer sunglasses, tucking them into the collar of his shirt, as he stepped down onto the matted floor of the main studio. His reflection had changed. Everything else remained untouched, as if time itself hadn't passed here. The room held many memories — some good, some not.

His parents had sent him to live with his uncle when he was a teenager. He had been acting out at school, starting fights with the other students. When his mother had asked why, he had lied. Kylo hadn't wanted to admit it was because his classmates were aware he was the grandson of Anakin Skywalker, the fighter who had allegedly murdered his wife. Despite being proven innocent, the rumors still clung to his family.

It had been in his best interest to move to a different town, a different school district. That was what his mother had told him anyway. But later the same evening, he had heard her talking to his father. They had been discussing him and what to do with him. His father wanted to send him to a juvenile detention facility. His mother refused. She said it would look bad for her political career if he had to go there. Instead, they decided to send him to live with a relative he had only seen a handful of times in his life.

Feeling betrayed, Kylo had spent the better part of the night researching his options online. Around 3am, running on fumes, he had stumbled across the answer.

He had asked to be emancipated.

Leia and Han had been against it. Surprisingly, his uncle had been the one to support his decision. It was only once they had to appear in court, Kylo spoke the truth. When he explained to the judge about how he had been bullied and mistreated due to his lineage, the mediator sided with him. He had, of course, thrown in some additional details about how he had lost himself due to the overwhelming nature of his legacy and how he felt he needed to make a clean break from his family in order to find himself.

Though he was a minor, the judge had approved the request. The court sealed his records and required his mother no longer pull him into the spotlight. In fact, he was to remain out of any political proceedings until such a time as he was (if ever) ready to be recognized as Ben Solo again. He moved in with his uncle the following day. It was his first step towards his new identity.

Luke hadn't been the most attentive guardian. During Kylo's first week of school, his uncle had forgotten to pack his lunch. Too embarrassed to tell the teacher, Kylo had ended up going hungry. The following month, Luke missed the parent/teacher conferences, which Kylo got blamed for. And so it went on. Eventually, his teachers gave up, not having enough patience or resources to devote to the troubled youth or his absent warden.

As with his previous school, Kylo kept to himself. He had never felt comfortable around those his
own age. His interests differed greatly. Where he was attracted to traditional art forms, such as calligraphy and bone script, his classmates were more concerned about instant messaging and the latest album release. He didn't have anything to discuss with his peers. He enjoyed learning, even if the content was limited. He could easily find more entertaining material at the library to supplement the school's curriculum.

When he had turned seventeen, his uncle had allowed him to have his own space, renovating the space above the academy into an apartment. It became Kylo's sanctuary. If he had had any friends to invite over, he was sure they would have been jealous. There was a great amount of freedom associated with having his own place. The majority of his classmates were sneaking off to do things with their significant others. He had even caught a couple of the other martial arts' pupils playing a game of spin the bottle one night.

He had never cared about girls. They were a distraction. After witnessing his parents tumultuous relationship, he didn't see a reason to form lasting attachments. His uncle had never married and he seemed to be getting along fine. He had his own successful business, along with plenty of peace and quiet. Though, there were nights when Kylo caught him sitting on the large rock in the zen garden, watching the pond as if it was the most engrossing thing in the world.

And Kylo knew.

Luke was lonely.

Kylo had become more aware of how alone both his uncle and he were as he completed high school. His mother rarely called to check in anymore. They only saw her during the major holidays, when it was time for her to have a photo op. Kylo was never permitted to be in the pictures, since his story was to remain out of the papers. His father had stopped calling and visiting all together. He had disappointed them growing up, but he had assumed they would be excited that he had graduated top of his class with multiple acceptance letters. In the end, his father had been traveling and his mother only stopped by his graduation for a quick hello, before she went off to a benefit. Luke had been the only one to stay with him.

So he had stayed with his uncle.

He had attended Berkeley. It was close enough to Tatooine he could commute. Kylo joined their UC Martial Arts program, while he double majored in history and philosophy. On top of continuing his training with Luke, he took all the available courses in Hearst Gym: Karate, Taekwondo, Jujitsu, and Wushu. Having additional instructors improved his technique and allowed him to enhance his own fighting style.

That was when the tides turned.

Luke began to evaluate him, often giving him the hardest critiques in class. He started assigning Kylo to the smaller studio to do self-meditation and practice. At first, Kylo assumed it was because he was too far advanced to be training with his peers. He had been excited, believing he had surpassed them. Eventually, he came to understand the true reason. His uncle saw his new style as dangerous and aggressive. When he confronted Kylo, after he had completed his undergrad degree, Kylo had lashed out, leaving Acho-To Academy and his uncle. He had gone home for the first time in years.

Only there wasn't a home to go back to.

His parents had moved from their previous address, once they separated. His father had been traveling so frequently, he no longer had a permanent address. He had a PO box. In his absence, Leia had downsized to an apartment in downtown Corellia, so she could be closer to her foundation.
Kylo hated Resistance. It was his mother's surrogate child, the one she had created once she had gotten rid of him. She had thrown herself into the work she did there, helping other people's children, saving them in the way she couldn't save him. It was the ultimate rejection. What mother didn't love her own child enough to be there for them when they were struggling? Apparently, his mother, because she not only dropped him off on the doorstep of a childless hermit, but then she ignored him in favor of helping everyone and anyone else on the planet who was struggling.

That was when he had met Anthony Snoke. The owner of the First Order had taken him under his wing. Being the only grandchild of the famous Anakin Skywalker had enticed Snoke. His fighting club had signed several big names at the time, building up their roster for future UFC events. He coaxed Kylo into joining them, praising his personal style, as well as promising him a lengthy career doing what he loved on his own terms. Kylo had immediately accepted.

Over the next six years, he had managed to become one of the most recognizable names in the MMA world. Undefeated, he had secured numerous endorsements, sponsorships, and even offers to appear in films. He had forgotten his former self, Ben Solo, changing his legal name to Kylo Ren, when he joined the First Order. He cut himself off from his parents and Luke, ending his relations with them as swiftly as he had changed names. Today was the first time he had returned.

"Excuse me."

The familiar British accent pulled him back to the present. Luke's protege was standing behind him, trying to get in the doorway with a spray bottle and a handful of rags. She had pulled her hair up into a high bun, revealing her slender neck and had removed her shoes. He saw her toes were painted a brilliant yellow-orange. The color of sunshine. Her namesake, he realized. Her eyes were on him with the same intensity as before.

Noticing him watching her, she said, "I'm on cleaning duty."

He stepped aside, allowing her to pass. She gave him a thank you and proceeded to kneel on the floor. Despite his sour attitude towards her, she didn't appear shaken or agitated. She wasn't intimidated by him at all. Usually people were afraid of him based on his stature alone. Even though he was a head taller than her, she held herself as though they were at the same level. She hummed to herself, spraying a thin layer of cleaner onto the mats, as she washed off the dirt and grime. He cringed inwardly, when she pulled away the rag to reveal a dark smear of filth.

Better her, than me, he thought.

Notwithstanding his objection for having her here, he found himself drawn to her. When he had seen her earlier, he had been struck by how light she was. Physically, she was small. She had a slim build and a musical voice. But she had a radiance about her, as if she as shining from the inside. Kylo had interacted with naturally happy people before. What this girl had was different. She hadn't been overly happy when he had met her. In fact, she had confronted him about his position in line. Her energy wasn't singularly happy. It was unusually pure.

And it made him nervous.

Shaking his head, he exited the room to find his uncle. He needed to distance himself from the girl and the unfamiliar feelings she was bringing up. Luke was just outside the studio, tidying up the waiting room area. When Kylo approached him, he waved toward the office. Clearly, he knew what to expect.

"What's she doing here?" Kylo asked, once the door was shut behind them.
"Who?"

"That girl," he hissed, annoyed he had to spell it out. His uncle was evidently going to make his next six months difficult.

"Rey?"

"I don't care what her name is. What is she doing here?"

"She's my new instructor," Luke sighed, taking a seat at his desk. "I thought I already explained."

There were papers all over the desk. It was organized chaos. It vexed Kylo. Every thing had a proper place and a proper purpose. His uncle's office needed order. If it had been his academy, he would have already sorted through all the forms, invoices, and bills. He'd have a system in place. It would be logical and consistent.

"What you haven't explained are her qualifications."

"I assessed her. She's more than adequate."

Kylo couldn't fight his uncle on that particular point. It angered him. Luke was still an expert martial artist, even if his style favored more of a defensive strategy than an offensive one. In Kylo's opinion, it was more prudent to have a strong offense. Life didn't play fair. Why should he? However, his uncle had studied a more traditional line of forms, focusing on self-defense and inner peace. He had stayed outside of the city for that very reason.

"Where is she from?"

"Jakku."

Kylo cursed. Venom seeped into his voice. Was his uncle serious? Jakku was the lowest of the low. It was a town barely marked on Google maps. Nothing had ever come out of there. No wonder she has no manners, he thought as he recalled how he had run into her earlier that morning. She was raised in a trash heap. Kylo had toured around the world as part of his training and competitions. Places like Jakku were all over, but they were all the same. The homes were trash. The businesses were trash. The people were trash. This girl wasn't worthy of being in his uncle's academy.

His uncle was leaning back in his seat, watching him with the signature Skywalker smirk. In the light, he appeared more like his former self, younger with a cheeky side. Kylo blinked and the smirk and cheekiness were gone. The boyish grin had been replaced by a stoic demeanor. His hands were folded neatly on his stomach, his eyes filled with unspoken words.

"I won't be around forever, Ben."

"Don't call me that."

"I will not address you as Kylo Ren."

He ignored his uncle's defiant retort, resisting the urge to punch a wall. He was fuming beyond control now, ready to strike the closest item in range. There was a lamp on the desk. It would make a satisfying crash if he knocked it off. His uncle sensed his wrath and continued in a calm tone.

"You're my nephew, Ben. I wanted to leave this to you, but you lost your way. I need someone to take over this place."
"This place belongs to me."

Luke fixed him with an indignant stare. "You left for the First Order. You abandoned your training here for what Snoke could offer you. You haven't been back since."

While nothing his uncle said was inaccurate, Kylo still felt jilted. He was not about to allow a girl off the street take his birth right. His grandfather's legacy had begun on these grounds. He'd be damned if some Jakku trash took it over. She probably didn't even know the first thing about martial arts. She was so small and bubbly with her little British accent and her brush of freckles. There wasn't a fighter underneath all her sunshine and rainbows. There was probably just a scared kid, searching for a hand out.

*Joke's on you,* he thought, cynically. *This family is filled with monsters.*

As if the scandals regarding his grandfather and parents weren't enough, Kylo had made his own splash. The estranged son of the state Senator had worked tirelessly for the past six years to separate himself from his family, only to be forced back into their lives now. It was ironic. The one place he had never wanted to see again was the one place he ended up.

Armitage Hux, his manager, had called the Senator the moment Kylo had gotten in over his head. His personal assistant Gwendoline Phasma had threatened to shove a sedative into his ass if he didn't quiet down. Apparently, his yells of protest were interrupting Hux's conversation, nearly convincing his mother to not bring in her team of high-paid lawyers to sweep the incident under the rug. Kylo couldn't have cared less. In his opinion, the wretch deserved what he got. But the federation disagreed.

He had been suspended for six months after attacking his competitor. It wasn't unusual behavior for him. He had a reputation in the MMA community for his unparalleled fury. It brought in a lot of press and even more fans, but it also created a whirlwind of paperwork for Hux and Phasma. The officials did not appreciate his outbursts. The federation had threatened him with suspension before. He hadn't believed they would follow through. When he had received his court summons, he realized his luck had run out.

The judge had been strict, providing him with two options. He was permitted to choose between them, with the caveat if he didn't complete either sentence fully, he'd be disqualified from any future scheduled fights and removed from the league permanently. He would have preferred jail time to teaching at his uncle's academy, however his manager wouldn't have it.

His sponsor and mentor, Anthony Snoke, did not approve of failure. In the end, the decision had been made for Kylo. He would serve the next six months at Ahch-To Academy teaching martial arts for free under his uncle's guidance. During those six months, he was to see a therapist weekly about his anger issues. He was also expected to have weekly check-ins with the federation on his progress. If he did not fulfill any of the requirements, he'd lose his titles and be removed from the MMA federation indefinitely.

It was a colossal mess.

"The academy is mine," Kylo insisted once more.

"Correction. It was yours. You decided to take a different path."

"So you're going to give it to that - that scrawny nobody! She could be a drifter or a con-artist for all you know."
Luke chuckled softly. "I doubt that. She is rather skilled and in need of a place to belong." He glanced at the door, as if expecting her to come barging in. If she did, Kylo would shatter more than a lamp. "I think this is a good fit for her and for me."

"Skilled," Kylo scoffed. "She's about as skilled as a-"

"And you know that how?"

He stalled. Kylo couldn't admit he was rude to her at Maz's coffehouse. It would only further Luke's resolve. Also, if Maz ever found out that he had treated a girl so rudely, he'd get an ear full from her. The old woman was less than half his size, but she was not to be taken lightly. She had watched him on occasion, even before he had come to live under Luke's care. She was a close friend of his parents. She had known Kylo since before he was born. It was a fact she often brought up when she was trying to guilt-trip him.

"I…I can tell by looking at her."

"You used to be a better liar."

His temper flared at the term. Luke knew how he felt about lies, how he hated them. He had been fed one after the other by his father. Han Solo had never been good with confrontation. He usually tried to sweet talk his way out of problems. Kylo had taken issue with it from an early age, having more intelligence than his father and able to outwit him before he was a teenager. Han's coping mechanism was to lie. At first, Kylo hadn't registered what was happening, truly believing his father was always traveling. Once he got wise to his father's act, he had shut him out. Someone like Han Solo didn't belong in his life.

"She doesn't belong here. This isn't her home."

"You've made it clear it isn't your home either," his uncle reminded him. "Why the sudden objection to someone else being here?"

"I don't like her."

"How very mature of you."

"What if she arrives to work late?" He tried a new tactic, less personal, more practical. "She doesn't look reliable."

"I doubt that will be a problem," he uncle chuckled. "I gave her the apartment upstairs."

"My apartment!"

"Last time I checked, I owned this building. Your name isn't on the mortgage."

"It was mine long before it was hers."

Luke raised an eyebrow at him. "Did you pay rent?"

Silence.

"Did you pay utilities?"

More silence.

"Did you work for me to compensate for living there?"
Even more silence.

"No? Then I don't see how it was ever yours."

"And you expect me to work with her?" Kylo scoffed, crossing his arms over his chest.

"No. I expect you to cover your classes. She will cover hers."

Kylo shook his head. He had known these six months would be long and painful. He had expected his uncle to drudge up unpleasant memories, maybe even attempt to force him to have a conversation with his parents, but this was ridiculous. He was a professional athlete. He was a celebrity. He didn't need to put up with this. He considered called Hux to complain about unfair treatment or some such allegation to see if the judge would alter the terms of his suspension.

"You don't have to talk to her if you don't want." Luke continued. "But if you do, I expect you to be civil." Kylo rolled his eyes. "Or I will be in contact with the court about your suspension requirements."

At that, Kylo slammed his hands down on the desk, standing up. He was seething. His uncle had no right to act so righteous. He had been the one to push him away. To add insult to injury, Luke Skywalker was now taking in strays. This girl was a nobody. She was nothing. She wasn't at his level. She couldn't teach here. She wouldn't teach here. He would not have it.

"I don't want her here!" He swung his arm, knocking over the lamp. It had had it coming. He relished the sound of the glass shattering, as the metal clanked against the floor. Then, with another sweep, he shoved all the paperwork off the desk. The sheets lazily fluttered about before landing about the floor.

"Noted."

Kylo ground his teeth at his uncle's unperturbed tone. He started for the trophy shelf, when there was a light rapping on the door. "Master Luke?"

"Ah, Rey!" His uncle winked at him. The old man had the audacity to wink. "Please come in."

The girl entered, her face set. It was clear she had heard Kylo's explosion. "I'm done mopping up the floors in both the studios," she announced. "I'm expecting my friends around six. Would you like me to take care of anything else until then?"

"No, thank you, Rey. Why don't you enjoy the zen garden while I finished up with Ben? You can practice meditating. It will help you center your chi."

"My chi?"

Kylo groaned inwardly. What a novice. And his uncle had assessed her? In what exactly? How cute she could do up her hair or what nail polish she used on her toes? He wasn't sure why he noticed those things about her. Upon further inspection, he realized she was quite pretty. She had chestnut hair, which contrasted nicely with her light beige skin. She wasn't pale, but she was fairer than he expected someone from Jakku to be. Her eyes were distinctly hazel, with the flecks of gold and green becoming more exaggerated depending on her mood.

When she had snapped at him in the coffeehouse, the green had deepened. Now, as she regarded both men, the gold was boosted. Was she nervous? He saw her worry on her bottom lip. She wasn't wearing any makeup, so the natural pink flush of her lips was unaltered. They were the color of the bubble gum he had chewed as a child. Watching her chew on her own lip, while he thought of how
he had chewed on the gum sent another strange feeling through his body. It was promptly followed by the image of him chewing on her lip. He shook it off.

She was becoming more irritating by the minute.

"Your chi is your life force," Luke explained. "It's an energy all living things have. For a fighter, it is crucial you learn to master your chi so you can build it up at important moments. It will assist you against an opponent."

Her eyes lit up with the information. It was clear she was eager to soak up an knowledge presented to her. She listened attentively to his words, as if he was telling her the secrets of the universe. Kylo found himself envious of how innocent she was. Hux called him a pessimist. It wasn't far from the truth. Since he had left Ahch-To, he had focused completely on his training with the First Order. He had wanted to please Snoke. Once he had won his first match, he had grown addicted to the power, to the rush of adrenaline he got when he beat his opponent in the ring. After that, nothing else had mattered but the next match and the next.

He had become fanatical.

Winning became more important than eating, than sleeping, than studying. He never finished his master's degree, dropping out of university to pursue his fighting career professionally. He started training all day, every day. As he rose in the ranks, Phasma was appointed as his personal assistant. He was given a nutritionist, trainers, and sponsorships. He wanted for nothing. It should have made him happy. However, he wasn't satisfied.

He continued training, continuing entering competition after competition, needing the win, needing the validation over and over again. Satisfaction was always out of his grasp. He had never been able to pin point why. He still couldn't.

"Chi circulation is important and meditation will help with it. When you are fully connected, you will be balanced. It will help you focus, keep your mind at ease. If your circulation is disrupted or blocked, like Ben, here," his uncle gestured to him, "you'll constantly be at odds with yourself."

"I told you not to call me that," Kylo spat.

"Isn't that your name?" The girl asked, genuinely, unaffected by his attitude.

"Not anymore. My name is Kylo Ren."

She laughed. It wasn't attractive. The noise started out as a bark, before she raised a hand to cover her mouth. Her eyes were full of merriment. He had wondered if she knew who he was. Now, he was positive she had no idea. That, or she wasn't very smart. Those who knew him, didn't cross him. His recent stunt was evidence why. Kylo eyed his uncle, who was trying not to laugh himself.

"I'm sorry," she tried to recover from her burst. "You're serious?"

"I am."

She hummed, as she took him in. For a brief moment, he considered telling her to stop staring. He hated how uncomfortable he felt under her gaze. He hadn't interacted with many women before. There hadn't been any time for it when training and those who trained with him were competition. They weren't available. There was something about this girl that got under his skin. He wanted her gone from his sight. Maybe a demonstration would scare her off. Kylo turned away, focusing again on the trophies.
"Target acquired.

"I prefer Ben."

He deadpanned, all thoughts of destroying his uncles achievements vanishing. Before he could provide a comeback, she had walked off. She had gotten in the last word again. No one had opposed him since he had become Kylo Ren. Most were far too intimidated by his stature. Others were afraid of his angry outbursts. Even his opponents were cautious in how they approached him. He hadn't faced a real challenge in quite some time. He didn't know how to react.

She left him speechless.

_How does she keep doing that?_

Kylo spent the next several hours training in the main studio. Running through forms he knew like the back of his hand, he lost himself. The practice kept his mind off of the day's issues. Having to commute from the center city here each day would be a haul. Teaching untalented youth would be a nuisance. Dealing with his uncle would be undesirable. Having to put up with the Jakku girl would be-

"Almost done?"

_Speak of the devil.

"Almost." he told her, while finishing his last form.

"I need to get these windows cleaned."

"No more meditation?"

"I don't like sitting still," she sighed. "Do you?" There was an eager curiosity in her voice, the same curiosity she had expressed in his uncle's office.

Kylo didn't offer her question a response. He couldn't be sure if she was teasing him or not. Instead, he proceeded to begin stretching. It was a practical way to cool down and release the built up tension in his muscles. He had a sneaking suspicion the tension wasn't from his meticulous drills. His stress was due to one particular individual. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw her. She brought more cleaning supplies into the room.

She had been precise in disinfecting the matts. He couldn't recall the last time he had seen the floor spotless. Just because she could clean efficiently didn't mean she deserved to teach here, live here, or eventually inherit the place. His uncle had told him he hadn't divulged that last bit to Rey. Luke wanted to make sure she was happy here before he thrust the choice at her. Kylo dismissed his uncle's manners, using the hesitation as grounds for him to keep trying to obtain the place. It was supposed to be his. It should not be a contest.

But if it was. He'd win. He always won.

"So…” The girl obviously wasn't comfortable with silence. Or she didn't know when to quit."You're the mysterious Ben Solo?" He ground his teeth, remembering his uncle's request to remain civil. Thankfully, she wasn't looking at him. She was concentrating on the windows. It made it easier for him speak to her.

"Yes," he replied, curtly.
She gave a little snort, as she bent over the bucket to rise out the rag. "Well, you don't look like Gaga."

"Excuse me?"

"Lady Gaga," she elaborated. "My favorite rumor was you ran away to have a sex change and were reimagined as Stefani Germanotta."

"What?"

The girl shrugged. "Hey, whatever makes you happy. No judgement here." She went about washing the windows, as if she hadn't just compared him to a multi-platinum female artist.

He stared at her, incredulously. How dare she? Didn't she have any idea who he was? He was not feminine. He was brute strength and power. Any compassion had been driven out of him under Snoke's training regimen. His master had made certain he had the appropriate constitution for success. He was Kylo Ren. He was a champion, a recognizable face in the MMA industry. He would not be compared to a Madonna-wannabe.

A new thought occurred to him. Was she teasing him? Perhaps she was intentionally provoking him. If she was attempting to drive him out of the academy, she would lose. He was not going to leave. He was going to prove to his uncle this place was his birth right. In spite of his choice to distance himself from the Skywalker name after his family had turned their backs on him, he had always admired his grandfather. His obligation to return here gave him cause to take over the property.

He wasn't about to let some girl take it all away from him just because she was pretty. Kylo stopped himself. Why did it matter if she was pretty? Looks had nothing to do with this. Even if she was built of lean muscle and spunk. So what if she looked like sunshine personified and had the attitude to prove it? It didn't matter to him. It didn't matter one bit because she wasn't going to stay here. He was going to make sure he terrified her to the point she'd never return.

"Oh! They're here!" The Jakku girl cried, jumping around at the window and waving wildly.

Kylo watched a white Tesla Roadster park outside. Two men emerged. Both were of average height, though they were nearly a full head shorter than he was. The driver had tanned skin and black hair. He wore a wide smile, as the girl bounded outside to greet them. He swept her up in his arms, effortlessly. Boyfriend, Kylo assumed, until he saw how her face lit up at the second man. The darker skinned man picked her up, twirling her around, while they both laughed like children. Her smile grew, causing dimples to appear. Ok, so he was it. He was her boyfriend.

He wasn't surprised a girl as attractive as her had someone. She probably had a entire city block full of friends. She had weaseled her way into his uncle's good graces easily enough. And the barista at Maz's had taken an immediate liking to her. Kylo found himself envious of how personable she was. He decided it was her light, the curious aura she wore around herself, that charmed those around her. It was a sharp contrast to his own dark demons.

Against his better judgement, he stayed by the window, observing her interactions with the men. The one he labeled her boyfriend called her 'Peanut.' Kylo felt like gagging. Pet names were sickening. He never understood why people needed to discount their original names for the use of such droll endearments. Then he was reminded at how the girl had laughed at his chosen name. He frowned.

Choosing his name had been about distinguishing himself as an individual. His mother had named him Ben after an old family friend. The same friend who had once trained his grandfather. It was tied to the Skywalker legacy. Solo was tied to his father's smuggling legacy. There was too much
recognition associated with either surname. Kylo had wanted nothing to do with either. He had created the name Kylo Ren after one night of grueling training. Back at his apartment, he had pulled out his old calligraphy set, working on drawing out ancient Chinese characters, until the name appeared before him. He had filed for the legal change not long after.

Focusing back on the girl, he saw she was still in the second man's arms. She was talking away, her hands gesturing as she spoke. His attention was on her completely and both were smiling. Unconsciously, Kylo began curl his right hand into a fist at his side. He didn't like how close she was with the two. She needed to be with someone better, someone stronger. Me. The second he thought it, he backed up from the window. She wasn't just under his skin. She was getting into his head. He had to do something about her.

Now.

Heading out back to the zen garden, he retrieved his cell. Phasma picked up after the second ring.
"Sir?"

"Phasma, I need you to get me a full background on one Rey Niima, originally from Jakku, California."

"Yes, sir. I'll have it for you first thing in the morning."

"Excellent."

"Anything else, sir?"

"That is all."

He ended the call with a tap of his finger and returned to the office to say goodbye to his uncle.

She'll wish she never left Jakku, he thought, maliciously.

I'll destroy her.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Thank you for your response to the first chapter. I wasn't sure how this story would be received, but I'm beyond thankful for the feedback I've gotten. Also, huge — HUGE — shout out to my outstanding and dedicated Beta myheadsinthegalaxy. I couldn't have made this so exceptional without you! New mood board for this chapter is up on my tumblr account wewantreylo.

Soundtrack for the chapter:
Wake Up - EDEN
Walls - Airspoken
In My Head - Peter Manos
Pantomime - Ben Hammersley
Chapter Summary

In which Finn and Poe arrive and Rey inquires about Kylo Ren...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.
"You're here!" Rey cried, darting out of the studio and flinging herself into Poe's arms.

"Hey!" He caught her easily, wrapping his arms around her frame and pulling her into a tight hug.

When he released her, she saw Finn. Her smile almost outgrew her face. "Peanut!" He greeted her,
as he lifted her up, twirling them both around in the parking lot. She giggled, embracing him tighter as he sped up.

"I'm so glad you're here. I can't wait to show you around."

"We brought your stuff," Poe said.

"And more importantly we brought food!" Finn added on.

"Food isn't as important as the wine," Poe inserted, so Finn didn't take all the credit.

Finn waved him off, ignoring the quip, as he set Rey down. "I ordered enough for a small army, because I know how you are, Peanut."

"Thanks," Rey replied, sarcastically, but it didn't diminish the wide grin on her face.

She moved around to the trunk she saw there were three cardboard boxes. Rey stared down at the three boxes. The bulk of what she owned, were stored in them.

Rey had never considered herself poor, despite her circumstances. Poor meant she was in need. Poor meant she went without. Poor meant she required a level of assistance to get back on her feet. And while in part, all of those definitions fit her, she refused to believe them.

She didn't need better or more possessions. She had the clothes on her back, her Triumph, and a cell phone. It was far more than most. She didn't go without. Though there had been nights she went to bed hungry, she had survived. She had always been resourceful. She didn't need assistance, but she did need her cheering squad. Poe and Finn's support was worth more to her than any amount of financial aid or government stipend had ever been. They were her rock, her stronghold. But even before them she had had something special.

She had had herself.

Rey wasn't aware of when she had become her own hero. She had purely had no other choice. Survival was for those who could fight, endure the conditions without falling to pieces. There had been nights she had cried herself to sleep. There had been days when she wanted to give up.

But she hadn't.

The promise of a new day, of a new opportunity had always hung on the horizon. It had been enough to give her hope.

She understood there were others out there who had it worse. Some didn't have a warm place to sleep at night. Others hadn't eaten in days. She told had told herself she was lucky. She had promised herself she would outlast Plutt's cruelty. Even when he came home drunk, looking for an outlet, she had told herself she could do it. She could hold on.

And she had.

Looking to the entrance, she spotted her new landlord and boss.

"Master Luke," she beamed at him, as they approached. "These are the friends I told you about. Poe Dameron and Finn Storm."

"Welcome." Luke extended a shake to each, regarding them in the same calm manner he had when Rey had first met him. The boys both shifted their boxes to their hips to return the gesture. She
wondered if Master Luke could sense a person's true nature just by looking at them. Maybe it had something to do with the chi ideology had mentioned before in his office.

"It's nice to meet you both," he spoke with the same calm tone.

"You're a legend," Poe exclaimed. Though Rey knew little about the fighting world, she knew Poe admired it. It was in his DNA. He had grown up hearing about Luke Skywalker's successful time in the ring. Though his mother had never allowed him to watch any of the fights live, his father had recapped them for him. Rey saw how his eyes lit up upon seeing his childhood hero standing in front of him in the flesh.

"Legends are only tall tales."

"And I suppose all those titles are fantasy too?"

Her master chuckled at Poe's persistence. "It was a long time ago. I doubt most even remember."

"Yeah, right," Poe dismissed Luke's reaction as modesty. "As if anyone could forget how you defeated the Empire's prize fighter."

Rey caught a faint spasm at the corner of Luke's eyes.

"I wish they would," he muttered, almost inaudible. Then the unease vanished, replaced with a kind grin. "Do you need any help?"

"No, we've got it, sir," Finn replied.

Luke turned to Rey with laughter now in his blue eyes. "I must look older than I thought." She snickered at his joke. Her friends didn't catch on. "Let me know if you need anything. I'm going to water my bonsai and head out for the night."

"It was nice to meet you," Poe inclined his head to the older man.

"You as well."

Rey led them inside, pausing at the door to the studio. She had forgotten about her perfunctory conversation with Ben. Peeking in, she noticed he was gone. She felt herself deflate. She had wanted to introduce her friends to him, thinking he'd like them. Everyone liked Poe and Finn. She stalled by the entry way for a moment longer, considering if she should check the garden, but decided against it. If he wanted to be antisocial, it wasn't her problem.

She led the boys to the office, navigating them around the cluttered mess that was Luke's desk, to the stairwell.

"How's it going at Raddus, Poe?" Rey asked.

Neither had noticed her hesitation by the studio. Normally her friends were on her if she faltered, but today they remained blissfully ignorant. She was glad.

"Admiral Holdo has him running the trainee's drills," Finn chuckled. "On top of his promotion."

"Oh," Rey's face fell at the sarcasm of the last word. She knew Poe's feelings on his supervisor. "She still hasn't forgiven you for the mutiny, huh?"

"Mutiny?" He scoffed. "You act like I was trying to relieve her of her command!"
"You were!" Her and Finn chorused.

"It was only a petition."

"You asked everyone at Raddus to sign to force her to step down," Rey reminded him, dropping her box on the floor. She held the door open for her friends. They followed her in, placing their haul in her vacant living room. "You're just mad you got caught," Rey added.

"How was I supposed to know she was friends with the Senator?"

"They didn't award her the title Vice Admiral for looking pretty," Rey insisted. "And I do like her hair. No wonder she left the military."

Poe had been offered a job working at New Republic before he had graduated. He had interned there since he had obtained his pilot's license, spending every summer working full-time until he returned for classes in the fall. The military contractor was highly regarded. They were offended using for training new recruits or even private security teams. Many of the employees were ex-military. Poe had wanted to enlist, but his parents had urged him not to. It hadn't stopped him. He had gone to register. He was a 'bull-headed fly-boy' even then. At least that was what the nurse had dubbed him upon completing his psychological evaluation. However, that didn't stop her from slipping her number to him along with his papers.

Poe would have served, had it not been for his mother's collapse. Shara Bey Dameron had been a pilot too. As a squadron leader, she had seen the affects of war on her team and their families. She had met Kes, his father, on one of her missions. Part of an elite special forces team, the army man shared her view. After their next tour, they had left, marrying and moving to Yavin. Poe was born a year later, their only child.

As strong willed as his mother had been, her final battle wasn't fought in the skies. It was fought within herself. Diagnosed with an aggressive form of cancer, after being treated for what appeared to be a simple fall, Shara had refused treatment. Both Poe and his father had argued with her. Rey didn't believe either of them understood her decision. She did. Perhaps it was because she only knew the woman from photos and Poe's tales, but she could see why the beautiful soldier denied radiation and chemotherapy. Treatment was costly. Treatment was painful. Treatment took more out of a person than the disease. If Rey had been in the situation Shara had been in, she was fairly certain she'd want her last days to be filled with love, instead of pain.

When Poe's mother had lost her battle to cancer during his senior year of high school, he had promised her he would never enter active duty. It had been her dying wish that her baby boy enjoyed his life of freedom, a life she had fought so hard to win for him.

The decision had been difficult for him. Poe was a big risk taker. He threw himself into action, sometimes haphazardly. At first, Rey had thought he was overly cocky. As she had come to know him better, she realized it was simply his nature. Poe didn't have a hero's complex. He wasn't searching for any gratification. He just couldn't stand idly by. His convictions ran too deep. If he saw a problem, he parted the seas in order to find a solution. It was admirable.

However, in the case of his boss, it was also irresponsible.

Amilyn Holdo was a highly respected and decorated war heroine. Her efforts during her time of Service had earned her a position as commanding officer of the Ninka, a B-52 Stratofortress. She had been one of the few female commanders. If her rise in ranks wasn't impressive enough, she had also managed to intercept intelligence regarding an upcoming attack. The information saved hundreds, if not thousands of lives, even if the exact details were classified.
The woman had an impressive track record. Despite her loyalty to the military, she was outspoken and often sported an eccentric hair color. The flavor of the month was currently a shade of amethyst. Rey thought it was her best choice yet.

It was unclear why Holdo had discharged from the Air Force. There was speculation, as there Always was when someone as esteemed as her stepped down. When she had been appointed the new leader at New Resistance, Poe had been ecstatic. He had heard of her exploits. Foolishly, he had tried to impress her with his own track record.

His prior boss had furnished him with numerous compliments on everything from his skill as a pilot to his training of new recruits. It had inflated Poe's ego. He had been ignorant to it, of course, only seeing the compliments as justification for his confidence in approaching Holdo.

She had shot him down.

He had very nearly lost his job after his stunt with the petition. He was fortunate his supervisor had merely demoted him. Rey figured it had more to do with Poe's expertise than his attitude. In spite of his ill-advised move against the Admiral, he was an asset. In the end, she had kept him on board.

"Why did you try to push her out?" Finn wanted to know.

"She was in talks with Star Tours. She wanted to be awarded a contract with them."

"The tourist transports?"

"Yep."

Rey laughed. "Guess we know who won that round."

Once he had been demoted, Admiral Holdo had awarded Poe the position of primary pilot for Corellia's premiere helicopter tours. It was a luxury tour of the city from a birds eye view, or at least that was what the website claimed. Poe was not amused. She changed the subject.

"Finn? Are you getting more comfortable at D'Qar?"

Finn had studied Food Science and Nutrition at Cal Poly. He wanted to develop healthy eating to combat illness and disease. He had found an entry level lab position at D'Qar Discovery, a Food Science company in the city. They had been researching the effects of nutrition on the population since the early 70's. Finn had worked as a janitor for them before college to earn money for his degree.

Like Rey, he had come out of the system with no known family. It was one of the reasons they had bonded so effortlessly. No one understood the loneliness of being an orphan than another orphan. It gave them a shove into the real world, a basis for moving up and onward.

"It's good...great, really," he replied. "I have been assisting a team developing a safer manufacturing process for frozen vegetables. Did you know the rate of frozen food consumption has increased by 59% in the last ten years?" He made a face. "I mean I know people are busy but the preservatives alone could kill you!"

Poe gave a snort. "You mean like the stuff in the macaroni and cheese you downed at lunch today?"

"Hey! That was organic."

"Sure it was."
"It was!"

"Terrestria is one of the best farm to table cafes in the city," Finn objected.

"I didn't see the NOP mark on your dish," Poe commented.

"It doesn't work that way and you know it."

Rey smirked. Her friends squabbled like a married couple. It was sweet. Where Poe was a hot-shot pilot, who had the ego the size of a small country (even if he didn't realize it), Finn was a down to earth, old soul. He held the same fire, as Poe when it came to a cause he was passionate about. Usually he was more level-headed about how he handled it.

She ripped into her box, revealing a pile of jeans, cargo pants, and her only pair of dress khakis. Those had been what she had been forced to wear to her university interview, having no money to even buy a sundress at the Goodwill. Thankfully, it had been enough.

Poe's box had her shoes on the bottom and the top was piled with t-shirts, hoodies, and one simple black cardigan. Finn got the leftovers — her bathroom essentials, undergarments, and a few minor knick knacks she had hoarded.

All in all, it was a huge haul, but everything in those boxes was hers. She had bought it with her own money. It was her property. There was a satisfaction in that fact. What she needed, she worked for, like these precious belongings. What she couldn't secure by traditional means, she built for herself, like her motorcycle. As with her unyielding hope, she drew power from herself.

A crash, startled Rey. She stared over at her best friend, who was scooting across the floor, putting as much distance between himself and the now overturned box of her belongings.

"I didn't see anything!" Finn shrieked, as he covered his face with both hands.

Rey cracked up at his reaction to unearthing a black lace bra. "You're such a prude," she teased, yanking the box away from him. "I'll put these away so I don't corrupt your innocence."

"Too late," Poe called after her with a wicked grin.

Rey carried her items up to the bedroom area, leaving the box on one of the shelves. She could figure out her organization method later. For now, she wanted to make the most of her time with her friends. As pleased as she was to have a place of her own, she was going to miss living with them. Coming home every night to their chatter, knowing they were only a hallway away from her when she slept, and having someone to share her day with — it was all going to disappear when they left.

They would still call, she knew, and there was always FaceTime and Skype. Still, Rey knew it wasn't the same as being in the same apartment, throwing half-cooked noodles at each other in the kitchen while they attempted to cook, or banging on the wall when the too made too much noise during their 'alone time.'

She'd miss them.

Collecting the next box, she brought it up to her bedroom area, followed by the final one. When she returned to the living room area, Finn had brought in the take-out and Poe was laying out a sleeping bag and pillow. Rey nearly teared up at the sight. Her beautiful boys. They were always taking care of her.

"It's not much, but the car doesn't fit a mattress," Poe sighed, scratching the back of his neck. "But
we'll find you something."

"It's perfect." Rey wrapped one arm around him and her other around Finn, drawing them both against her. "What did I ever do to deserve you two?"

"Blood sacrifice?"

"Promised us your first born?"

"Jerks." She playfully smacked them, as she stepped back, but she couldn't keep the smile off her face.

"This place is nice, Peanut." Finn said, as they sat all together in a circle in the middle of her apartment. "It's actually bigger than our place."

"Yeah, but you two live in the city," Rey pointed out. "And you actually have to pay your rent."

"You're not paying rent?" Poe asked.

"Nope, it's part of my compensation for working here," she told them. "Which means, I don't make much, but at least I have somewhere to live while I look for another job."

"I just wish you weren't so far away," Finn sighed.

Rey laughed, raising an eyebrow at him. "It's only thirty miles. It isn't even an hour drive."

"We don't drive. We're city folk, now," he retorted.

"Then take the bus."

"I'd rather get here in one piece," Poe commented with an eye roll. He was rather particular about driving. Rey assumed it was because he liked to be in charge, another trait from his mother.

"So what is it like in Tatooine?" Finn asked, digging into their Chinese. He plucked a dumpling up with his chopsticks before depositing the entire thing in his mouth. Rey laughed at Poe's face.

"And you say I have bad table manners!" she cried.

"Peanut," Finn joined in with her laugh, "There is no table."

"Floor manners?"

"Manners schmanners," Poe mumbled through his own mouthful of food. "Our baby Rey is all grown up." He fluttered his eyes dramatically, placing a hand over his heart.

"Drama king!" Rey shoved him playfully, his earlier question forgotten.

"The worst," Finn agreed. "Oh wait! I almost forgot." He turned around to dig through his bag for his external speaker. After a minute, he had pulled up his favorite Spotify playlist and the apartment was filled with music.

Rey started rocking back and forth to the beat, recognizing the pop song. It had a dance vibe. Food forgotten on the floor, she started a barefoot shuffle around her apartment.

Free. I'm finally free, she thought as she moved. No more Plutt. No more scraping together a few dollars for food. No more sleepless nights lying awake worried about where she'd end up. She was
home. Finally.

Even with no furniture and no decorations, she felt secure and safe. This place was hers, for as long as she was here. Luke had been kind to her, much kinder than a stranger should have been. He had given her the chance to belong, a chance to truly be a part of something.

She wouldn't ever forget it.

This place, so outdated and forgotten looking, had chosen her. She felt it. She had felt it on her motorcycle, the pull to the academy. Being here now, she could feel the pull was stronger, as if she was tethered to the very foundation. And she knew, though she had no reason to, she could put down roots here. She could have this space, this life. It would truly be hers.

Poe and Finn began cat-calling her, teasing her for her goofy dancing. She didn't care. It was the most liberated she had been in ages. She wanted to dance all night and scream out her balcony window. But she was sure her new neighbors would not approve. So she settled for simply dancing.

Finn joined her and shortly after Poe until the three of them were jumping around, turning in each other's arms, and generally being silly. Rey's cheeks started to burn from laughing so hard. They were a bunch of dorks, but they were her dorks. And she loved them.

Maybe she didn't have a family, in the conventional sense, but she had Finn and Poe. They had taught her how to open herself up again, how to learn to trust people. Without their support she never would have driven out here and found Master Luke. He would teach her more. More about herself. More about martial arts. More.

And then there was his nephew.

Ben Solo.

Kylo Ren.

Whatever name he was going by. She thought it best to call him Ben. Luke did. Rey was fairly certain Senator Organa would call her son by his birth name. So she would too.

First impressions were not always telling. The man was rude. There wasn't a way around it. She had heard him hollering about her to his uncle in the office. She knew his opinion of her was quite low. She couldn't understand why.

Rey had been nothing but nice to him, with the minor exception of when she had called him out at the coffee shop. She had no idea who he was or that he was apparently famous. To be honest, she didn't really care. He was just a person, like her. Being successful didn't make him a god. Though he did seem to have a god-sized ego on him.

As the trio finished their impromptu dance, the playlist concluded. Finn selected the slightly more soothing sound of alternative, soft rock music. The cords of a Coldplay song filtered through the apartment, as they finished up their Chinese. Before long, Rey found herself checking her phone to realize how late it had become.

"Do you guys know someone called Kylo Ren?" She found herself asking, as they cleaned up.

Poe laughed. "Mr. Tall, Dark, and Asshole? Yeah, what about him?"

Rey bit back her bottom lip, unsure if she should say anything. There was speculation about what had happened to Ben Solo after he had left his parents, but she had never heard anyone report he had
become Kylo Ren. Blowing his cover or whatever it was, probably wouldn't earn her any points with him.

"I heard his name today. I don't know anything about him."

It wasn't a lie, just not a whole truth.

"He's the reigning champ. He won the Welterweight title this year. It's the fifth time in a row for him. He's a big deal."

"Hey!" Finn huffed.

"You'll always be my big deal," Poe assured his boyfriend, planting a quick kiss on his temple.

Rey giggled. When Finn had met Poe, he had been masquerading as an older, more accomplished student in order to impress him. Poe had seen through the facade. He had let Finn pose for a while before the charade fell apart. Poe had asked him out the very same day. To this day, though, he still teased him, calling Finn 'Big Deal.'

To Rey, it was endearing. She had never seen a couple as much in love as her two best friends. It was like they were made for each other.

"However, he's bad news."

"Huh?"

Finn repeated himself. "Ren. He's bad news. Got himself thrown out of the MMA for a while. He knocked some guy out."

Rey raised an eyebrow. "Isn't that the point? I mean that's the kind of career they are in. Isn't it an occupational hazard?"

"In the ring, yes. Outside the ring, not so much."

"Oh."

Luke had mentioned Ben had some issues. She hadn't asked, not wishing to offend her new mentor. What Finn had told her piqued her curiosity.

"So why's he do it?"

Her friend shrugged. "No one is sure. The tabloids have been pitching all kinds of rubbish, but you can never be sure. It's all hearsay."

She nodded and took that as her cue to stop asking about it. She didn't want her friends to get suspicious about her sudden interest in a dangerous man. Rey didn't want to keep secrets from them, but she felt protective of Ben's private life. It wasn't her information to share.

Regardless of how mean he was to her, she would not lower herself to his level.

Life had been mean to her. It had sent her down a rocky path. She didn't use it as an excuse. Life is what you make it. She had seen that quote somewhere when she was growing up. It had given her a new outlook. Instead of focusing on the fact her parents had abandoned her, she focused on how she could make her life better.

Hardships, bad circumstances, disappointments — it was pressure. Pressure crafted diamonds. She
wasn't going to crack underneath it. She was going to channel it into something beautiful, something more valuable.

Ben Solo wasn't going to break her.

If he didn't like her, too bad. He'd learn to, or he'd learn to get over himself. Rey wasn't going to let him get to her. She had found her place. She wasn't about to let some foul-tempered, entitled wanker run her off. No, sir. She wasn't scared of him.

Tomorrow morning, she'd go in there and do whatever chores Master Luke gave her. She'd devote herself to her training and finding another part-time job. She'd fill up her schedule with so many tasks, she wouldn't have time to worry about Mr. Solo.

He had said he wanted her gone. That wasn't going to happen. He could try. He could be as cruel to her as Plutt. She knew she could take it. He could snarl insults at her, call her trash. She'd heard it before. He could smash a hundred lamps and she'd just clean it up with a smile.

*Bring it on, asshole.*

*Hit me with your best shot.*

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**A/N:** I know there wasn't much of Kylo/Ben in this chapter. I promise there will be in the next. I'm laying the ground work for them. And for those who have asked, yes, Rey and Kylo/Ben are going to fight, though I'd call it sparring. Who is up for a little sexual tension?

As always, a HUGE shout out to my Beta [myheadsinthegalaxy](https://www.fanfiction.net/s/3937675/1/My-Path-to-Darkness) (YOU ARE AWESOME) and a special thank you to [@shortystarrose](https://www.fanfiction.net/profile/32255582) for reaching out on this update!

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**Chapter End Notes**

Soundtrack available via Spotify Playlist: Hit Me With Your Best Shot (Reylo)
Chapter Summary

In which Kylo continues to learn more about the girl Rey, including her ability to hold her own against him in a fight...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.
Kylo had heard music blaring and then the sound of laughing coming from the open balcony doors. Stalking back to his uncle's office, he felt his hands clench at his sides yet again. He was not mad about some beautiful girl who had two attentive friends fawning over her, one more than likely her boyfriend and slightly more than attentive. He was not mad she had ran away from him to run to
them the moment they had arrived. He was not mad about it. He had no reason to. He was mad at his uncle.

Yes, that was it.

He found his uncle reclined back in his chair, sipping a glass of wine, unaffected. Wasn't his zen uncle supposed to refrain from things such as alcohol? "This! This is who you want to run your business?"

Luke Skywalker grinned, actually smiled at his enraged intrusion. "She brings life back into this old place. Quite like her namesake, don't you agree? A beam of pure sunlight."

So his uncle had noticed then? Could he see the girl's light as easily as Kylo could?

"She's a child," Kylo argued, flippantly. "I'm the only one mature enough to handle this place, including you," he gestured to his uncle, "you ancient relic."

Luke raised an eyebrow at the obvious quip on his age, but didn't retort in anger. "She's innocent," He corrected. "She is no more a child than either you or I."

The sound of feet moving around above them, signaled the start of the three dancing. Kylo could picture the girl, Rey, shifting about on bare feet, the golden color of her painted toes standing out against the dark hard wood grain. He wondered if she still wore her hair up in the company of her friends or if she had forgone her messy bun to let her locks down. How long would it have hung? Past her shoulders? Longer?

"But you already knew that, didn't you, Ben?"

Kylo flared at his uncle's not so subtle poke. "And what is that supposed to mean?"

Luke gave him a knowing smirk. Stupid Skywalker blood. It made you one of two things: a smart ass or a pain in the ass. He didn't have the patience for either.

His anger thrummed around him and Kylo felt himself being drug backwards through time to a night long before the here and now. Another night when he hadn't been patient and he had been shouting. He saw himself as a young boy, with the same dark locks and pale skin, but he had yet to grow into some of his features. Wearing his hair long had been less about a fashion sense or bad boy aesthetic and more about hiding his abnormally large ears. Unfortunately, there was nothing that could be done about his nose or his gangly limbs.

It was one drawback to training at the academy. There were mirrors fully coating the walls. The purpose was for correcting their forms, showing them where a foot was out of the proper stance or how their angle of attack was off. The goal was not to further his increasing insecurities. But being naive and vulnerable, Kylo saw object as a reason to keep his guard up. He was defensive about a lot of things, but his appearance most of all.

One afternoon when he entered the dojo for class, he overheard his peers discussing him. The other dozen or so members of his class were already on the floor stretching, when he caught one of them say his name. Not meaning to eavesdrop, he started to clear his throat. And that's when he gathered what they were doing.

Kylo had been bullied at his former school, prior to coming to live with his uncle. He'd heard the names before: Big Ben, Elephant Ears, Gonzo...the list went on. He hadn't been able to stop his emotions from over powering him then. When he had burst into the studio, startling his peers, he had barely registered their fear at having been caught. Glaring at them all, he had snapped viciously,
going on about the flaws in their technique and about the inconsistencies in their own features.

When he had finished, he was hoarse and flushed. He had excused himself from the room, neglecting class that evening. The next time he saw them all, they remained silent, none of them brave enough to offer up an apology or friendly smile. No one had so much as looked at him or in his general direction for months. Luke had been taken aback by his sullen mood in class, but Kylo had pretended it was nothing, not wishing to further relive their harsh critiques.

The world was a cruel place. He had learned the lesson too many times. The more days that had passed after the event in the dojo, the more withdrawn he became. His dedication to his studies and his training were what he clung to. His impressive grades and perfect forms were regarded by his teachers. Their praise, though well-earned, had been the only positive feedback he'd been given in his life. Kylo had strived to be the best.

It had become a mantra.

Attachments to people had only let him down. Eventually even his uncle, the one person he had believed would stand by him, disappointed him. He had always been alone. He didn't know how else to be. Snoke had told him it was a wise decision to ignore the temptation of attachment. He had groomed Kylo, granting him constant praise and gifting him with the opportunity to gain more adoration from fans as he succeeded again and again in the ring. The love of a fan was an approval he could work with. They never expected anything from him. They were just pleased he was a winner. There was no attachment, no disappointment to be had. If a fan got over him, there were dozens more waiting to fill the disgruntled one's shoes.

"When was the last time you went out with someone? Female? Male? Whatever," Luke asked, as if he knew what was in Kylo's mind.

He was not having this conversation. Not with Luke or anyone. His personal life was just that. Personal.

So what if he was single? So what if he hadn't had a date in over three years? So what if he was a thirty-something virgin? What did any of it matter? He was a champion. People all over the world wanted him or wanted to be him. He had plenty of options. But he also had standards, exceptionally high standards. He wasn't interested in a quick tussle in the sheets if all it left him with was further regret and embarrassment.

When the time came for him to be done fighting and to retire, he'd worry about what came next then. Whether that meant being with someone or not, that would have to be seen. Until that time, his focus was on the ring and winning his next title. He was still young enough that if he played his cards right, he would have several more years in the MMA arena. Once the suspension was over, he could go back to basking in his fame and glory. He could forget about this ridiculous conversation and that ridiculous girl.

He could forget, later, apparently because his uncle was still pushing the topic. "You could take Rey around town tomorrow and introduce her to Maz and-.

Also out of the question. The last time he had seen Maz had had a lasting effect. He wouldn't be putting himself in her line of vision any time soon. The only reason he had gone to her cafe in the first place was because he knew she wouldn't be there. He would have forgone caffeine all together, if she had been present.

"No."
Kylo had to suffer through working with the inexperienced girl his uncle had hired. He was not about to play nice with her. Luke had said he only needed to be civil. There was nowhere in his court arrangement where it stated he had to be buddy buddy with his coworker.

Besides, taking her around town would inspire talk, not to mention start the perpetual gossip hotline. Maz was a direct line back to his parents. And that was a line he had disconnected years ago. He would not be revisiting it any time soon.

Phasma would take care of things. She always did. It was why Kylo kept her around. She didn't do small talk and she was thorough. The perfect assistant. He only wished Hux was more like her.

His manager had an uncanny way of putting his nose in Kylo's business — where it wasn't wanted. Hux was talented in his own way. He handled situations with a calculated manner Kylo struggled to achieve. He had been instrumental in aiding Kylo after punching out Nines. The papers had wanted to know the reason. Kylo didn't care. He wasn't about to let them, or anyone else, know. He hadn't even shared it with his staff. Hux had pestered him for it, claiming he needed the information to protect Ren, but Kylo ignored his efforts. Hux was a necessary evil.

Just like these community service hours.

Kylo considered if the judge, who had sentenced him, knew he would have preferred jail. Usually altercations of a certain level required serving time, or at least a period of house arrest. But no, he had been given, what the papers called, a free pass by serving at the academy.

It was anything but free.

He hadn't even been back for a full twenty-four hours and already he was unraveling. He felt his control slipping with each second he remained standing in his uncle's office listening to the noise of happy youth upstairs. When he had lived there, it had been a silent escape. Only he and his uncle had ever been inside. Now, she had appeared. She has changed the essence of his home simply by being there...simply by being her.

*Quite like her namesake,* his uncle had said.

Kylo hated the sunshine.

She was already there the next morning, flitting around, bright and bubbly as usual. He groaned inwardly, contemplating if it was her regular mood or if it was a ploy to continuously annoy him. If the latter, it was working.

"Morning!" She flashed him one of her sunbeam smiles. She was back to cleaning, wiping down the equipment, organizing his uncle's notebooks, and generally tidying up.

He barely managed a nod to acknowledge her before he was slinking back to the office. After escaping his uncle's intrusion into his love life, Kylo had driven back to the city and the quiet comfort of his apartment. He hadn't gone out in days and all that met him was an empty fridge as a reminder. As a consolation prize, he did have a bottle of whiskey.

And it had proved to be sorely needed.

His landline had been blinking on the kitchen wall. Kylo groaned and rolled his eyes. Why he had bothered to keep such an antiquated piece of technology was beyond him, but since he was rarely in his apartment, the fact the phone existed bothered him infrequently. Now, however, the little red light was blinking angrily, as it taunting him.
Might as well get this over with, he thought, slamming one larger finger down on the 'play' button. There were only a handful of people who even knew his home number and only one who would use it.

"First missed message recorded, today, at 10:43am."

The clipped, artificial voice was replaced by a weathered, but familiar tone. Kylo grimaced as the voice of his mother echoed through the empty penthouse. "Ben, this is your mother, you know, the woman who spent twenty-two hours in labor with you?" He was glad it was a rhetorical question. Leia Organa had never been one to hide her true feelings. If blunt honesty had been a medium, she would have been the greatest artist of her time.

"I heard you were back in town. I wanted to see if we could meet up for dinner. And before you object by having that Amazonian woman call me to tell me your schedule is too full, recall I was the one who made sure your sentencing was reduced. You owe me." Kylo added guilt-tripping to his mother's list of under appreciated skills. He knew the judge had let him off too easy. Hux must have requested assistance with more than the initial harassment suit from Nines. Damn, ginger.

"I'll be in Coreilla for the holidays this year. The foundation had a few charity events coming up. It would be lovely if you could attend. I'm sure auctioning off an evening with the one and only Kylo Ren would bring in a large crowd of supporters." Ah, there it was, the self-serving portion of his call. He was wondering when she'd get around to it.

"We were planning on auctioning off eligible ladies from the city, but I am sure the committee would make an exception for you. And before you refuse, think of how it would be for your PR. Even that bastard Snoke would agree with me on this one."

Kylo scoffed, running a hand through his dark mane at her last comment. His mother had made no attempt to hide her disdain towards Anthony Snoke. In fact, her contempt for him had grown incrementally over the years. If there was one thing Leia hated, it was losing. She was a rather sore loser. Perhaps it was a family trait. Kylo hadn't lost a fight since before he became a professional, so the concept was a bit fuzzy for him.

"Hope you're taking care of yourself. Tell your uncle to call me. Love you." Then he heard the tell-tale click of her disconnecting the line.

He let out a breath he hadn't been aware he had been holding. His body was taut with tension. He thought about going into his personal gym to get a few hits in on his base opponent bag, then banished the idea. The whiskey sounded more alluring this late in the evening.

The alcohol had been a welcomed treat after the long day. He had poured himself a glass, before settling down on his couch. Outside the lights had decorated the night skyline. They shined so brightly, they made it appear to be day time instead of nearly midnight. It had reminded him of how Rey blocked his own dark demeanor. He had closed his blinds.

When his alarm had gone off earlier, he had thrown his phone across the room. Over an hour later he opened one lazy eye to find the bottle of whiskey nearly empty. Grumbling, he had pulled himself up off the sofa and made his way to the shower.

It had been years since he had had a drink. His training was rigorous. Alcohol was a hindrance and not tolerated by Snoke. Being on a forced sabbatical, however, meant less training and more time alone with his thoughts. It was not a situation Kylo cared to be in. So he had drank. Drank until his thoughts fell silent, along with the rest of him.
So what if his head was pounding? So what if he was late to Ahch-To? So what if he hadn't bothered to check his phone since he left the night before?

Phasma.

The files on the girl.

Kylo grabbed at his pocket as if it would burst into flames. He yanked his phone free, unlocking it to find a couple of missed calls from Luke, a text from Hux, and several emails. He scrolled through until he saw Phasma' name on one with an attachment.

He ducked into his uncle's vacant office to review the information. He did not want to be disturbed.

Sir,

Attached, as requested.

- G. Phasma

Direct and to the point. It was typical of his assistant. He was appreciative of her concise nature. She didn't mince words. She went right for the jugular.

Some of the other fighters at First Order didn't want a female assistant, claiming they were just a skirt to keep up the diversity ratio at the firm. Kylo would have agreed had it not been for Phasma. She was tough as nails. And even tougher on those who crossed her.

Phasma had been a fighter for a time. An injury had caused her to retire early. It hadn't caused her to lose her fire. Her spirit was evident. No one talked down to her. If there was a newcomer who didn't understand her role, Kylo was the first to educate them. He knew she could do it herself, but he wanted her to remain content so she'd stay with him. After the last few years, he wasn't sure how he'd manage without her.

Kylo downloaded the attached combined PDF. There were several reports, transcripts from the girl's high school and college, and foster paperwork. She had been in the system.

He wasn't sure what he had expected. He had been the one to insult her Jakku background, but he hadn't anticipated her being there without a choice. For whatever reason, he read through the fostering section first. She was an orphan, abandoned too early in life. He tried not to dwell on that fact.

The man she had been left with was single, a junker. It didn't seem an appropriate choice. Kylo made a mental note to have Phasma look him up. As he did, he noticed there was a picture of Rey from when she had been brought in by the agency.

She was tiny, smaller and more delicate than she was now. There was still light in her, even as she sat in a plastic chair, hugging her knees to her chest, eyeing the photographer warily. Her clothes were dirty and baggy, hanging off her thin limbs. It was clear she hadn't been taken care of. He found his mouth go dry and it became hard to swallow.

What kind of parents left a poor kid in a place like Jakku? How could they go about their lives with her so under fed? She looked as if she had been tossed aside, discarded as if she was nothing more than...

Rubbish.
Garbage.

Trash.

Exactly what he had called her barely less than a day ago. Kylo practically snarled at his phone, as if it was at fault for his clashing emotions on the girl.

Frustrated, he exited out of the files. He had asked for this. He had wanted to know about her so he could find out what made her tick. She was already under his skin. He couldn't permit that. He needed to scare her off, make her leave the studio so Luke had no other choice but to will it to him. It was patrimony.

"Rough night?" Luke entered, a bottle of a disgustingly blue liquid held in one hand.

"What is that?"

"Blue milk," he replied, as if it was explanation enough. Kylo repressed a shudder, as his mind gave him images of what could make a concoction such a hideous color. "It does the body good."

If Luke's withered appearance was a valid indication of his health, Kylo had to disagree. His uncle was worn, aging badly. The scar he had received in his youth, from a motorcycle collision, was more evident now. It was jagged in its impression against the other creases in his face.

Had the blemish spoiled his uncle's chances at love? Disfigurement was common among professional fighters. Fake teeth, plastic surgery, and sometimes prosthetics were applied to help them appear complete. There wasn't much to be done for their inner workings. Some breaks could never be repaired.

"And for the record, you were the one who arrived late this morning. Not Rey." Luke wore a rather smug expression for someone who was perceived as a zen master. Kylo thought about asking his uncle if it was healthy for his chi to be taking such gratification from his failings. His uncle didn't seem to be above manipulation of the current situation to make him feel less worthy of inheriting the studio. However, he was right. Rey had been on time, while Kylo had been over an hour late.

_Damn him._

Kylo's arm twitched with the need to break something, preferably something that would make a mess. The photo of his uncle and winning his final title would do. The glass would shattered, satisfying his need for breaking something in place of his uncle's face.

"Take it out on the bags," his uncle waved him off, sensing the storm unfolding before him. "That is what they are there for, after all."

Kylo stomped out of the room. Gone was his concern for the girl. She had bested him...again. And to make it worse, she seemed completely unaware of it. She was still in the studio, leaning over the corner counter where the sound equipment was. She was humming, as she scanned through one of his uncle's lesson plans.

He ignored her, rolling out one of the freestanding bags. If Luke wanted him to take out his anger on this piece of equipment, he would. It wasn't his fault if he broke the damn thing. The bag was probably as old as him.

"You should remove your shoes," Rey reminded him, though not unkindly. "It's not good for the mats."
He shucked his shoes off, throwing them out the studio door into the waiting room. They thumped loudly against the linoleum, crashing against the floor, before landing together under neath one of the chairs. She gave a little jump at his aggressive response. "Better?" He growled.

"Thank you."

Thank you? He stared at her through the reflection in the mirror. She had already gone back to perusing the notebook, unaware of his observation. Why did she thank him?

Most people he was rude to accepted it. A rare few gave it back to him. No one ever was kind. Not his parents. Not his uncle. Certainly not Snoke or Hux. Phasma was the closest, though kind was a bit of a stretch. Obedient was a more accurate term.

There was no reason for anyone to treat him kindly. He was condescending by default. After years of feeling unwanted and weird, he had developed a tough skin. Ridicule had haunted him in his earlier years, but once he was faced with the limelight surrounding his matches, he had learned how to cope with the constant streams of jealousy and ridicule associated with his success. He was in his prime, a top contender, a force to be reckoned with. He no longer had to fear being an outcast. He was famous.

But still alone.

Kylo flexed his hands at the thought. Alone. It was becoming a constant in his life. No matter how he excelled in the ring or how many championship titles he won, he ultimately returned to an empty apartment, a penthouse which looked as unlived in as it felt. He didn't even have a pet to greet him when he walked through the door. As if a pet would love him. No one loved a monster.

He struck the bag, slowly at first, finding his rhythm. It had been some time since he had trained with an inanimate object. At the First Order gym, he trained with other individuals, sometimes more than one at a time. Punching a bag was less satisfying, but also less hazardous to his career. If he knocked out another person, outside of the ring, the federation was sure to kick him out.

His thoughts quieted as he increased he pace and ferocity of his hits. Jab, cross, jab, jab. Uppercut. Right hook, another jab, another cross. Another. Another. Again and again. He lost count, found his pace, and chased the clarity he brought him.

It could have been mere minutes or it could have been hours. Time ceased to exist. All he could hear was the blood rushing in his ears and the staccato best of his fists hitting the target. Perspiration leaked from his pores, dropping down his body. Most soaked into his clothes, leaving the rest to splatter into the mat.

He gave himself over to his emotions — anger, embarrassment, more anger, loneliness, desperation — it all meshed together into a mixture of inner turmoil and chaos. He didn't focus on any one particular thought or feeling that passed through his mind. It wasn't until he saw a shadow shift behind him he even remembered her presence. Her hand was outstretched, reaching towards him.

"Ben?"

Pure instinct took over, at first from the advance of another person and secondly out of hatred for his birth name. He ripped a left hook through the air. As soon as he let the punch loose, he realized his mistake. The papers would have a field day. He was about to hit a defenseless woman.

Only his first never made contact.

She had pivoted just out of his range, her face unreadable. She was quick. He'd give her that much.
Breathing hard, he made a reckless decision.

He fired off another shot, this time aiming a jab at her cheek. She took half a step back, wrapping her tiny hands around his much larger one, before looping herself underneath his arm and behind his back, keeping his own arm locked behind him. She applied enough pressure to the hold for it to become slightly uncomfortable but not break.

Defenseless?

Had he really thought of her as such? He almost laughed. Almost. He easily kicked back, sweeping her ankle, so she fell backwards. But she didn't remain still. She rolled over backwards, keeping the distance between them until she had regained her footing. Her eyes were narrowed now, maddening in how darkly green they had become. He couldn't tell if she was actually cross with him or simply concentrating, but he'd be damned if he wasn't about to push her further to find out.

Kylo advanced again, crowding her small form back towards the far wall. He watched her eyes, impressed how she remained focused on him, despite her attempts to search for an exit. His uncle had trained her in the importance of that, at least. As he rose his arms to cage her in against the wall, she sent a power front snap kick into his shin, hitting directly under his knee cap, forcing him to fall toward one side, thereby giving her the perfect route to escape.

Scrapy little thing.

He faltered only for a split second, but it served to be enough to permit her to gain distance again. Her hands were up now, protecting her face. Kylo had never hit a woman before and found himself feeling disgusted at the idea he had very nearly hit her. Had he struck her lovely face, he wouldn't have been able to look himself in the mirror.

His father had had a temper, as did his mother, but for all their bickering, his father had never laid a hand to his wife. He had told Kylo once there was no greater sin than harming an innocent creature. Kylo wasn't sure if he'd consider his mother innocent, but he had to agree the idea of striking a woman felt terribly wrong. Only a coward would resort to such a thing.

So what are you doing?

Teaching her, he answered himself.

If teaching was playing a game of cat and mouse with him as the cat stalking a rather attractive mouse.

Rey was regarding him with an ambiguous glare. Her breathing had become more labored and there was a red flush working its way up her collarbone, past her neck, and into her face. She looked like warrior, not the malnourished, submissive rag doll he had seen in her foster picture. No, this woman was something else.

His lips pulled into a smirk and he rushed at her, taking them both by surprise. He latched onto her wrists, wrapping his massive hands around her effortlessly. Her eyes widened in shock, but her defiance was still there. The green had all but taken over her irises, however, as he yanked her close, a spark of gold erupted from the center. He delighted in how her blush deepened, against her fiery will.

Oh, little one, has no one ever told you not to play with fire? You could get burned.

As if she could hear his mocking thoughts, she surged all her energy into kneeing him in the hip, attempting to knock him off balance once again. While the force of her attack did startled him
enough for her to break her right wrist free, he didn’t release her entirely. She tried to flee, but his hold on her other arm, caused her to snap back towards him, like a rubber band. He expected to catch her and ask her to yield. He didn’t expect her to use the momentum of the backwards motion to land her own hook.

She caught him with knuckles and a straight wrist, driving the full power of her punch into his check.

"Fuck!"

Kylo released her instantly, stumbling back a step to grab his face. He could feel the tear of his flesh. When he pulled his hand back, he saw the red smear of freshly drawn blood. He raised his eyes to find Rey staring at him. She didn’t look like Rey anymore. She looked wild, almost feral. Stars, he had been wrong about her. She wasn’t a bubbly, light-hearted Millennial. She had a dark side.

He felt rather smug about it, though he had no idea why. He should have been mad she had landed a hit. Hell, she had drawn blood. And he had been worried about hurting her. Apparently such a level of restraint only went one way. She obviously felt no need to prevent herself from injuring him.

Slowly, he made a move towards her. Her hands were up in an instant, her focus purely on him. It stirred something inside him, something equally dark and exhilarating.

"Do that again," he commanded her.

His words were unexpected. She shifted, unsure about his intentions. "W-what?"

He repeated his words slowly, so there was no way for her to misunderstand. "Do. That. Again."

She swallowed, clearly weighing her options. After a long moment of pause, she nodded. He wiped the back of his hand across his bruising cheek, before brushing off the residue on his pants. If the blood stained them, no one would notice. It was one of the perks of an all-black wardrobe, besides, he had dozens more at home.

Rey was the one to advance this time, keeping her stance defensive. Her eyes betrayed her, blazing with eager gusto. She swung a high kick at him, causing him to retreat back a half step, before he was ducking to avoid another kick. He hadn’t seen her stretch, so either she was rather flexible or she had warmed up while he was lost in his own head space. He tried not to think too much about the former, lest he forget himself while in battle.

When she threw her next kick, he was prepared. He caught her by her calf, with the intention of tossing her down. She didn’t hesitate, instead using her other foot to kick herself up off the ground and land her heel into his core, knocking both of them apart. He landed back on his rear, while she skimmed the floor on her back. He didn’t envy her the mat burn she’d feel tomorrow.

From her sprawled position on the floor across from him, he could see the deep rise and fall of her chest. She was nearly as breathless as he was, yet another detail he had to make himself ignore. They both rose to their feet, cautiously, never taking their eyes off one another. Then, as if they shared the same thought, they lunged for each other.

Kylo tried to grab a hold of her wrists again. Sensing his decision, Rey gripped back, fighting to direct his energy as he worked to pull her in his direction. Her skin was smooth and he wondered if she was hurt by the numerous calluses on his own hands, evidence of his years of dedicated training. If it bothered her, she didn’t mention, too focused on his hold. She attempted to shuffle them to the side, sliding her grip further down his hands to where she could bend his fingers for compliance.

_Clever girl._
He whipped them around quickly, stunning her for a second to buy him time. What did he do now? If he was fighting in the ring a head butt would knock out his competitor, but he did not want to knock the girl out. And he certainly didn't want to mark her. That left one other option. He positioned himself to finish their brawl. He would have the final word—or in this case, shot.

It was in that moment, his uncle appeared in the doorway.

"Stop!"

They broke away instantly, both still breathing heavily from their bout. Kylo had his eyes trained on hers. The green was there again, more so than the gold. He felt the stirrings of an addiction starting, imagining the many ways he could coax such a physical response out of her. He felt pleased he was able to control at least one aspect of her, no matter how minimal it was.

Her lips were parted slightly, as she tried to catch her breath. Pearly white teeth were behind them. He briefly wondered how she had managed to achieve such hygiene living the rough way she had. As quickly as the thought surfaced, he drove it out of his mind. She was not his to worry about.

"Rey, could you run into town for me?" Luke asked, causing her to turn away from Kylo. "I forgot to pick up a new USB cord for the sound system. Alliance should have them in stock."

"Yes, Master Luke," she nodded, dutifully, leaving the floor.

Kylo waited until she had disappeared into the office. He could anticipate the lecture that was to follow in her absence. Something about how he was a bad influence and would corrupt her. Perhaps his uncle had gotten some new material to work with but if past history was any indicator, he would rehash how the Skywalkers always made mistakes and how their lives fell to pieces because of their misguided notions.

"I don't want you training her," his uncle commented. "Your style is far too dark."

"She didn't seem to mind," he replied, cockily with a sneer.

In a rare show of anger, his uncle crossed the room to grab the collar of his shirt. "I will call the court official. Don't test me."

Oh, the mighty Luke Skywalker. The world saw the underdog. Kylo saw the real deal. As much as his uncle acted as the face of reason, a calm presence, he had his own dark past, his own demons.

Kylo returned his uncle's uncharacteristic move with a dark chuckle. "I'll stay away from the girl-.

"Thank y-.

"-if she stays away from me."

"Ben." His tone was a warning.

"Wasn't it you who said she was no child?" Luke remained silent. His face was filled with irritation. "If that is so, then she can make her own decisions where her training is concerned."

"I will not have you corrupting her."

"Do you think she's easily corruptible?"

"That is not-."
"Perhaps you should have taken care when selecting your padawan," Kylo stated, hoping it would convince his uncle he was the rightful successor.

Luke stood still for a long moment. When he did speak, there was a smile teasing at the corners of his mouth.

"Fine, Ben. Do as you please."

Kylo raised an eyebrow. Was this some kind of old world trick? Reverse psychology? His uncle suddenly was calm. There were no hints of his earlier displeasure. In fact, he seemed to be on the edge of amusement.

Old fool.

Perhaps he had been going about this the wrong way. He had been trying to force Rey out when he should have been focused on changing his uncle's mind about her. If his uncle lost faith in her, the way he had about Kylo, she wouldn't be an option. Kylo could fight for the academy since it was a family owned business and he was Luke's only family. Rey would have no claim on it.

His uncle's final warning hung in the air long after he had left Kylo alone in the studio.

"This is not going to go the way you think."

Chapter End Notes

So how was that for growing the tension — sexual and otherwise — between our duo? I apologize for the length in waiting for an update. After my Beta (the amazing myheadsinthegalaxy) read the first pass of this chapter, I rewrote Kylo's flashback. I like it better this time around, but it did take me some time to flow naturally back into the chapter.

Follow the soundtrack on Spotify: Hit Me With Your Best Shot (Reylo) --- It gets updated while I'm writing with new music that inspires the content for my chapters. For instance: "Go to War" by Nothing More is the song I imagined playing for Kylo and Rey's fight.
Rey was still fighting to catch her breath, as she mounted her Bonneville. Her skin was pricking with an energy affecting the air around her. She felt rattled. In sharp contrast to her sparring with Master Luke, engaging with Ben had been frightening, but not in the traditional sense. No, the fear wasn't
due to his constant advances or steel glares. It was something else entirely.

She forced her feet to move, starting up the bike and putting as much distance between herself and her new coworker as she was permitted. Her skin was screaming beneath her clothes from the mat burn she had achieved when she had propelled herself off of him and away. It hadn't been the most graceful move, but it had achieved the distance she needed at the time. She was sure she'd be paying for it over the next few days while her back healed. Making her way into town, Rey found herself mulling over what had just occurred.

When she had come downstairs earlier that morning. Master Luke had been meditating in the garden. Not wishing to disturb him, she had gone into the studio, curious about a selection of stacked notebooks she had noticed the day before. She had been delighted to find the journals contained terms, sketches, and detailed description of moves she would eventually learn. She had spent the morning committing the information to memory, her first step in becoming a dedicated staff member at Ahch-To.

It wasn't until she had heard the low roar of the Vanquish entering the parking lot she realized how long she had been standing on the studio floor. Rey had commanded herself to remain neutral. After promising herself she would not be bullied by an overgrown man child in the form of one, Kylo Ren aka Ben Solo, she had not been about to change positions. If he had mentioned how he didn't want her here again, she'd just brush it off. They were only words, after all.

But there was no way she'd give him a reason to say them.

Quickly, she had begun to wipe away the cobwebs wedged in the corners, organized the notes, and dusted off the chairs in the waiting room. When he had swept in, dressed from head to toe in all black again, she had plastered a smile on her face, greeting him warmly. "Morning!"

Ben had barely looked at her, before retreating to the confinement of his uncle's office. Rey took it in stride. At least he hadn't been a pompous ass, as he had during their initial meeting. It had been a start.

Or so she had thought.

She had felt the rage radiating off of him when he his thundering steps brought him back into the main studio. He had been like a nuclear bomb, ready to explode. Part of her had sensed the change in the room and her brain had sent up red flags, signaling it was time to admit defeat and remove herself from the volatile situation. Another part of her had jeered, content to wait out this latest passing storm. In the end, her stubbornness had kept her in his presence.

He had gone at the bag as if he had a personal vendetta against it. She hadn't found it prudent to interrupt, until his actions had threatened to break both the bag and possibly his hands, which had been growing alarmingly red from his constant stream of punches. She had approached him, to make sure he was alright.

It had been a mistake. The first of many she would make in the minutes to follow.

When he had launched a shot at her, Rey had been too concentrated on avoiding the hit to register any level of fury at him. What coward hit a woman? There had been such an intense smoldering craze in his eyes. Then, upon realizing what he had done, he had hesitated. He had appeared to be waking up, suddenly all too aware of where he had been and who he had tried to hurt.

But in another flash it had disappeared, replaced with a beguiling look in his eyes as he had peered back at her. Before Rey had made a conscious decision on how to proceed, he had attacked her. His
proximity had short-circuited her brain, or at least that was what she had told herself, though she doubted the newly earned cut on his cheek felt the same. She was rather proud of the strike she had landed on him. His words, however, were another thing to consider.

Do. That. Again.

Was he some kind of masochist? He did like wearing black and he seemed rather high-strung. Before she could stop her mind from following that particular train of thought, she heard Poe's voice in her head: Boy needs to get laid.

In all fairness, it was Poe's go-to line when he was met with someone who was on edge or unruly. Rey couldn't be blamed if Poe's assessment was typically correct. He could be annoyingly accurate at times, usually times when it was inappropriate, but that was neither here nor there. Because Poe wasn't here. Just Rey.

Her nervous heart beat hadn't settled by the time she stopped her bike in front of Alliance. The storefront wasn't overly impressive. There was a red logo outlined in white on the front door and main window, which reminded Rey of a crescent moon wearing a crown. As with the academy, the store appeared passé. Rey ventured inside.

Cold, white metal shelves of routers, external hard drives, and an assortment of other electronics filled the space. Towards the center was a circular counter, situated amongst the collection of goods. There was a pale girl with black hair flowing over her shoulders, leaning on the counter. She was hunched over her phone, seemingly unaware she had a customer.

Rey decided not to bother her, perusing the aisles in search of the USB cord Luke had asked her to retrieve.

"Big spender, huh?" The cashier teased, with a grin that faded the second Rey pulled out an assortment of crinkled bills from her back pocket.

"It's for my boss," Rey offered.

"Then he should pay for it," the girl snarked, ringing up the purchase. After a slight pause, she asked, "Are you Rey?"

"Yes," Rey responded, hesitantly. She didn't know this girl and she hadn't been in town long enough to meet anyone other than Luke and Ben. Unless... No, she refused to think about it. He wouldn't come after her. He couldn't.

"I'm Jessika Pava," the girl extended her hand. "You met my roommate Rose yesterday at Maz's."

Rey felt a swirl of relief wash over her. "Hi." She shook the girl's hand. "Nice to meet you."

"Same. I figured you had to be Rey. I mean how many British girls in their twenties show up here, right?" Jessika spoke with her hands, much to Rey's delight.

She shrugged in response. "Wouldn't know. I grew up in Jakku. I just moved here."

"Jakku!" Jessika's eyes turned into saucers. "Damn, girl, you're a freakin' survivor, huh?"

"I suppose," Rey shrugged, again. As hard as it had been living in Jakku, it had been her place of residence for as long as she could remember. While the rest of the world saw it as a dump, a wasteland of filth and dirt, she had only known it as home.
Jessika saw her discomfort and reached a hand across the counter to lay on Rey's arm. "Hey, I didn't mean anything by it. If it makes you feel better, I hail from Dandoran." She laughed at herself. "It's all Hutt space out there."

The Hutts were a famous, or in their case, infamous crime family. Their politics, if one could call them such, were legendary and spanned back decades upon decades to the original monsters of the '20's. Rey had never seen any member of the five families, but she had heard they were not to be trifled with.

Even Unkar Plutt had been scared of the Hutt name. The blob of a caretaker had told her to stay clear of doing any jobs near the Hutt's territories, lest she be taken by one of their associates. It was no secret the Hutt's dealt in all manner of illegal goods — some of the human persuasion. Rey's heart skipped at the thought.

"Were you-.

"No, no," Jessika replied, swiftly. "Nothing like that." Rey let out a breath she had been holding. "But my parents and I were smuggled into the country when I was six," she admitted, nonchalantly, as if she was remarking on the weather. "So they are still there, working off their debt."

Families like Jessika's were the reason the Hutt's continued to be in power. Too poor to enter the country in their own accord, they made deals with the devil in order to live in the land of the free. Their silence was bought and paid for by the gang, who leveraged them as laborers or worse once they were in the country.

"And you?"

Jessika's grin widened, as she gestured to the empty store around them. "Living the dream."

Rey found herself instantly at ease with Jessika. Like her, the girl had suffered through trying ordeals as a child, growing up under circumstances most would have dubbed unfit. Yet, here she was, working a normal job, to pay normal bills, in a normal town with a roommate. It was oddly comforting to Rey.

"So who sends their new employee out on a run for a USB?" Jessika asked, changing the subject to lighter fare.


Rey watched as the girl's eyes filled with an expression similar to shock. "You work for Skywalker?"

"Yeah," Rey nodded, slowly, unsure what land mine she had unearthed with her honesty.

Jessika snapped open the cash register and returned her money to her promptly. "On the House."

"What? Why?"

"Because he's freakin' Luke Skywalker, that's why!"

Rey had to laugh at Jessika's face. It was almost a mirror image of Poe's when he had come face to face with her employer, all adoring and full of youthful innocence. It was clear Jessika shared his fascination with Master Skywalker.

"What's he like?" She questioned, propping her elbows up on the counter to rest her chin on. "Is he
is all cryptic and zen or is he just a total badass?"

"A bit of both, really," Rey answered. In the short time she had been with Luke, he had been rather zen, but she couldn't forget how rapid his motions had been during their sparring. There was still some fight left in him.

"Awesome."

The conversation fell into silence. Rey hadn't spent much time around other girls her age...or any age for that matter. She had always assumed the reason she got along so well with Poe and Finn was because she had only worked with men at Plutt's shop. There hadn't been much in the way of maternal guidance or female influence in the mechanics business. She wasn't sure what girls talked about. Hair? Makeup? Boys? It all seemed rather childish to Rey. Those topics were superficial and not of any interest to her.

"You should come hang out with Rose and I some time," Jessika spoke up. "We live just up the street."

"Thanks," Rey flashed her a smile. "I should really get situated first and I need to get a second job." At Jessika's confused look, Rey added, "To help pay off my student loans."

"I don't envy you those, though I wish I had gone to school," the other girl admitted, somewhat sullenly. "Then I wouldn't be in this dump."

"It's not so bad," Rey commented, taking another glance around.

"Better than hearing people snap out orders for their caffeine fix, anyway," Jessika conceded. "I don't know how Rose puts up with some of her customers."

Rey giggled. "You're in retail."

"Touché." Jessika straightened up, glancing at her phone before inquiring where Rey had applied. "Besides Ahch-To, where are you looking?"

"I don't know," Rey confessed. "The auto body shop is already full, so there isn't anything available there."

Jessika huffed. "Believe me, girl, you do not want to work for Watto. He's as sleazy as they come."

"Any suggestions then?"

"Go talk to Maz," Jessika told her. "She knows everyone and I do mean everyone."

"Ok, thanks."

"And tell Rose I said hi!" Jessika added. "We'll have to plan a girls night to take you around soon!"

She nodded, making a mental note to do just that. After exchanging numbers with Jessika, so they could text, once she was settled, she gave the girl one final wave and walked out. It was a short distance to the cafe, so she took the opportunity to enjoy the fresh air. Rey was still smiling when she stepped into the same coffeehouse as the morning prior. Kanata Kaffeine, as it was called, was more affectionately known Maz's by its patrons. Rey was surprised to find the owner was the same woman she had seen walking her dog when she had first arrived at Ahch-To.

The petite woman wore Coke bottle glasses on her round face and a bandana around her head,
"Hello dear."

"Good morning," Rey replied. "Thank you for your help yesterday."

The old woman's eyes glistened. "Did you find the belonging you sought?"

Rey paused for a moment at the strange choice of words Maz had used. "I think so."

"Good," Maz nodded, patting her hand. "Good."

Rey waved at the girl she had met yesterday, who she now knew as Jessika's roommate Rose. Maz released her to go say hi to her new friend. "Green tea with honey?" Rose asked, as she approached the counter.

"Yes, please," Rey grinned. "I met Jessika this morning. I didn't realize I was such a celebrity."

"Oh," Rose flushed at the light teasing. "Sorry, we don't get a lot of out of towers. Gossip, sure, but none like you standing up to that tree of a man."

"Ben?" Rey rolled her eyes. "I should tell you what i did to him this morning."

Rose's flushed deepened. "Oh!"

It took a moment before Rey understood how her words had sounded. "No," she waved her hands back and forth, wildly. "No, not like that. God, no!"

"Oh," Rose sighed, her face relaxing back into her standard happy smile. "For a moment there….I mean I could see it, but he's just so….so…."

"Childish? Arrogant? Rude?"

"Yes," Rose laughed, nodding. "Yes to all three." Then, inclining her head to the side, she handed Rey her green tea. "Maz wants a word."

"Thanks. Jessika has my number."

"Great, I'll get it from Jess, if that's ok. We are not done with this conversation. I want details, girl," Rose told her, obviously intrigued.

"Sure. Until then," Rey laughed, turning away from the counter to leaving her new friend to speak with the coffeehouse owner.

"You need something," Maz stated matter-of-factly. It was uncanny how easily the woman could see her intentions.

"Not to sound ungrateful, but I need a second job," Rey told her. "Jessika mentioned you could help."

Max nodded, gesturing to a small table in the corner. "Come, child." She led Rey over, taking a seat across from her. "What experience do you have?"

"I have a degree in Mechanical Engineering from Cal Poly."
The older woman's eyes widened slightly, but she still wore the knowing smile on her face, as if she was laughing at a joke only she understood. "There's not much need for that around here."

"I noticed," Rey sighed, starting to feel her luck running out.

After yesterday, there was no reason to think she could so effortlessly find another means of supporting herself. It had been risky to come to this town, so far from her only life lines, and attempt to start anew. The weight of her decision was beginning to feel real.

Resting in a sleeping bag on the floor was not the worst condition she had ever had to endure. It wasn't the best either. She wanted more. She wanted to be able to have a mattress with daisy yellow sheets and gray accents. She wanted to decorate the open spaces apartment she had been gifted, make it her home, make it feel lived in and loved.

"What hours are you working at the academy?" Maz asked.

"I'm teaching the padwan level classes, so afternoons and early evening courses." Maz nodded again, thinking over something. "Oh, and I'm co-teaching with Master Luke in the morning for his adult kickboxing courses on Tuesdays and Thursdays."

"How early?"

"7:30."

"Hmmm," Maz rubbed her small chin. "Do you mind night shifts?"

Rey raised an eyebrow, unsure what the owner of the coffeehouse was implying. She had worked long shifts at Plutt's, usually eight or ten hours a day on top of her studies. It was a normal work day for most, but it had always felt like a double shift for her. If she was closing up by midnight, she considered herself ahead of schedule.

"No."

"Then you should see Jyn Erso and Cassian Andor in New Jedha," Maz offered. "They are looking for a new bartender for their club. It isn't engineering, but it is," and here Maz shrugged, "mechanical. Make a drink here, take an order there, make sure to not let Kaytoo's sass get to you."

"Kaytoo?"

Maz rolled her eyes. "He's a character, but you'll get used to him," she waved her hand dismissively. "After all, you can hold your own."

"How so?"

Now the older woman leaned forward, peering over the rims of her glasses at Rey. She felt herself shift slightly under the shrewd gaze. "You handled Ben Solo, did you not?"

Rey felt her face redden at the mention of Luke's nephew. "How do you even know about that?"

"Dear child, when you are my age, you tend to notice things, things you young people are too busy to notice."

It wasn't a true answer, but Rey found herself unable to press Maz further. She was eccentric and outspoken and Rey loved her. She was everything Rey wanted to be: self-sufficient, humorous, loyal, worldly, and most importantly confident. Rey decided she would visit the coffee shop as often
as her schedule and budget permitted.

"Where can I find Jyn and Cassian?"

"They run a club called Rogue One on the outskirts of the city. It's only a fifteen minute drive up from the academy," Maz directed her.

"Thank you." Rey reached into her pocket to pay for her tea, as Maz stood up to return to her post at the front of the shop.

"No, dear," Maz's hand on her arm stopped her. "It's on the house."

"But Ms. Kanata-."

"Maz," she insisted.

"Maz," Rey corrected herself. "I couldn't. You already helped me find a place to live and a job. You don't need to-."

"I don't do anything I don't want to," Maz interrupted her again. "It's the perk of being me. No one tells me how to live." She winked at Rey. "But you already knew that."

"Yes," Rey found herself laughing. "I did."

"Finish up and go speak with Jyn and Cassian," Maz advised her. "Luke won't mind."

Rey wasn't sure on that point, so she pulled out her cell to call her boss. At the sound of Luke picking up, she felt the phone rigged out of her hand.

"Skywalker?" Maz barked into the device. Rey felt herself blush again, unable to hide her embarrassment as more than one head turned to stare. There was a muffled response from the other end, before Maz continued. "She's fine. I'm taking care of her. I'm sending her to New Jedha. You have a problem with that?" Another muffled reply. "Good. Then it's settled." Maz clicked off the call and handed Rey her phone back. "Told you," she grinned.

She strolled off, leaving Rey shaking her head and giggling to herself. She was glad Maz was on her side. The woman was not one to take no for an answer.

New Jedha was more built up than Tatooine, but not nearly as exquisite as the city of Corellia. The old city it was constructed over had once been considered a holy place by the natives due to the crystal mines in the mountains. The crystals had since been harvested, leaning the rolling hills as a standing reminder of the wealth they had once provided.

The revival of the city had been started up by a pair of men who had been in Service to the area through their youth. Rey didn't recall their names from her limited study of local history in high school, but she did remember their faces.

One had been a large, bear of a man with long dreads and facial hair. He had the eyes of an old warrior, an old wolf that Rey had always found strangely comforting. His appearance was imposing, as it was meant to be, but to her, it screamed protector. It was no surprise she would idolize him as a child, having desired someone to stand up for her on more than one occasion.

The other man, his compatriot, had a slimmer build and no facial hair. In fact, his grooming was impeccable, which was ironic since he was blind. The blue haze of his eyes was the most memorable
feature from his photo. Despite his lack of sight, the way his picture had been taken made Rey believe he could see beyond what the average person did. He seemed to be all-knowing, like Maz.

Rogue One was easy to locate, situated one street off the main drag, with a large metal sign over the repurposed warehouse garage door. Rey parked her bike, staring up at the entrance, feeling slightly nervous. Her interview with Luke had been more of a trial run than an actual review of her skills or how she was the best candidate for the position. She wasn't sure how to proceed with this one. She had only been in a bar a handful of times and had never been a bartender. The boys and her usually stuck to cheap wine and a six-pack of beer they could pick up at the store.

Taking a deep breath, she tried to think on centering herself, her chi, as Master Luke called it, and walked over to the door. For being a nightclub, she was surprised to find the side entrance propped open. She could hear people moving around inside and let herself in.

"Hello?" She called out.

No sooner had she spoken then she saw a gruff looking man appear, from behind a large horse-shoe shaped bar to her left. "We aren't open," he grumbled, wiping his hands on his jeans.

He was much younger than Rey had expected. If she had to guess, she'd say he was about Ben's age, maybe a couple of years older. His eyes were the oldest feature, looking both aged and sad from life and unyielding memories. He had a handsome face, covered in facial hair and his locks were just shaggy enough to cover the tops of his ears. Considering the impressive size of the club, she imagined he was well-off.

"I know," she said quickly, trying to channel Maz's confidence. She stuck out her hand. "I'm Rey Niima. Maz Kanata told me to stop by. She said the owners were looking for a bartender. I was hoping to speak to Mr. Andor and Ms. Erso."

"You can't," he muttered. "He's dead."

Rey felt herself deadpan. If that was his attempt at a joke, she didn't find it funny. She hadn't been expecting Maz's friends to be rude. This guy could give Ben a run for his money.

"Cassian," a woman's voice called out from the bar. "Leave the kid alone."

A slim woman pulled herself up and over the bar, walking over. Like the man Rey now knew was Cassian, she was younger, in her late twenties, early thirties. Her dark brown hair was pulled back into a low bun, but her bangs had come loose, framing her round face. Her piercing eyes were green and shared the same haunted look as her partner's eyes.

"I'm Jyn," she introduced herself and shook Rey's still waiting hand. "Don't mind him," she motioned to the man over her shoulder. "He's not a morning person."

"I don't like to be called Mr. Andor," he complained, crossing his arms across his chest. "My father was Mr. Andor."

"I don't like to be called Mr. Andor," he complained, crossing his arms across his chest. "My father was Mr. Andor."

"Sorry," Rey apologized, extending her hand to him in a second attempt. She noticed the glare Jyn flashed, out of peripherals. Grudgingly, Cassian shook her hand. "I didn't mean to interrupt. I was just wondering if the bartender position is still open?"

"It is," Cassian replied, coolly, returning to his guarded position.

"Are you applying?" Jyn asked, ignoring his disgruntled behavior.
"Yes," Rey nodded, "but I should warn you, I have no experience."

Cassian scoffed, turning on his heel to walk back to the bar. He obviously didn't care to hear her honesty. Jyn remained, though her face was less pleased at the admission. "So then why should we hire you, Rey?"

Rey had been wondering the same thing since she had spoken to Maz. She had been hoping a good reason would come to her on her drive over. It hadn't. So she remained honest.

"I don't have any experience, but I'm a fast learner and I work hard. I will be here early, if you need help with shipments, I can fix any mechanical problem you come across, and I don't have any commitments keeping me from working nights or weekends."

Jyn's lips pulled into a smile, while Cassian remained unconvinced. "What kind of mechanical training?"

"A Bachelors of Science and thirteen years working in an auto body shop," Rey offered.

"Can you fix that?" Jyn indicates their sound system setup on a stage across the room. "We've been getting some static when it starts up...really annoys the customers."

"Sure. Let me take a look."

Rey was impressed by the setup. All of the equipment was state of the art and in extremely good condition. The person who had organized it, though, didn't appear to know what they were doing. She was exasperated by the mess she found. It annoyed her more than it should have, but she appreciated ordered. Cords were shoved under the base and main control board, the speakers needed to be placed a bit further back, and the power connections should have been on a surge protected line.

Ducking under the controller panel, she started unplugging and replugging in cables, attempting to make order out of the chaos. Once she had the board reworked, she began to address the pattern of cables, until she had them properly hidden under the stage mats and tapped down so there was no longer a tripping hazard. Finally, she turned back to her expectant potential employers.

"Power it up."

Cassian, who had been leaning back against the bar, reached over to a switch. With a flick, the system came to life. Jyn plugged in her phone, selecting a song. When the first notes of the music came through, it was clear. There was no static or residual white noise — just the tune. Jyn's face immediately took on a satisfied look, as she glanced over her shoulder at Cassian. His expression was unreadable. He switched the system back off, turning to his partner.

While they discussed her, Rey jumped down off the stage. Cassian had his back to her, his head ducked down to Jyn's ear. Rey tried not to focus on it, her weak attempt at providing them privacy to make their decision.

After several minutes in which neither spoke to her, only each other, Rey sighed. "Um, I'm going to get out of your hair. Thanks for your time," she waved, as she headed for the exit.

"Wait," Jyn called out after her, "come here." Rey did as she was asked, slipping behind the counter alongside Jyn. "Do you know how to make an Old Fashioned?"

Rey shook her head.
"Here," Jyn handed her a short glass, a container of sugar cubes, and bitters. "You need club soda," she pointed to their drink system by the well, "and bourbon." Rey had never had bourbon before, but she saw a collection of bourbons available on the counter.

"Which one?"

"Depends on the customer. Some prefer the top-shelf brands like those behind you," Jyn motioned to the lit display of high-end liquors on the island in the middle of the bar, "but some will go with something like this." She handed a bottle to Rey.

Jyn instructed her on how to craft the drink, demonstrating the correct way to decorate the glass, appropriate amount to pour, and how to serve it.

"Your turn."

Cassian remained where he was, watching. Rey mimicked Jyn's actions, placing a replica drink down beside of the one the club owner had made. Jyn plucked a small black straw from a holder on the bar and sampled the concoction.

"Perfect."

She repeated the process several more times, teaching Rey how to make a whiskey sour, cosmo politan, Tom Collins, mojito, and finally a Long Island ice tea. By the end, Rey noticed Cassian's arms were no longer crossed over his chest and Jyn was sneaking him a look that said "I-told-you-so."

"Kaytoo won't be happy," Cassian remarked, though Rey wasn't sure if he was saying it to them or himself.


"So?"

"You're hired," Jyn grinned. "Can you be here tonight? Around nine? The club opens at ten but we don't usually start getting busy until an hour or two later. It will give me time to help get you up to speed and introduce you to the rest of the staff."

"I'll be here," Rey promised, gleefully.

"Don't be late," Cassian warmed, back to his sour mood.

"You got it boss," Rey saluted him. His eyes widened in a form of shocked embarrassment, while Jyn laughed.

As Rey drove back to the academy, she felt whole and complete. She was doing it. She was making it on her own with no help from Plutt, or the boys, or her non-existent parents. She had found a place to live, scores two jobs, and soon she'd be able to make regular payments to her student loans and create a real home.

She wouldn't let anything bring her mood down...not even the dark-eyed, raven haired man who had taken her breath away.

Chapter End Notes
So limited Reylo in this chapter, but I promise there is plenty coming in the next three chapters. Just needed some time for our duo to cool down before things HEAT UP.... (dun, dun, dun, DUN!)

Shout-outs to my beta myheadsinthegalaxy and @galaticpadawan for asking when the update would be posted. It's supporters like you two who keep me writing. Thank you! If you're on tumblr, come say hi @wewantreylo
Savages

Chapter Summary

In which Kylo gets Rey to agree to one-on-one sessions with him...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes
Kylo had left the studio not long after his uncle's cryptic warning. He had had no patience for the old man or his half-hearted attempts to keep him from his chosen protege — a title which should have been reserved for his blood relative. But his uncle had made his choice, furthering Kylo's belief that attachments only caused disappointment. So he had gotten into his car and had drove off without so
much as a goodbye.

The remainder of the week passed uneventfully. It was partially due to Luke constantly keeping guard over the girl and partially because she disappeared each night. Kylo began to notice her rushing out the door around six or six-thirty, followed by the rumbling sound of her motorcycle turning over. He was curious where she ran off to each evening, but he hadn't been alone with her since they had fought.

He had been mulling over the outcome of their battle since it had happened. Her moves, while sloppy and chaotic were a far cry from perfect, but she had strength, more than he would have suspected for someone of her size. She was like a bobcat, small and tranquil, until a line was crossed. Then she let her claws loose. Upon further consideration, a bobcat was a fitting metaphor for her. She was scrappy, with brown hair, and that delectable spotting of tan freckles across her face. Also, she always wore her hair up in three sloppy buns, a unique style he hadn't seen before. It was another curiosity, another question about her that went unanswered as the days passed.

Without answers, he found himself constantly going through her files. The answers he sought were not enough to satisfy his growing need to know everything about her, but it pacified him enough to not break anything at the academy, lest he prove his uncle's point and he scare the girl away before he even had the chance to offer to teach her. His apartment didn't earn the same fate. In the first forty-eight hours alone, he destroyed a lamp, demolished his landline, and flipped over his glass coffee table. The shattered remnants of all remained untouched, silently mocks him each night he returned. It usually resulted in him wrecking additional objects.

As he once again returned to his home, he ignored the doorman, as he strolled into the complex. The lobby was empty at this time of day, the majority of the tenants still at their top-floor office suites, out to a fancy dinner, or traveling the globe to secure the next big contract. It was a vicious cycle, the search for greatness, the chase for success. The money was the reason why they did it, or so they said, but Kylo was more honest with himself. The money had its perks, of course, but he wanted the power. He wanted invincibility. While he spent his working hours at the gym training or in the ring delivering physical blows, his neighbors were down in the Financial district crunching numbers and battling a debt crisis that was crippling the nation.

*Everyone wants power,* Kylo mused to himself. *They just find it in different ways.*

It was a job sure to bore him to tears. He couldn't fathom sitting at a desk in front of a computer screen all day. He imagined it would result in numerous destroyed property complaints and the occasional physical assault charge. However, he was already serving for the latter, so perhaps when he retired from fighting he would join the other residents in their office space.

Coreilla was never where he planned on living long-term, though to be honest, he had never made plans to live anywhere long. The only reason he kept a permanent residence was more about a tax write off and to have a memorable address to send stuff. It had nothing to do with having a real home. That fantasy had been a child's dream, a notion he had outgrown.

Kylo traveled in the elevator to his pad, scrolling through notifications on his phone as he ascended. There were the typical daily announcements about the First Order, several requests for him to make an appearance by the PR team (they included a list of events and dates), and a reminder from HR about submitting his expense report on time. He ignored them all, continuing to scroll through to the end, when his eyes landed on Phasma's email.

He found himself opening it again, for what seemed to be the hundredth time. He bypassed the photo, not wishing to see the frightened, fragile child sitting alone again. It was an image he couldn't get out of his head, so drastically different than the hurricane of a fighter Rey had been in the dojo
that day. What had transformed her from the shattered soul in the photo to the confident, happy young woman she was now? How was she not as jaded as him?

The elevator chimed, the double doors sliding away to reveal his floor. Kylo entered his apartment, half-watching where he was going, half-reading the other files in the collection Phasma had sent him. The girl had made top marks throughout her entire academic career. In high school, she had graduated at the top of her class, earning praise from all her teachers and a scholarship to Cal Poly. She had been on the Dean's list every term there and had kept up with all her scholarship requirements while working part-time at her foster father's shop. He expected her to be enrolled in clubs or some form of extracurricular activities, thinking she would have had more than a couple of gym credits worth of experience in martial arts. There was nothing, just a job at a dingy old shop.

Engineering was not an effortless degree. He had to wonder why she chose it, especially when she showed such promise as a fighter. Cal Poly was nationally ranked and the fifth best school in the country for engineering, so he was sure their program was rigorous. Still, with her potential, he was sure Rey would have benefited from some outlet, some other activity to keep her mind occupied beyond her degree's coursework. Kylo had hoped for at least a yellow belt in karate or some foundational training he could work with. It was no matter. With some private training and the right resources, she could join the league. She could be his equal within the female ranks.

The thought of her in all black and red, the color scheme of the First Order uniforms, had him picturing other things like how she would look in the team's gym, stretching alongside him, or working out with the targets, as he stood by, correcting her turn out. Kylo wondered if Mitaka would be able to do a work up on her when she first came in. The First Order doctor was on call at all times. It was mandatory for all new fighters to have a work up, but Dolph was awkward, and Kylo was concerned about him making Rey uneasy. He'd need to be present for that, against any protests from either the doctor or the girl.

He wouldn't let anyone else near her while training, not wishing her to be tainted by their lack of discipline or bad habits. At least that was the reason he gave himself. It had nothing to do with the fact he wanted her alone, all to himself. No, she would need to be carefully groomed into his counterpart. And if that meant more one on one time with her, away from his uncle, then so be it.

He was practically grinning to himself at the idea, when his phone began going off in his palm. Armitage Hux's name appeared in the screen. Kylo contemplated sending it to voicemail to continue down his train of thought on the girl, but Hux was persistent and he had already ignored him for the majority of the week.

"Yes," he snapped, irritably.

"You should make an appearance tonight. It would be good for your image," Hux replied, disregarding Kylo's annoyed tone.

"Not my problem."

"Your a public figure. Of course it's your problem."

"That's what I pay my manager for," Kylo insisted, with a snarl.

"I'll meet you out," Hux continued to ignore him. "I could use a wingman."

"What?" Briefly, Kylo wondered if his manager was drunk. Hux was not his friend. He was his coworker. Kylo didn't have friends.
"Phasma said there is a new club in downtown, the Supremacy. I want to go check it out."

"So go check it out," he grumbled. "I'm staying in."

"What else is new?" Hux groused. "You are going to end up alone, Ren."

"I like being alone."

"No you don't," Hux protested. "You just like to act like you do. We are going out. I'm getting us a car. Pick you up at eleven."

Before Kylo could reject the offer, the call ended.

Fucking Hux.

Damn ginger thought he could order him around! Him! He was Kylo Ren, the enforcer of the First Order, their main cash cow. If he wanted to spend his evenings downing whisky in his apartment and contemplating how to seduce an unsuspecting girl to their club, he would. Hux was not the boss of him. Hux could kiss his ass. The prick. Who did he think he was?

Kylo took his frustration out on his wall. Prior to him moving in, Phasma had hired an interior decorator, who he had instructed to work in a monochromatic color scale, keeping with white, black, and a few red accents. It was lucky the First Order colors were also those he favored. It made furnishing his apartment simple. The walls had been covered with abstract art, some paintings and a few photographs. The one he targeted now, was his least favorite. It was a smearing of ebony and pearl acrylic paint, creating shades of gray. He despised it.

Ripping it off the wall, he paid no attention to the gaping holes it left behind. He threw the large canvas on the floor, stomping on it before he knelt to pick it up and began tearing at it haphazardly. In seconds, the painting no longer resembled a piece of art. It had been obliterated, resulting in fragments of paper and splintered wood on his already cluttered floor.

He found his phone, having previously discarded it onto the couch. Dialing his assistant, he was pleased to hear her voice instantly on the opposite end.

"Sir?"

"I need you to call the cleaners. It seems I have a mess in my apartment," he informed her, no hesitation or remorse in his tone.

"Right away, Sir."

"Thank you, Phasma."

He realized his assistant probably deserved some time off, time away from him and his demands. Gwen Phasma had served him well and rarely took her vacation. In fact, Kylo had never even seen the woman sick. She was a trooper, never complaining, never irritating him the way Hux did. No, Phasma was loyal to a fault and kept up with all his requests, no matter how peculiar. He truly did appreciate all her efforts. It was difficult to secure a subordinate as capable as her.

"Of course. Will there be anything else?"

Kylo surveyed the disorder of his apartment, seeing the clear parallel to the chaos swirling around in his brain. He needed to get to Rey, needed to cement his hold on her and get her to join them. For all his studying of her files, he was no closer to understanding what to make of the girl. He needed more
Yes, please find me background on Unkar Plutt, the girl's foster father and any known associates."

"Certainly."

"And tell Hux I will not be joining him this evening."

"Sir?"

"I have work to do."

"Understood."

"And Phasma?"

"Yes, sir?"

"Schedule some time off for yourself. Whenever you deem necessary," he instructed. "Tell Sol Rivas to report to me during your time off."

That should shut Hux up. If Phasma was off, he'd force his general manager's assistant to fill in for him. Sol was not Kylo's first pick, being older and not as efficient as the platinum blonde haired woman, but it would annoy Hux, so he was the perfect candidate.

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir."

"That is all."

He clicked off his phone, stepping away from the remnants of the painting to stare at the city below. The wide windows of his apartment granted him an unobstructed view of the skyline. He watched as the sunset, only a few rays still peeking past the tallest buildings. Soon night would fall, his favorite time of day, when the shadows came out to play.

Kylo preferred to work in the dark.

When classes began on Monday, Kylo watched Rey's interactions with both the padawans and their parents. She was naturally good with people, easily making them all comfortable and welcomed, with her bright eyes and signature smile. It was like watching her from the first morning at Maz's all over again. She could make friends with anyone.

The children appeared to enjoy her, probably starved for some energetic teacher instead of the dull drone of Luke "the Zen Master" Skywalker. She went through basic forms with them, making each transition graceful and fluid. He could see the numerous hours Luke had spent with her over the last few days had given her a good base. It wasn't how he had wanted it to go, preferring to teach her himself, but it would do. He could correct any differences in methods once he got her alone.

Luke stood off to the side for all of Rey's first classes, silently watching and only interrupting if she stumbled over the pronunciation of a term or forgot a step in their form, which was not often. She had absorbed a great deal of knowledge in her brief time at the academy. It was truly impressive. Kylo was pleased. If she could take instruction so well, it meant he'd be able to fast track her. His visions of her joining him at the First Order seemed less like daydreams and more like real goals to work towards.

As the afternoon came to a close, Rey bowed before her students, and had them recite the academy's
pledge.

"There is no emotion, there is peace. There is no ignorance, there is knowledge. There is no passion, there is serenity. There is no chaos, there is harmony."

The children repeated each line back to her, completely focused on her, as she scanned the line of them, to ensure they were all speaking the words out loud.

She bowed again, dismissing them. Kylo started for the door, when the stampede of tiny karate users came running into the waiting room. He side-stepped, narrowly escaping an impact. Children, he shuddered. They were almost worse than full grown adults, always asking questions. It was meddlesome. Kylo couldn't fathom why anyone would want a child.

As if the universe meant to make a mockery of him, one of the padawans came to stand in front of him.

"You're really tall," the boy commented.

"How observant," Kylo sneered, glancing into the studio to see Luke conversing with Rey. Would his foolish uncle ever let her have the peace his code spoke of? He hadn't left her side once in Kylo's presence.

"Are you another new teacher?" The boy asked, still staring up at Kylo.

He glared down at the youngling, wondering why this child wasn't intimidated and running to his mother. Instead, he stood before him, inspecting Kylo as if he was the most interesting specimen in a collection. The professional fighter didn't like it. He felt as though the longer he was under the child's gaze, the more he was being judged.

"Yes," he hissed, hoping his lips flared back enough to reveal his teeth. That ought to do it.

"Cool," the boy grinned, before continuing. "Are you going to our class?"

"Never," he grumbled. "I don't teach infants."

"I'm six," the child insisted, though not unkindly. In fact, he seemed immune to Kylo's aggravation.

"How nice for you."

"Temiri," his uncle appeared in the studio doorway. "Where is your mother?"

"She has to work tonight," the boy informed Luke.

"I see," his uncle's nodded. "Do you want me to as Mrs. Lanai to take you home?"

"Ok," he agreed, while Kylo attempted to sneak into the studio to corner Rey. Then he felt a hand tug on his pants. "Bye Mr. Teacher, sir."

Kylo glared at the boy, Temiri, and then at his uncle who was chuckling. Luke guided the child away and Kylo shook his head, moving to the doorway.

Rey was leaned over the corner counter, scribbling at the speed of light in a new notebook. He stepped down onto the mat, running through his offer once more in his head. He needed her to say yes. He needed her to let him teach her. He wasn't sure how else he'd get through the next six months of his suspension without training with a proper opponent.
As he opened his mouth to begin, another wave of students came rushing onto the floor. He whipped around, spotting his uncle standing just outside the door, arms crossed over his chest, a smug look on his face.

What the hell?

How was this zen? For all the all of no emotion or chaos or passion, Luke Skywalker was a spiteful ass. Kylo gritted his teeth, bunching his hands into fists. With no opportunity to try speaking with Rey for at least an hour, he went to the back, smaller studio to practice his own forms.

There were no bags in the studio to hit and while the idea of pounding his fist into the mirrored wall across from him was enticing, he was not interested in scaring Rey. While she could hold her own, she was not a stranger to violence and it had him more perplexed about her decision to study engineering and work here. It seemed the more he learned about her, the less he really knew. Per his request, Phasma had obtained information on her foster father, if one could even call the man that.

Unkar Plutt was lower than low, not even worthy of being called Jakku trash, as Kylo had previously seen fit to refer to Rey as. She was his only foster child, which wasn't surprising considering he shouldn't have had any. He had several motions filed against him, complaints from neighbors, speeding tickets, and numerous other allegations. All of which had been withdrawn about a month before Rey was left in his care. He was a regular hodgepodge of crime, petty and lowly crime, but still offensive.

Kylo didn't understand how the state could have awarded custody of the girl to a man like Plutt. Even more unsettling was the countless hospital visits. Rey had been in and out of the ER every few months or so. Broken wrist, broken leg, dislocated shoulder...the lost went on. He had his fair share of injuries from training, the worst being some broken ribs when Snoke had had him go up against the six best ranked members at the First Order. Still, it pales in comparison to the scores of damage the girl had taken. Each time the reason for the break or wound was something along the lines of, "You know how kids are" or "She's clumsy and fell down the steps."

Kylo didn't buy it. He was appalled the hospital staff had. Hadn't anyone understood what was going on? How had no one reported Plutt? But none of the medical files, which Phasma had probably obtained in a less than legal fashion, were as atrocious as the photo she had managed to uncover. He wasn't sure where she had found it and he hadn't thought to ask.

It was Rey, a few years older than her foster shot, covered in grease and thinner than any child should be. Her collarbone was poking out of a shirt that was far too large for her and her eyes were nearly devoid of her spark. She wasn't looking directly at the camera. She was working in a junkyard, trying to lift some hunk of metal out of the belly of a rusted car. He could see her ribs. Seeing her so malnourished and dehydrated had triggered him.

The cleaners needed to be called for another appointment after that. He had let loose on his apartment, punching and kicking in a flurry of hostility. His couch had taken the brunt of it, but some pillows and the lamps didn't make it out. Part of the problem was how the photo had triggered him. It reminded him of his early training under Snoke, when he had had to practice a move until it was perfect. He had not been permitted a break of any kind. No water, no food, no going to relieve himself. Snoke had told him it would make him stronger, hone his focus. All it had done was made Kylo desperate, weak from exhaustion, and earn a UTI. It was not one of his fonder moments.

He had been enraged at Snoke. When he had gone to training the next day, he had vowed to tell off the owner, but he had found his anger allowed him to channel his actions better. It fueled his motions into the perfection his mentor craved. And his hatred of Snoke vanished. Having to see Rey had suffered such cruelty at such a young age, unnerved him. She wasn't training. She was surviving.
And it begged the question, how had she survived? And why did he care?

Obviously she had never let her past affect her education, which was admirable. Though it had seemed to impact her ability to reach out to others and make lasting relationships. While she was able to get along with others with little to no effort, maintaining actual relationships, appeared to be more challenging. From Phasma's digging, she had obtained a couple of photos and blog posts from Cal Poly where Rey had appeared next to the same two men who had helped her move in. Kylo assumed her boyfriend and his friend were her only real connections, unless he counted his uncle, which he preferred not to.

Kylo momentarily considered how the boyfriend factor would affect his attempt to get Rey to join the First Order. Would he be against it? Would he need to fight him on it? The possibility of taking out the other man gave him a twisted sense of satisfaction. He didn't know the man, but he already despised him. The girl couldn't have any interruptions to her training. She needed to remain focused on instruction and him.

It was at that moment, he focused on the noise, or lack thereof coming from the main studio. Class was over. He peered out to find the students departing. His uncle was talking to one mother, who was animatedly talking his ear off. Kylo took his chance, leaving his practice for later to search for Rey.

He found her in the office, her fingers rapidly typing away on his uncle's laptop. She was so engrossed in whatever task she had been given, she didn't notice him standing in the doorway. For a minute, he paused, taking in her form. She was hunched down towards the laptop, which should have been on a base to make it easier to work on. Her agile fingers were practically flying across the keys and her eyes were trained to the screen, determined as ever. She was chewing on her bottom lip, subconsciously and he found it endearing for some reason.

"Can I help you with something?" She asked, not pulling her gaze away.

Kylo forced himself not to flinch at having been caught staring. He had thought she was unaware of his presence. "I wanted to offer to train you," he stated. There was no use in beating around the bush. He wasn't sure if he'd get another chance to converse with her before his uncle swooped in to save her soul, or whatever. Luke Skywalker could be rather melodramatic. It was another trait that ran in the Skywalker line.

"Excuse me?"

Once again, she didn't bother to look up. It peaked his interest, making him more eager to uncover specifics about her and her life. He wasn't sure why he cares so much. Kylo refrained from getting too close to people out of habit. But there was something about this girl - Rey - that had him churning, lying awake at night wondering. She was a riddle he couldn't solve, the blank row across his Sudoku he could never figure out, the forgotten line of a song he kept hearing but couldn't put words to. She held him captivated.

"You need a teacher," he claimed.

Rey stopped worrying on her lip to smile. It was not a full blown grin, like he had witnessed before, but it was enough he felt comfortable entering the office. He took the seat across from her, noticing how her fingers stilled on the keys in front of her as he approached. Once he sat, she continued typing away.

"Master Luke is my-."
"My uncle has a limited perspective on things."

Rey raised her eyes, taking him in for the first time since the start of their conversation. She regarded him over the top of the screen, clearly thinking. Then, with a slight scoff, she gestured to the awards aside of the desk. "Then I guess those are just trinkets?"

Kylo laced his fingers together, leaning forward to prop his elbows up on the front of the desk. "I have more. They are at my apartment, if you are interested in checking it out."

Her face erupted in a bloom of red. It was only then he realized how suggestive his offer sounded. He needed to be more careful. If he scared her off before he had time to work with her, to mold her, he would lose any opportunity of obtaining the academy.

"I have a training room," he added, hoping it would clarify any questions over his intention. "It's state of the art with better equipment than here."

"Must be nice for you," she commented, returning to her work. She didn't seem impressed at all. In fact, her words almost echoed his from earlier, when he had spoken to the annoying child. And she seemed just as interested in him as he had been in Temiri. Kylo couldn't fathom why. She had come from nothing. She had been cast aside. She should have been jumping at the chance to train with a champion, to be in a large city, a luxury apartment with the best materials available. Instead, she appeared to be unaffected by his proposal, unaffected and uninterested. This was not going the way he wanted.

"We could go after my Jiu Jitsu class this evening," he continued.

"Can't," she shook her head. "I have work."

He reclined in the seat, observing her. From her face, he perceives she wasn't lying but he knew the schedule. She only taught in the early afternoon and the mornings. She wasn't assigned to any night classes. Those were reserved for the intermediate and advanced levels, the specialty classes. Then he remembered her disappearing act.

"Part-time job?" He guessed.

She nodded.

"Where?"

Rey's hazel orbs found his. She pursed her lips. Then, mimicking him, she leaned back in her seat, the laptop momentarily forgotten. "Why?"

"Why what?"

"Why is this so important to you? Last time I checked, you didn't want me here. So why the sudden interest in training me and what I do?"

Oh...right. She wasn't about to let him have this without a fight. She was a bobcat. He could see the wheels turning in her head, sense her claws ready to come out. In trying not to scare her, he had failed. She was being defensive, nice about it, in a clipped but professional sort of way, but still nice...at least nicer than he deserved. He needed to continue being honest. He had to build a level of trust with her. She had probably been lied to enough as a child she could smell one from a mile away, so he needed to walk a fine line between what he wanted long-term and what he could offer her.
"You have potential," he explained. "It intrigues me."

She crossed her arms over her chest, eyes still on him. "Because I punched you?"

He chuckled. "That's part of the reason."

"Not used to a woman striking you?" She quipped. "I would have thought with your award-winning personality, they'd be all over you." The snark in her statement was not missed. Her claws were out. It gave him an odd sense of satisfaction. The perky girl of sunshine was gone, replaced by this woman of grit and fire. It had him angling toward her again.

"My personality aside, I am serious about teaching you," he said, voice level.

Something changed in her expression. There was a slight flush of color, before she forced herself back to the keyboard. The clicking of keys became the only sound in the office. Kylo waited, intent on getting her to accept, no matter how long he had to keep up his requests. He'd find a way to break down her defenses. He was good at finding the cracks in others and exploiting them to achieve success. It was what made him a master fighter, he had skill and strategy.

"I can't pay you," she finally sighed, her answer barely audible over the clacking of her typing.

"I don't expect you to."

Her eyebrows raised at his reply. He began talking again before she could convince herself this was a bad idea. He had to make her feel comfortable, give her a say in this. "What days work best for you?"

"Sundays," she responded. "It's my only day off."

"Sunday it is," he agreed. He reached for a pen on the desk. "Let me write down my address for you and-..

"Sundays," she cut him off. "On one condition."

Kylo stilled, waiting for her terms. He should have expected her to test him, but he reminded himself, it had to be on her terms. She had to feel safe or she wouldn't open up to him. He needed her to open up. He needed to know everything about her. It was going to take time and building trust, but he had six months to kill. Kylo could work with that time frame.

"We do it here."

He wanted to scream or at the very least throw something across the room. Why did she insist on being at this dump? Why wouldn't she let him show her how much better things could be? What did she have against the luxury he could pamper her with? He thought about the files on his phone, recalled the numerous hospital visits, the picture of her in the dump. Realization dawned on him. She wasn't comfortable with fine things. Given her past, it probably served as a reminder of how little she had. Yet another thing he'd have to work with her on.

Her eyes held his, a silent standoff.

"Fine," he ground out.

Now her beaming smile graced her face. The smile of victory. "Fine." She dropped her gaze, back on her task. "Now get out. You're distracting me."
Kylo obeyed her request, walked out of the office to enter the studio. He wanted to re-position some of the bags for his Hapkido class. Only then, as he worked, did he register her words. Distracting? He distracted her? A sly smirk appeared, as he started preparing for the workout he was going to give his students. And the workout he was going to give her.

This was going to be fun.

Chapter End Notes

I have been so honored by the response to this fic. It has a special place for me, since I am studying martial arts, so I appreciate everyone's love. As always, the biggest thank you goes to my beta myheadsinthegalaxy
Chapter Summary

In which Rey contemplates who Ben Solo really is and Kylo outlines his plan for Sunday...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes
The weekend came quicker than Rey anticipated. While her first week of teaching at Ahch-To had been a success, she had been growing increasingly anxious as the days went by. Ben’s offer had left her both excited and terrified. After what had occurred during her second day in the studio, she had given him a wide berth, keeping busy with odd tasks Luke provided her, such as updating his
website, and practicing the various forms he had gone over with her. Though Rey was learning more each day, she still struggled with the names. Korean wasn’t as easy to pick up as how to install a new carburetor. Luke continued to tell her how naturally gifted she was. His praise was a new concept for Rey. It was taking time to adjust to.

Her position at Rogue One was also going well. Cassian had warmed up to her, or at least wasn’t as cold as he had been during her interview. Jyn was constantly sharing new drink recipes with her and asking her opinion on certain areas they wanted to renovate in the club space. However, the infamous Kaytoo was not a fan of hers. Kaytoo, one of Cassian’s friends from before he had met Jyn, was as sassy as they came. Rey thought he could probably give Finn a run for his money. She had never met anyone quite like him.

Kaytoo had choppy blonde hair, was middle-aged, of middle-height and weight, and was mediocre looking at best. There was nothing exceptional about him in a physical sense, yet he seemed to mock everyone who entered the club for some flaw or another. Rey failed to see most of them, believing he had severely high standards. What Kaytoo lacked in personality, he made up for as a bartender. He was able to create any concoction, tap numerous pints of beer, and pour the perfect glass of wine, all before Rey could finish one cocktail. None of his customers ever complained, so she assumed the speed was met with craft. She also assumed it was his reason for being a self-assured asshole. In that respect, he could rival Ben Solo, even on his worst day.

Ben Solo was an enigma. Rey wasn’t sure what he wanted from her. He had been dead set on kicking her out of the academy and her apartment. She would have thought her strike on his face would have sealed her fate. He seemed the type to push for harassment, or some such nonsense, given the fact he had come after her first. Regardless of who had initiated their fight, Master Luke had ended it. He had never uttered another word about the situation to Rey. He hadn’t had to. Rey could sense his distrust of his nephew and the situation. Oddly enough, the act had not led to Ben requesting her to leave, in fact it had prompted him to ask her to allow him to train her.

At first, Rey had been skeptical, believing he was playing a cruel prank on her or testing to see how gullible she could be. It sounded like the twisted sort of thing he’d get a kick out of. But he had been serious. She still wasn’t sure what to make of it. Was it normal for a grown man to change opinions and emotions the way most changed underwear? He seemed to be awfully conflicted. Despite it all, including Luke’s reservations, Rey was intrigued. There was something about his offer. When he had asked, it had almost seemed like a plea and when she had tried to catch him in a lie, thinking he was being unknighted, he had been genuinely shocked, almost hurt. She had been the one shocked, when he had allowed her to set the ground rules: Sundays, here at the dojo.

It had been a request of hers for comfort and safety. She didn’t trust Ben. His mood swings were enough reason for alarm. Add in the mistrust from Luke and she was making a recipe for disaster. Her own friends had warned her about him, telling her he was no good. Though both Finn and Poe could exaggerate, they wouldn’t make up stories to prove a point, just exaggerate specific details. The fact Ben had been suspended from the ring was another indicator she needed to proceed with caution. Still, she couldn’t keep her thoughts from remember how it had felt to have his hands on her. They were rough, evidence of his rigorous training routine, and strong. She wasn’t sure what she had expected from a professional MMA fighter, especially an undefeated one. Still, it had surprised her how controlled he had been in the moment. After watching him annihilate the bag for over an hour, she had decided it was enough. He needed to calm down. She hadn’t thought about what would happen if he turned his unbridled rage loose on her. Luckily, she had seen the slight tick in his muscles as he pulled the punch, otherwise she wouldn’t have been quick enough to avoid the hit. There had been a change the instant he saw her, focusing on her face. The realization dawned, clear
and new, and then something else...something primal overtook him. When he came at her again, it wasn't raw power or an emotion venting against an inanimate object. His moves were calculated, specific. Each move had a purpose.

His offer to teach her had a purpose too. She just wasn't sure what it was.

Since it was Saturday, Rey had two morning classes to teach, then some down time before she had to drive to New Jedha for her shift. Going to Maz's had become part of her routine, even though she knew it would have been easier and more cost effective to make tea in her apartment, she hadn't yet gotten a tea kettle, so she used it as an excuse to visit each morning. Rose was always there and on occasion, Jessika was getting her own java fix when Rey stopped in, though Jess wasn't a morning person, so Rey kept her conversations short.

The local girls had become a constant part of Rey's routine along with her two jobs and her visits to Kanata Kaffeine. After years of not having any friends, then accepting Finn and Poe, it was an adjustment to have girl friends. Even though she had known them briefly, she felt attached to them, in the same manner she had felt attached to Finn and Poe when she had opened up to them at college. There was something easy about falling into a rhythm with the two girls. But as with the praise Luke bestowed upon her, Rey was learning to welcome the attention. It helped Rose had a fascination with machines and Jess was overly outgoing and adventurous. Rey found similarities between herself and them, helping ease them into a blossoming friendship.

Maz was consistently giving Rey vague and mysterious advice, which she took happily, if not a bit confused. A lot of what Maz said went over her head, like when Master Luke tried to get her to center her chi during meditation. It was the one concept Rey still failed to grasp. The coffeehouse owner was Rey's favorite member of the Tatooine community, though she would never say it out loud, in fear of disappointing her boss or hurting his feelings. As cryptic as Maz could be, she was nurturing and warm, in a way that had Rey wishing she would have known Maz her entire life. Maybe she could have been her foster mother in another universe? It would have been a vast improvement from the terrible childhood she had suffered at the hands of Plutt.

A cold ghost of a shiver ran down Rey's spine at the thought of her ex-guardian. This had been the longest she had ever been away from him, without hearing his cruel remarks about her or his yells for her to bring in more work. It felt good. Her freedom had been difficult to obtain. Even now there were moments in her day she would pause, simply wait for herself to wake up, convinced it was all a dream and she'd open her eyes to see an angry Plutt hovering over her, ready to reprimand her for sleeping in. This time the shiver hit Rey hard enough she physically shook. Now she needed her tea even more. She needed the warmth to wash away the chill of loneliness seeping into her from the unwanted memories.

“Morning Rey!” Rose greeted her, as she walked into Kanata Kaffeine. “The usual?”

“You know me so well,” Rey smiled, handing her a five. “Keep the change.”

“It’s on the house, dear,” Maz appeared next to Rose, reaching across the counter to pat Rey’s hand.

“Maz,” Rey groaned. “You can’t keep doing this. I’m a paying customer.”

“And I’m the owner,” the older woman insisted. “I can do whatever I want.” She stared at Rey, watching the unwavering offer of the bill.

“Fine,” the Jakku girl relented. She waited until Maz turned to get her tea, before stuffing the bill into
the tip jar.

“I saw that.”

Rose and Rey both looked at each other in awe. “How does she do that?” They said in unison, falling into companionable laughter at their shared thought process.

“Jinx!” Rose cried, pointing a finger at Rey, who raised an eyebrow, puzzled by the expression.

“Huh?”

“Jinx,” Rose repeated again, her wide smile causing her cheeks to dimple. “You know....the game?”

Shaking her head, Rey gave a small shrug. “Sorry, I’ve never heard of it.”

“What?” Her friend was stunned. “Well we have to remedy that. What are you doing tomorrow? It’s your day off, right? You should come over. Jess and I were going to order pizza and binge watch ‘Orange is the New Black’ on Netflix. You in?”

Rey wanted to agree, but stopped herself, realizing she had never given Ben a time for their training. Was it an all-day thing or were they only going to practice for a couple of hours? The anxiousness she had felt earlier over her upcoming session with him returned. She wasn’t sure what time commitment was for one on one tutoring with the famous fighter. Mentally, she kicked herself for not having the forethought to create guidelines around her training.

“Can I text you?” She finally responded. “I have a thing.”

“What kind of thing?”

Rey wasn’t sure if she should admit to spending time alone with Ben Solo. There were varying degrees of disappointment and concern whenever she brought up his name. Despite the world not knowing Ben Solo’s new identity, the residents of Tatooine all seemed aware of Kylo Ren’s background, yet they all gave him a wide berth, as if expecting him to turn on them as quickly as he turned on his opponents in the ring. Perhaps that was the reason why Rey kept her voice low when she responded.

“Training.”

“With Luke?”

“Um,” Rey bit her bottom lip, unsure how she was going to explain the situation to Rose, who saw the good in everyone, but wasn’t above asserting herself when the time called for it. The last time Ben had been in front of Rose, he hadn’t been civil. In fact, he had been downright rude. Had Rose not been working, Rey wasn’t sure if the petite girl would have dealt with it as well as she had. “Not exactly.”

“Did he get another instructor?” Rose asked, as she gathered up some dirty spoons and milk containers to dump into the back sink.

“Yeah, his nephew.”

“Ben Solo,” Maz returned to the counter, handing Rey’s tea over. “Is a masterful fighter, one of the
best, but he has lost his path. This could be good,” she said, though Rey had a feeling her statement was directed at her and not at Rose, “for both of you.”

And there it was, the upteeoth cryptic comment Maz had made since Rey had met her.

“He’s a jerk, Maz,” Rose pointed out.

The older woman turned to her employee with a sly grin. “And what man isn’t at one time or another?”

Rose shook her head, but she giggled, before she went to the sink to wash the dishes. Maz’s eyes skimmed over the counter to Rey, but not before pausing on the tip jar. She didn’t make another comment about it, but Rey suspected the coffeehouse owner wasn’t finished yet. “Dear child” Maz’s voice was softer this time, despite the fact Rose was elbow deep in soapy water and Rey was the only patron in the shop at the present. “There are times when we embark down a path with the best of intentions, but no matter how hard we try, we get lost. We lose our way and our purpose. That’s not to say with the correct guidance, we can’t find our way again. If we didn’t break apart, there would be no cracks to let the light in.”

“Maz?”

Rey didn’t understand her meaning or how it related to Ben. The woman was staring at her with such hopeful eyes, it made Rey ache. She wished again Maz had been her adoptive mother or even a friendly neighbor in Jakku — someone who could have held her hand the first time she came home crying from school, someone who would have calmed her during her first period, someone who would have beaten Plutt for ever raising a hand to her. Maz would have done it all. Rey had no doubt in her mind. As it was, she was equally grateful to have the woman in her life now, even if it had only been for a short while. There was no one on this earth quite like Maz. Even if her advice was unclear.

Unclear or not, Maz reached up, tapping her open palm against Rey’s cheek lightly. “You’ll figure it out, dear.”

“Thanks,” Rey smiled.

It was the only response she could give.

The first class of the day was an adult women’s kickboxing class, followed by the younger padawan level taekwondo class. Temiri Blagg was in the second class. He was quickly becoming Rey’s favorite pupil. Though she reminded herself not to pick favorites, his ability to pick up on moves quickly and his infectious energy had Rey seeing a part of herself in him. His mom was a single mother, who usually worked double shifts at the Canto Bight Diner on Main Street. She would come during her breaks to drop off and pick up her only son. If she couldn’t make it, one of the other mothers typically offered to take him home. Today, however, no one was available.

“I’ll sit and wait with you,” Rey told him, coming to sit next to him outside of the studio on the curb. She put an arm around his shoulders, comforting him.

“You don’t have to,” he attempted a brave face, but she knew he was embarrassed.
“Your mom works really hard, you know.”

He was young, but Rey believed he’d understand the value in having a parent who tried as hard as his mother did. From Rey’s perspective, his mother was a hero. She worked long hours, brought him up to be a smart, polite kid, and still managed to put him through school and his classes at the academy. It was far more than Plutt had done for her, or anyone for that matter. He was lucky.

“I know,” he sighed. “Sometimes, I just get mad, you know?” He glanced over at her, looking guilty. “I wish she didn’t have to work so much.”

Rey gave him a squeeze. “I bet, but you know, she only works so hard because she loves you and she wants what’s best for you.”

Temiri nodded. They sat together in silence for several minutes. Rey had wanted to go to the thrift store to search for some necessities for her apartment, but this was more important. She could relate to the lonely child. She couldn’t bare the thought of him waiting alone. She wished she had a helmet for him to wear. She could have taken him with her, to keep him out of his house and to keep her from spending more money than she should on any one particular item. The tips she had been making at Rogue One were good, better than she had expected, being new. They were good enough, she had money to purchase some furnishings, which at this point were sorely needed.

As they sat together, Rey noticed the sounds of the area. The breeze had picked up since her morning run to Kanata Kaffeine. She could hear the gentle brush of leaves from the trees in Master Luke’s zen garden, paired with the babbling sounds of the pound. If she concentrated, she could hear her boss moving around his office, off to her right. Peeking up, she saw him wave from the window. She waved back. And then there was a distant rumble, getting louder. It wasn’t organic, but it was familiar. It was the sound of a black Vanquish speeding out of Corellia and towards the parking lot. Rey immediately tensed.

Within seconds, Ben pulled in. His vehicle was impeccable, as always. Despite the miles he was putting on it by driving back and forth from the city on a daily basis, it was always spotless. There wasn’t a smudge of dirt on the shiny black surface. She figured he had it washed regularly. As he slid out of his car, she noticed he was wearing the same Ray-Ban sunglasses he had worn the first day she had met him. He didn’t remove them, as he walked towards them.

“Morning,” he greeted her, ignoring the Temiri.

“Morning,” she replied, willing her voice to remain unwavering.

“Hey Mr. Tall Teacher Guy,” the child at her side acknowledged him.

Rey bit back her laughter. Ben peered over his sunglasses at the boy. She wasn’t sure if it was contempt or surprise she saw reflected in his eyes. He cleared his throat, before angling towards her. “Are you finished for the day?”

“Yes, we just wrapped up.”

“Good,” he muttered. “I wanted to run over details with you before tomorrow. Shall we?” He brushed past Temiri, heading into the dojo.

“It will have to wait,” she called over her shoulder to him. “I’m waiting with Temiri until his mother
is able to pick him up.”

Ben stalled in the doorway, his face scrunching up. “And how long will that be?”

Rey shrugged. “Not sure. Depends on when she is permitted to take a break.”

He frowned, pinching the bridge of his nose, as if it caused him some sort of physical pain. Rey watched him, curious. Did he not like children? He seemed to regard them the same way most adults regarded a contagious disease. It was almost humorous. Almost. Rey had always liked children, ever since she was one. Things were simple in a child’s eyes. The world was larger, full of opportunities and endless possibilities. The hardest decision was usually about what color crayon to use on an activity pad or which flavor juice box to indulge in. There was a beautiful innocence to their age. She couldn’t understand his disdain.

“Fine,” Ben sighed, his shoulders slumping forward as he exhaled. “I’ll be inside, when you are ready.”

“You could stay out here with us,” she offered. She wasn’t sure if she was offering to be friendly or because she wanted to test his patience around a child. “We don’t bite.”

“Much,” Temiri added, laughing at his own joke.

“Pass,” he responded, gruffly. The door slammed shut once he was inside.

“Why is he such a grump?” Temiri asked.

“Unsolved mystery,” Rey teased, though she truly didn’t know why Ben Solo was as unpleasant as he was.

Maz had mentioned he had lost his way. Rey didn’t know what path he had meant to take, but it was clear he was dealing with several severely unresolved issues. When she had done her research on his mother, the Senator, she hadn’t focused on the details of his formative years. Some parts had trickled in, where they intersected with Leia Organa’s work, but ultimately her report had been on his mother. Now, she found herself wondering what had happened to bring him to this point in his life. As rude and stand-offish as he could be, he tended to operate at a level of calm in her presence.

Still, she could see the weight on his shoulders was heavy. He carried it around, as if he was trying to atone for something. It was yet another layer to the unanswered riddle that was Ben Solo. Rey had never been good with riddles, however, she excelled at fixing broken things. From an early age she had enjoyed opening up objects to inspect what made them work. She taught herself how to put them back together and, if necessary, how to improve them. Perhaps she could do the same to Ben.

It was another twenty minutes before Temiri’s mother arrived to collect him. She thanked Rey profusely before she reminded Temiri to thank his instructor and loaded him into her beat up Subaru. Rey waved, watching them depart from the parking lot, before she turned to the studio.

Walking in, she immediately turned to go to the office, forgetting Ben had asked to speak to her. Luke was still working when she stopped in the doorway. “Hey boss,” she greeted him, leaning against the frame. “All done for the day. Do you need anything?”

“No thank you, Rey,” he smiled, good-naturedly back at her. “Thank you for watching out for the children. They love you.”
“Aww,” she beamed, taking the seat across from his. “I love them.”

“It shows.”

He seemed pleased by her efforts. Rey was glad. Though it had never been her plan to teach at a martial arts school, she was enjoying herself. She was learning just as much from her students as they were learning from her. It was the perfect balance of give and take. She could understand why Luke had told her this was his life’s mission. It was rewarding to watch a pupil struggle with a certain form, only to perfect it over time, and light up when they mastered it.

“Do you like the new header image for the website?” She asked.

“I do,” he replied. “It balances the page out. “

“I thought so too,” she grinned.

Their conversation lapsed into a comfortable quiet. Luke continued going through the files littering his desk. Rey scanned over them, absently, not really reading any of the text or pausing long enough to make sense of the content. His office, no matter how many times she attempted to organize it, was always in some level of disarray. She decided it was organized chaos and that he must have liked it that way because he worked more efficiency when she let him keep it a mess. She mused at what his twin would think of such clutter, knowing how orderly Leia tended to be. With that in mind, she started for the stairs to her apartment.

“Any fun plans for the weekend?” He questioned, suddenly.

“Actually,” she held onto the railing to keep herself from shaking, “I was wondering if it would be alright to use the studio space tomorrow.”

“There are no classes,” Luke stated the obvious. “Are you practicing your forms?”

She couldn’t lie to her boss and mentor. “Sort of. Ben offered to train me one on one.”

“Did he now?” Master Luke rotated in his chair, his eyes boring into her. He had his hands in his lap, fingers strumming against one another, as though he was a villain in an action movie plotting against the protagonist. “How interesting.”

Rey hopped down from the steps. “He wanted to do it at his apartment,” she paused, shaking off the blush that had sprung up in her cheeks at the thought of being alone with Ben at his apartment, “but I’d rather do it here, if you’d be open to it,” she concluded.

“Of course, Rey,” Luke agreed. “Please use the space, as you need. It is your day off, after all. You should be able to benefit from it.”

“Thank you, Master Luke.”

“Don’t mention it.”

Rey hurried up to her apartment. As much as she enjoyed teaching and training, she was ready to be out of her itchy uniform. The solid white color was so stark it made her appear to have more of a tan than she did. The material was heavy and, after long hours, uncomfortable. She was happy to shed it
now that she was done for the day. Slipping into her favorite pair of ripped jeans and a band T-shirt, she went to her kitchen. She had written out a list of what she needed last night. While downing the rest of her tea from Maz’s earlier, she had prioritized each item. She folded it once and then again, before stuffing the note into her pocket. She had enough time to go scavenging at the thrift store. Poe and Finn had promised to help her haul any finds back to her apartment and if their car couldn’t fit it, Jess had a beat up orange Toyota they could use.

It was then, as she prepared to go out to her bike, she remembered Ben needing to speak with her.

When she crossed through the office, Master Luke was gone. Furrowing her brow, Rey wondered where he had disappeared to. He had been deeply concentrated not but five minutes ago. She doubted he’d been able to complete his work in the time it had taken her to change. Still, it wasn’t her business how he went about things. She found Ben in the main studio, doing one-handed push-ups. He had removed his shirt, leaving his top-half bare to her eyes.

She could hardly keep herself from running her gaze up and down his form. As he bobbed up and down, she watched the way his arm muscles tightened, then relaxed, before he went down into the next rep. His other arm was folded across his back, which was equally muscular. Beads of sweat were pooling on his forehead and he let out a whoosh of air each time he descended. She had seen him fighting, knew he was strong, but he hadn’t been shirtless in her presence before. It made her briefly reconsider her position on training here at the academy instead of in his personal gym at his apartment.

“Can I help you?” He quipped, repeating her question from prior.

Rey remembered herself, keeping to the doorway, so as not to mess up the mats with her sneakers. “You said you had some details to review.”

“Yes.” He completed his last rep, before pushing himself up so completely he sprung to his feet. “I was thinking we should get an early start.”

“How early?” She queried, already not liking the sound of it.

“Nine?”

She laughed. “Nine in the morning is early?”

“For normal humans, yes.”

“What are you some nocturnal being?” She mocked, knowing he only ever wore black. With his pale skin, one may have thought he was a vampire wannabe. All he needed was a black cape fluttering behind him like some sort of strangely erotic Dracula cosplay. Rey shook her head at her own traitorous thoughts. She had to remember who he was, what he had done. He was not to be trusted. “Nine is good.”

“Good,” he agreed. “We’ll start with a run, then we can come back here and get to work.”

“How long are we going to work?”

“Do you have a hot date or something?” His question was meant to tease, but Rey sensed a genuine curiosity stemming from his words.
“My friends and I were going to hang since it’s my day off.”

He nodded. “Let’s see how it goes. It’s only the first day. You may be tired after the first hour.”

Rey raised an eyebrow, crossing her arms over her chest. She was not going to let him act all arrogant and behave as if he was better than her. Truth be told, he was. He was ranked and had won medals, but she wasn’t about to let that stop her from mocking him further. “Listen, Mr. I’m Better Than Everyone Else, if memory serves correct, I wasn’t too tired to kick your ass.”

“You got lucky,” he insisted.

She scoffed. “No, you got lucky. Lucky that all I did was punch your pretty face.”

“Is that a threat?” He asked, walking over to her. “Or an invitation?” He stopped when he was standing directly in front of her, the difference in their height non-existent, since the studio floor was lower than the waiting room floor. They were eye level and suddenly Rey regretted egging him on. He was too close. His eyes were too intense. They were a dark brown color, she realized, having thought they were pure black before. It would have matched his mood. Seeing the lighter, warmer color hidden in his depths, she was relieved. He was less intimidating with brown eyes. For some reason, it endeared him to her. She continued to stare, scanning for other details she may have missed.

He had a scar. It wasn’t noticeable all the time, but up close Rey could see it ran the length of his face, down his chest towards his right hip. She wondered what had caused such a long gash. She didn’t remember reading about any accidents or events which could have resulted in such a wound when she had done her research. Ben had probably obtained it after his emancipation. Did it hurt him? Was he bothered by the mark it had left on his skin? Did it have to do with the weight he carried around with him?

Red flags, Rey, she attempted to remind herself. Anger issues, physical assault, broken family... the list went on. For every reason her brain told her to abstain from his advance, her body was responding in an altogether different manner. Butterflies sprang to life in her stomach, heat flowed through her entire form, and she began to feel lightheaded. It was reckless, terribly uncharacteristic of her to be so affected by an expanse of skin. She had seen Poe and Finn pad through their apartment in only their boxers. It had never made her feel like this.

Part of her knew to be afraid. Part of her warned about his power, his connections, and his wealth. He had everything at his disposal. With a snap of his fingers, he could change the course of her entire life, if he had wanted to. She was sure he had access to some of the best lawyers in the country, if not the world. She was surprised he hadn’t gone that route in order to take over the academy, though she also believed Luke would never sign over the business. Ben had unlimited power and a need for control. It was equal parts irritating and irresistible. In her current position, with him so dangerously close that she could feel his breath against her skin, she was leaning towards irresistible.

“Rey?”

Hearing her name, brought her out of the trance. The girl from Jakku found her resolve and her voice. “I guess we’ll see.”

She could feel her face burning from his proximity. Her pulse was hammering in her ears and she couldn’t catch her breath. Why had she done that? Why had she thought it was a good idea to pick on the unstable enigma? Handsome or not, toying with him was likely to end up with one or both of
them hurt. The far more likely result was her. After all, he had a reputation for being trouble. And she didn’t want to be used for what she could do for him. Plutt had already taken advantage of her. She wouldn’t waste any more of her life serving the needs of another. So, before she could further embarrass herself, she left for the thrift store.

But not before he called after her, “We certainly will.”
Chapter Summary

In which Kylo eagerly prepares for his first one on one session with Rey and then traps her against a kickboxing bag....

Chapter Notes

I apologize for the delay in getting this posted. I've been working on two submissions for the RFFA More Than Love fic exchange. In my defense, this is the longest chapter yet and full of REYLO goodness. Bonus points for the person who figures out the movie which inspired Kylo's cafe outburst!!! Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Kylo had been up before the sunrise, anticipation thrumming in his veins. It was Sunday. Today was the day. The fact echoed within him, causing every cell in his being to become charged with excitement. He had never been interested in training with a lesser ranked individual before. Hell, he could hardly stand to train with any single person, preferring to push himself to the limit by actively engaging as many participants from the First Order gym as he could. He never focused on their features, allowing them all to blur into indistinguishable attackers. It was how he operated, removing the personal aspects from his world.

One personal aspect kept trying to break through. His mother had begun leaving voice mails with both Phasma and his manager, about her charity auction, after he had ignored her previous attempts. This meant Hux was texting, emailing, and calling him constantly to complain that 1) it wasn’t his job to take messages and 2) call his damn mother because she held political power he could manipulate for the glory of the First Order. Kylo refused to acknowledge any of his manager’s demands.

Though it would have been considered good PR, Kylo wanted nothing to do with the Resistance or his mother. She used those around her for her own political gain. He was no exception. Despite being her only child, she still only viewed him as an advantage. Maybe she couldn’t publicly announce him as her offspring, but that wouldn’t stop her. She’d leverage his fame as a renowned fighter to bring in more donors to the event. There was always a trick to play, something she had no doubt learned from her smuggler husband.

Hit Me With Your Best Shot
Kylo rarely went to black tie events. As Hux had acutely pointed out, he preferred to remain alone. Shying away from people, kept him focused on his goals and kept the cruel memories of his youth at bay. But that would soon all change.

The girl was different. She had a fire in her, a drive he recognized. If he could hone it, train her to follow the strict regime he had built for himself, she’d develop into a worthier opponent, a true challenger. It gave him a pleasant feeling, knowing he had found something in her, something that called to him, made him feel connected in a way no one else ever had.

His bedside clock read 5:50am. He had time before he needed to drive out to Tatooine. He rolled out of his bed, padding across his apartment to his personal studio. The room was as large as the master bedroom, with matted floors, no mirrors, and a selection of training pads and weapons. Kylo began going through his angles of attack, quieting his mind from the excitement of his upcoming session.

To be successful, he needed to continue working on her trust. His first impression had not done him any favors, nor had his follow-up conversation with his uncle. He had a lot of mistakes to make up for. As he moved from angle eight, a strike to the right leg through angle nine, a strike to the left leg, he tried to discern personal details he had observed about Rey versus the confidential information he had obtained. Disclosing private points would set him back and possibly cause her mistrust in him to end their interactions permanently.

Kylo recalled how each day when he had arrived at the academy he had seen an empty cup from Kanata Kaffeine. The disposable travel cups were disposed in the office waste basket. Since his uncle was sold on his blue milk theory, a disgusting concept to Kylo, he assumed the cups belonged to Rey. He remembered she preferred tea, not coffee, which was very British of her. He made a mental note to peruse her files for more on her location before she had been brought to the States.

Heading into Maz’s cafe was not an adventure Kylo was prepared for. His self-preservation outweighed his desire to make the girl happy. The other option was a chain, just outside the city. Deathstarbucks Coffee was on his way to Tatooine and had a wide menu of offerings. He’d stop in there on his way to the academy. The chain was wildly popular with both the college aged crowd and his peers at the First Order. He was sure a small boost would be welcomed by the girl.

Mind made up, Kylo continued running through the twelve angles, flowing from one into the next and then again, over and over until he lost himself in the fluid rhythm.
Deathstarbucks was the same as any other chain in Kylo’s opinion. The workers were all part-timers in their late teens, early twenties and were decorated in pep and matching uniforms. He tried not to groan at the overzealous young man at the counter when he came up on his turn in line.

“Good morning and welcome to Deathstarbucks. What can I get started for you?”

“One green tea with honey and one black coffee,” Kylo responded, handing over his credit card.

“Perfect!” The teenager chirped. “And what size would you like?” Unsure, Kylo glanced at the stacks of paper to-go cups down the counter from the barista. “We have tall, grande, and venti.”

What the hell?

“Those sizes do not make sense,” he grumbled.

“S-Sure they do,” the boy stumbled slightly over his own words, unnerved by Kylo’s attitude.

“No,” Kylo glared down at him. “Naming three sizes in different languages does not make you cool. It makes you stupid.”

The boy bristled at the words and there was a hush over the counter area, as the surrounding conversations came to a halt. Kylo continued starring at the startled barista, convinced he was either about to faint or puke. Either option would have proved his point. This entire place was ridiculous.

“Just order, asshole,” someone snapped from the back of the line.

With a sigh, he relented. “Make them both grandes.”

The barista nodded, nervously, before swiping his card, and handing it back over with a recipe. Kylo pocketed both and moved to the end of the counter to retrieve the drinks.
As painful as this pit stop had been, it was a more preferable alternative to seeing Maz Kanata.

Once he had his beverages in hand, Kylo loaded both the drinks and himself into his Vanquish. The drive to Ahch-To Academy was uneventful, but he had to admit the strength of the black coffee was a pleasant surprise. Maybe those college kids were on to something, even if they were idiots.

Rey was in the office when he arrived. It was eight-thirty, but she had mentioned nine wasn’t early. Leaning on the door frame, her tea in his hand, he watched as she combed through files in the bottom drawer of his uncle’s desk. She was hovering over the opened drawer from her seat, unable to see him. She had on a pair of light grey capri leggings and a bright blue tank top. There wasn’t any black, not even on her sneakers that were peeking out from under the desk. He would have to remedy her wardrobe choices when she came to the First Order. He cleared his throat and she gave a little jump, slamming the drawer shut.

“I brought you caffeine,” he entered the room, setting the cup down on the desk in front of her. She eyed the offering, suspiciously. Before her mind could wonder if he had laced the drink with anything, he asked, “What are you looking for?”

“The web hosting contract Master Luke signed,” she let out a small sigh, as if she had been at it a while. He briefly pondered how long she had been awake. Could she have been up before dawn, as he had? “I wanted to see if I could get him a better deal,” she explained.

“Isn’t that his problem?” Kylo returned.

Rey scrunched her nose at him. “Is it a problem to help?”

“Kiss ass.”

“Better than a dumbass,” she retorted, rising from the chair with a defiant smirk. He gathered her dig was directed at him, but he was too busy comparing her remark to the ones he had made about the baristas earlier. His little bobcat did have spunk.

Kylo followed her out of the office and down onto the dojo floor. He had his gym bag strapped over his shoulder. While he had a clear plan of what he wanted to achieve with Rey, he had been unclear as to how to start off. A run was a good test of her endurance, her breathing, and her form. After that, though, he wasn’t sure how to proceed. So his bag was filled with various weapons, pads, and a few books on techniques and methodologies he had studied over the years.
Rey made a choking sound, as he passed her toward the teacher station in the corner of the room.

“This isn’t from Maz’s?” She made a disgusted face, stretching her arm out, so she could inspect the branding on the cup.

“So?”

“So?” Her eyes widened, as if he had said something ludicrous. “She’s the only coffee shop in town. The least you could do is support the local business. It’s not like you’re hurting for money.”

Kylo wasn’t sure how to take her words. She sounded as if she was insulting him and reprimanding him at the same time. Her concern over where he had gotten her tea surprised him to the point he momentarily forgot how she should have been grateful he had brought her anything, let alone green tea. He was thankful her concern was overshadowing the fact he had remembered her order from the day they met. Kylo was not in the mood to field questions from her on why he recalled how her accented voice had requested the simple drink order.

He turned to the counter, setting down his bag on the floor at his feet. He put down his own container of black coffee, trying to ignore the growing frustration. He was beginning to associate Rey with the blood boiling feeling he always got in her presence. She was still under his skin, always there, an itch he couldn’t scratch. Kylo’s goal for the training was self-serving, it was true, but it was developing into something beyond his original intention. He needed to get Rey off this train of thought and focused on their training for the day.

“It was out of my way,” he shrugged, angled so his back was partially to her, but so he could still watch her from his peripherals. His lie was an excuse and she latched onto it.

“Out of your way?” She rolled her eyes now, more annoyed over his gesture of good faith than she had a right to be. “You have to drive down Main Street, past Kanata’s Kaffeine to get here!”

He didn’t like the fact she had found yet another point to call him out on. This was not how he had envisioned the morning going. He was losing ground with her, not building up her trust. The entire point of bringing her tea was to make her warm to him, open up, so he was begin planting seeds towards getting her away from the academy and back in the city with him, getting her to join him and the First Order. As with so many things in his life, he had messed it up. She was pulling away from him. Kylo growled, low in his throat, too low for her to hear.
“Next time you won’t get anything,” he snarled, yanking the cup out of her still outstretched hand. The anger on Rey’s face fell away instantly, as she stared at him, seemingly shocked by his response.

Silence followed his outburst. He wanted to scream. He wanted to go over to one of the bags and begin beating it until it came undone from its heavy base. He wanted to punch at the mirrored walls. What was seven years bad luck when he had already suffered his family’s short-comings? He had already put up with years of his mother attempting to guilt trip him and his uncle’s hypocrisy. A few shattered mirrors wouldn’t change any of it. But Rey could.

The girl behind him was his reason for not taking out his aggression in a physical way. Teaching her to fight, showing her techniques for self-defense was different than blowing up in a rage. He figured she’d appreciate him appearing calm and in control versus the dangerous storm of chaos he was dissolving into. Kylo reminded himself of her past history, willing himself to snuff out the raging fire within. Rey wouldn’t trust him if he couldn’t keep it together. He needed her to see him as a friend, not the enemy. If he pushed too hard or too far, she’d retreat. She’d back out of these one on one sessions and he’d lose his opportunity to have her.

“Ben,” her voice was softer now, the heat of the fight gone. “I’m sorry. It was nice of you to think of me.”

Kylo sighed, running a hand through his hair, before turning around fully to face her. “Forget it.” She was looking at him, still unsure, still suspicious, but there was a hint of acceptance there. “Here,” he handed her back the tea. “It will get cold if you don’t drink it now.” Her lips pulled into a small smile and she accepted the offering. This time there was no suspicion in her gaze, only appreciation.

“Thank you, Ben.”

“You’re welcome.”

After they had finished their preliminary stretching in silence, they locked up the studio and proceeded outside. Kylo decided they would run down into town, along Main Street, then loop around back to the academy. It was about three miles in total, but would give them a good warm up before they started going over some forms and basic techniques. Rey was already bouncing back and forth on the balls of her feet, as they stood at the edge of the academy’s driveway. If he didn’t know any better, he would have thought he had handed her a triple shot of espresso instead of a green tea.
He ignored her burst of energy; sure it was another one of her endless techniques to annoy him. Kylo focused on how training her would improve his relations with Anthony Snoke. To say the man was displeased by Kylo Ren’s latest write up was an understatement. Though Phasma had said something along the lines of, “no press is bad press,” Mr. Snoke had reprimanded Kylo for his actions. His exact words had been, “What foolish, weak-minded nonsense was that? Look at what you’ve cost me with your insolence!”

Kylo had stormed out of the office, keeping himself in check long enough to drive back to his apartment, before destroying everything in the guest room, including the mattress. Once his aggression had been restored to normal levels, he had called Phasma and stepped out to give the cleaners privacy. He was sure they were used to the destruction he left in his wake. They had been servicing his apartment since he had moved in.

“Want to make this interesting?” The girl asked, causing him to glance back over in her direction.

He quirked an eyebrow at her; unsure what she meant.

“I bet I can make it around town and back here before you.” She flashed him a full grin of white teeth and dimpled cheeks.

Kylo squashed his impulse to say something nasty and merely retorted, “Impossible. My strides are longer than yours.”

She shrugged, walking towards the end of the driveway. “Fine, if you’re too scared to-.”

“I’m not scared,” he protested.

The girl glanced over her shoulder at him with a skeptical look. “If you say so.”

“I will not coddle you, if you cry when you lose,” he insisted, moving to join her at their ‘starting line.’

Rey smiled again, craning her neck slightly to see him properly. “Don’t worry, old man. Just try to keep up.”
“Three, two, one...Go!”

And she was off, before his mind could comprehend what she had called him.

Kylo was still standing there, partially stunned by her absent minded insult, until he noticed the growing distance between them, as she sprinted down the road. She was fast. He recalled her instincts from when they had sparred. She was quicker than he had given her credit for. He wouldn’t make the same mistake again. He needed to show her who was in charge, needed to set precedence as her teacher.

His lengthy limbs covered the distance easily, as he charged after her. It had been some time since he had run on physical ground. Normally he resigned himself to the treadmills at the First Order gym or in his apartment complex. He preferred to go at off times when the probability of having to converse with other individuals was lower, nearly non-existent. Still, he kept up with his training, never taking a day off, if he could help it. So despite the girl’s immature attempt to beat him, he passed her.

He allowed himself the briefest of glances at her, as he raced by, noting the growing smile on her face. She seemed pleased, not at all flustered or upset by his presence. Kylo was confused by her response. Had she been angered, he could have jeered back at her. Yet again, he reminded himself of his goal.

By bringing her to the First Order and to Snoke, he would have delivered a valuable asset to their organization, another top contender who would win endless competitions, as he had, bringing in further recognition and revenue, the two things Snoke revered over all others. Kylo’s last indiscretions would be forgotten once he had the girl. Snoke would be far too pleased with the added benefit of having her onboard that he would praise Kylo for his prudence. It was a perfect plan to get back into his mentor’s good graces.

As he thought through how he’d announce his discovery of the girl and her raw talent, he let the scenery around him change from the open landscape around the academy to the buildings of town and the change of the pavement from battered macadam to concrete sidewalks.

Kylo made a wide loop at the end of Main Street, where the road headed out the other side of town, ready to start his way back towards the academy. As he came to pass Kanata Kaffeine, he spotted the petite figure he had been avoiding since his sentence to return to this god-forsaken community.
Maz.

The old woman appeared weathered by time and experiences, but to Kylo she hadn’t changed at all. She had always worn the mark of an ancient entity, as if she was not of this world. Her wise eyes locked onto him, from where she told on the porch of her business, sweeping up the front stoop. He felt his steps grow heavy, his limbs suddenly tired from his jog.

Her brown eyes pierced through him, sending his mind reeling from memories long suppressed. But as rapidly as he was pulled into his painful past, he was brought back, by the brush of someone’s bony shoulder nudging into his side.

“Keep up,” the girl teased, momentarily running backwards in front of him before she took off like a shot towards the dojo.

Kylo shook his head, eliminating the last of his mental haze. One final peek back at the coffeehouse revealed a now empty front porch. He scowled and continued forward. He was not about to let the untrained girl win this race.

He picked up his pace, once again closing the space between the girl and himself, but this time, as he neared her, she pressed on, increasing her pace with his. Each time he progressed closer, she sped up, staying ahead of him, even if it was only by a couple of yards. He glared at her back, as if he could mentally haul her backwards. He fixated on a spot in between her shoulder blades, as if by sheer will he had the power to immobilize her.

He didn’t.

She won.

As they both came round the corner of the academy to enter the parking lot, Rey threw both her arms up on the arm, dancing around, her buns bouncing on her head as she hopped back and forth on the gravel.

“She won.” She taunted him, her smile wider than ever before. She gave another couple of hops around the parking lot, before pulling the keys free from her capri’s pocket.
Kylo was chiding himself inwardly, as she moved toward the door. He had not expected to lose. He had not expected her last burst of speed or her endurance to keep up the way she had. Then he recalled Maz in town and cursed the old woman for getting into his head. It was her fault he had stalled, her fault he had lost his pace, and ultimately their race.

That woman was proving to be a meddlesome force yet again. He wondered if it was her age that brought her such abilities or if was his former selves weakness which allowed her to breach his normal rough exterior. She had always been able to open him up, even if it required a few cracks to get to the center of him.

“Coming?” The girl called, standing in the entrance. Kylo buried his anger, stalking towards the door.

Once they were back inside the studio, Rey bounded up towards her apartment, the outcome of the race seemingly already forgotten in her mind.

“I'm going to grab my water bottle. Do you want anything?”

“No,” he called after her, watching her dart from the waiting room and disappear through the office. He had the forethought to bring his own water bottle when he packed his bag that morning. However, he noted her offer. It wasn’t much, considering how open and friendly she was to anyone who walked into the studio. Still, it was a step in the right direction. Perhaps he didn’t need to make up as much ground as he had initially assumed.

Kylo entered the main dojo, kneeling by his bag to dig through for the black container. It had the red and white seal of the First Order on it, typical branding paraphernalia. The marketing department ensured the logo was on practically everything and anything the fighters used on a daily basis, never knowing when they would get photographed.

Rey returned a moment later, a bright teal aluminum bottle in her grasp. It made a slurping sound as she drank out of the straw. He cringed, hating the annoying sucking noise. His disgust must have been evident, because she apologized.

“Sorry, I know it’s loud.”

He waved a hand at her, rising from the ground with his own water in hand. “I'll have my assistant get you one of these,” he replied, gesturing to his own First Order bottle. “It’s better.”
“This is fine,” she told him, her eyes narrowing.

“It’s distracting,” he commented, hearing a slurp as she took another long gulp of water. She had done it on purpose. “And that was childish.”

She rolled her eyes, ignoring his barb. “Are you ever satisfied? Honestly, it must be exhausting to be you.”

“Why?”

“You’re never happy with anything,” she observed. “Nothing is ever to your liking, never meets your expectations. Kinda makes me worried about this,” she swung her arm out, gesturing to the empty studio floor.

Kylo realized he may have been too harsh in his remarks. He needed to be more aware of what the girl was comfortable with, if he was going to sway her. Given her background, her perspective on this was not the same as his. In his drive to become the best fighter in the league, he had developed a high level of expectations. Perfection was an illusion. Luke had told him that. Kylo disagreed. He was perfect...at fighting. He was undefeated, ranked the highest in the league since his grandfather. He had scored numerous endorsement contracts, owned endless luxuries, and didn’t need to rely on his parents or uncle for anything — not even their validation. He had fans for that. He was unstoppable. He could beat anyone.

Except the girl, a traitorous voice in his head supplied.

That would quickly be remedied. After today, she’d see it was beginner’s luck. She’d be so bone tired after the work out he put her through, she wouldn’t have time for her friends or her boyfriend. Kylo tried not to acknowledge how the fact she had a devoted person irritated him. He had....well Hux and Phasma didn’t really count so...no one. But it didn’t bother him. He wasn’t a people person. Rey was. But he’d break her of that soon enough.

He had seen her dedication to training. No matter how exhausted she was after today, no matter how hard he ran her, she’d be back for more. Like him, she’d become addicted to the rush, addicted to the knowledge and would crave more and more. Kylo would make sure he’d teach her methods his uncle wouldn’t, so she’d be forced to rely on him, spend more time with him one on one. Eventually her training would become all-consuming, as his had; she’d forgo her relationships, as he had. She’d be his completely — his victory.
It would no longer be about who beat who. None of that would matter anymore, because she’d join the First Order with him, she’d leave the academy. Without her as his uncle’s apprentice, the business would pass directly to Kylo, the last of the Skywalker line, and he’d have everything he wanted. He’d have the girl at his side in the First Order, his equal in the female rankings. He’d have the academy, which he could repurpose as he saw fit, and he remains the best, at the top of it all, untouched.

“Not going to disagree with me on that?” Rey asked, startling him out of his thoughts.

“I have high expectations,” he retorted. “There’s nothing wrong with that.”

“No, there isn’t,” she agreed. “But you don’t have high expectations, Ben. You have impossible expectations.”

“My name is Kylo,” he reminded her, ignoring her clarification.

“I’m not going to call you that,” she shook her head, before settling down on the floor to stretch.

“Why not?” He sat across from her, extending his left leg to the side to work his hamstrings and calves.

“Because it’s dumb,” Rey laughed. “It’s not your real name. It sounds like some villain from a sci-fi flick.”

Villain? She had no idea. No idea of what he really was. Perhaps she wasn’t aware of how he had destroyed his former opponents, sending more than one to the hospital. Nines hadn’t been ushered out in a stretched during the match, but he had afterwards. After he had-

“I mean, who even came up with the name Kylo Ren?”

“Me.”
“Oh.” She had to decency to at least look embarrassed by her question. But she rebounded fast. “I still prefer Ben.”

“I prefer to get started,” he grumbled, tossing a pair of short sticks at her. They landed at her feet, the crack of the bamboo echoing off the walls of the studio. She stared at them, unmoving. “They won’t bite,” he told her.

But I do.

With her hair pulled up in her signature style, he had the perfect view of her slim neck and the gentle curve where it met her collarbone. Suddenly, he had an urge to press his mouth to the soft skin there; sure she would make a delicious sound in response. The thought came unbidden. It gave him reason to pause over his bag, before reaching in for his second set of sticks. Pushing the urge from his mind, he straightened up, one stick in each hand. The girl was still observing the weapons on the floor in front of her, warily.

“Is there a problem?” He asked, considering he may have made a mistake starting her off with weapons training before they got into further hand to hand techniques.

She shook her head, the unnamed emotion clouding her eyes disappearing before she retrieved the sticks. “Not at all,” she responded, the defiant grin from earlier back on her face. “What are we doing?”

“I am going to teach you, Heaven Six or Sinawali, as it’s called in some styles,” he informed her. If she noticed how he distinguished his role versus her own in the exchange, she didn’t react. Instead, she watched him carefully, as he came to stand before her. He got into his starting position and she nodded, mimicking his stance.

“It’s a six count pattern. I suggest you count out loud or in your head until you are comfortable with the pattern,” he suggested.

She nodded, again, surprisingly silent for a change. Determination was written in her face, a clear sign she was ready to begin. They fell into a rhythm as he showed her each of the six positions and how each transitioned into the next. He demonstrated each piece separately at first, having her practice mirroring him, then completing the motions by herself in front of the mirror on the wall. Next he had her work through the first three moves with their transitions, slowly.
The girl had fluidity to her form, picking up the pattern as quickly as she had adjusted her fighting stance when they had sparred. Within a half hour, she was going through the entire pattern, only requiring minor corrections from him. Kylo was impressed with how gifted she was, convinced her talent would be applauded at the First Order. They hadn’t had a female champion since Phasma’s retirement.

“Now we spar,” he told her, watching her eyes flash with the familiar gold flecks at his words. She moved to place the sticks down, but he tapped her stick with one of his own. “We are sparring with these.”

The gold sparked brighter in her eyes, but the green was advancing, swarming over. He recognized the look. The claws were about to come out. His little bobcat was going to play his game.

“We’ll go slow, at first,” he said, though he figured they both knew it wouldn’t last. A simple parry back and forth would hardly serve his goal. If he wanted her to be ready to put before Snoke, he needed to challenge her. He needed the ferocious warrior he had coaxed out last time.

He went through the first round slowly, then noting how effortlessly she completed the pattern, he quickened his pace. Tap, tap, tap, tap, tap, tap. The bamboo stick against bamboo stick checks were increasing in tempo and Kylo realized he wasn’t the only one speeding up his movements. Rey had caught on to his acceleration.

He took a step, walking in a slow ring around her, as she kept up with the new flow they had both set. Kylo noticed her hesitation, unsure of having him circling her, as if she were prey. He reflected on her use of the word villain. Perhaps it wasn’t so far from the truth. In his uncle’s opinion, Kylo was attempting to lure Rey to ‘the dark side.’ The mere thought of how absurd it sounded in his head made him want to chuckle, but he retained his composure.

The girl began to pivot around, never turning her back to him, and never giving him a clean opening to strike her with. It was remarkable. Her self-defense instincts were extremely well-crafted to the point, where if he hadn’t known what demons existed in her past, he would have suspected. She was far too assertive, far too observant for a normal girl her age, though she did appear rather trusting. He was convinced it was part of her mask; her happy smiles and optimistic personality were to keep others from knowing the truth she kept hidden, the skeletons in her closet, so to speak.

If he was being honest with himself, a part of him was excited by the fact they had that in common. It gave him an advantage in how he could pursue her.

Kylo stopped walking clockwise, his lips curling into a smirk as he watched Rey still, back into
starting position, awaiting his next move. He pushed. Stepping forward into her space, he pressed each strike down harder, forcing her back. Her eyes hardened into a deep emerald green, her lips squeezed together as she concentrated on him. He was about to revel in his ability to bring out the fighter in her, when she broke formation and moved to strike his side.

Improvisation was not a lesson he had considered teaching her. She needed to master far too many skills before it would be sensible to have her break the rules to enhance her own combat signature. Kylo found himself being pushed back, as she continued weaving her sticks before him. The glint in her gaze was practically murderous and he had an unhealthy attraction to the shade he found there.

*If you want to play dirty, little girl, let’s play dirty.*

Her footwork was good, but it was far from perfect. He dropped to one knee, coming level with her torso. One rapid shot to the back of her knee had her careening backward, while he slid forward, angling away from her fall. She didn’t land on her rear, as a lesser skilled opponent would have. Instead, she ducked her chin, rolling backwards until she found her footing and jumped back up.

Not graceful, but not too bad either, he had to admit. Though, if he had thought she looked savage before, he was wrong. There was no gold left in her normally speckled eyes. Now there was only a deep forest green, so dark it could have been black.

“Tired yet?” He mocked, unsure how long they had been at it, but guessing she had to be winded by now.

“Not a chance.”

And then they were at it again.

This time, Kylo didn’t hold back. She had come after him again, ever the eager one, but he was not going to let her have it so easy. His uncle may have saved her last time, but he was not about to let her score another hit on him. He swung through the pattern as fast as he normally did when he was training at the First Order. To her credit, the girl kept up. Her form was not perfect and she wasn’t aware of how far back he was driving her, but she kept in time with his hits, not providing him with a chance to strike her again.

He backed her up against one of the kickboxing bags, her eyes widening when she realized she had run out of space to retreat into. Kylo slapped his stick down hard against hers, before locking it
against her knuckles and wrist, using the pressure against her small features to force her weapon from her hand. The stick dropped to the mat and he quickly kicked it away from her reach. He had to distance her from any possible edge. He needed to secure the upper hand.

Rey struggled against him, her other stick still raised up where he had pinned her other wrist against the bag. He stepped between her legs, checking his hip against her abdomen, to keep her there.

“Yield.”

Her nostrils flared as she glared up at him, face flushed and eyes full of fire. “No,” she hissed.

Kylo shook his head, before pressing his thumb against her wrist, where he had her pinned. The pressure on the correct point forced her compliance and she dropped her second stick to the ground. Angrily, she let out a sound, as she raised her leg to knee him in the hip. He chuckled, as he brought his own leg up, before stepping on her foot to keep her from trying it again.

He glared down at her, so unwilling to give up and possibly even more obstinate than he was. Hux had often remarked about how difficult Kylo was. He hadn’t ever given it a thought, until now, standing there staring down at the girl who was seething beneath his hold. Her stormy attitude should not have been so alluring, but in that moment, his head tilted down toward hers, Kylo Ren was convinced he had never seen anything as beautiful as her.

And like any opponent would, fair fight or not, she took advantage of his pause to throw a head-butt.

*Bobcat, I may need to change your name to Minx.*

He angled his head away just enough for her attempt to miss, before he brought both her arms down in front of her, so he could wrap his hand around both of her wrists. With his free hand, he cupped her face, forcing her to look at him.

“It’s done,” he had a warning tone in his voice. “Yield.”

Stubbornly, she shook her head.
Kylo chuckled, lowly in his throat, aware of how the flush from their activities was now spreading across her tanned skin. This was the closest he had ever been to a woman before and absolutely the most compromising of positions, as well. Apparently he was not the only one who thought so. There was a flicker of something in her features, which hadn’t been there before. It wasn’t fear. It was more primal, more alluring. As much as the realization sent him spiraling back towards the awkward days of his youth, and his earlier urges, he still had a point to make.

“Not bad,” he told her.

And he meant it.

Even when Phasma had been in her prime, she hadn’t had the endurance Rey was exhibiting. It was as if she was feeding off the fight instead of exhausting herself. She had so much spark, so much fervor in her, yet she was poised and ready to strike at any moment. He would need to keep his guard up around her. She was as unpredictable as any wild animal. His little minx.

“Rey.” He spoke her name so softly, he wondered if she had even heard him.

Apparently, she had, because the next second, she blinked and the normal hazel color of her eyes returned, all green, brown, and gold tones. Her body, so taut with frustration and anger, relaxed against his hold and her gaze softened.

“You win,” she sighed, her breath running down over his lower arm, causing the hairs to stand on end.

If he had thought she were beautiful before; he was about to melt from the satisfaction of hearing her yield to him.

Kylo couldn’t tear his eyes away from her, or his body for that matter. He let his hands fall down to rest on her hips, releasing her wrists as he did. He should have stepped away. He should have given them both room to breathe after her submission. Instead, he stayed rooted where he was, watching her, as if at any moment, she’d disappear from his life, just as unexpectedly as she had emerged.

“Ben.”

She started to say his name — his real name — and he decided he didn’t mind. For once, it sounded
right, it sounded like the person he was, because for once he was who he had wanted to be back when he still lived at Ahch-To with his uncle, back when he had been a scholar and interested in the history of martial arts more than the success of the sport. For once, he was just a boy with a girl who was returning his stare with as much hope and longing as he felt.

If he just leaned down another inch or so, he would feel the softness of her lips, have a taste of her mouth, and —

**BEEP**

Kylo and the girl both jumped apart suddenly, at the loud horn honking outside. He instinctively looked up at the clock over the center of the room, shocked when he saw it was after one.

“Sorry,” Rey apologized, sheepishly. “That will be my friends.”

She scrambled to pick up her water bottle and his short sticks, holding them out to him. He barely registered taking them, as she scurried past, pausing by the door to wave at her ride, before disappearing upstairs to the apartment. Kylo stood stock still for several more seconds, unsure how to process what had nearly occurred, before his curiosity got the best of him.

Keeping off to the side, he peered out one of the studio’s windows to see two girls in a beat-up old truck. It was an ugly rusty, orange color, but he had a feeling Rey loved it. He was surprised to see these two faces, one of whom he recognized from the Maz’s, instead of her boyfriend and his male counterpart. Suddenly, Kylo felt incredibly insignificant. Any lingering sensation of being at peace, of having feelings towards the girl, or of being Ben Solo vanished.

“See you tomorrow?” Rey appeared in the doorway, having traded in her workout gear for a pair of sweats, a beat up pair of Converse, and an old T-shirt that had seen better days. He tried not to grimace at the sight.

“Sure,” was all he managed to mutter in reply, before she shot out the door, a huge smile on her face as she greeted her friends.

Kylo Ren was alone once more.
Note: We now have beautiful fanart by @callme-c0nn0r for the "almost kiss."
Chapter End Notes

Comments keep me going and urge me to get the next chapter finished and posted.

Thank you to AbyssalSpark for beta-ing this chapter! She stepped up and offered her services so graciously.
Fires

Chapter Summary

In which Rey goes 'scavenging' at the local thrift shop and texts Ben regarding their earlier training session...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.
"So..." Jess drawled, as the trio drove away from Ahch-To and towards the thrift store.

"So?" Rey quipped back, ignoring the knowing stares she was getting from both girls.

"How did it go with Tall, Dark, and Utterly Terrible?"

Rey giggled, relieved to be in a safe place where the tension, which had been building earlier, was no longer in play. "He's not so bad," she admitted, with a shrug of her shoulders. "In fact, he was actually nice to me today. Even brought me tea."

"Really?" Rose asked, sounding genuinely pleased by the revelation.

"Green tea with honey" Rey confirmed, flashing her a smile over her shoulder.

"He remembered what y-."

"Hold the phone!" Jess cut her roommate off. "He is giving you lessons for free and he bought you coffee?"

"Tea," Rey corrected, "But yeah."

It was only then Rey realized she had only ever ordered in front of him the first morning they had met. Did he really remember all this time? She tried to contain the warm feelings blossoming through her at the thought of Ben ordering her favorite drink, even if it hadn't been from her favorite place. It didn't change the fact that he had remembered. That had to mean something, right?

She couldn't stop the smile from spreading across her face. "I guess he did."

"Pfff," Jess laughed, her eyes meeting Rose's through the rear-view mirror. "Sounds like he wants to teach you more than martial arts, girl."

"It's not like that," Rey insisted.

She could still feel the lingering sensation of heat from where Ben had pressed his fingers into the curve of her hip bone. The wave of his breath falling down her neck and across her collarbone had made her feel heady. It had driven all reason, all those red flags, far from her mind. She had been so sure he would kiss her, so sure he would lean a bit closer and eliminate the space between them.
"So what's it like then?" Jess questioned. She was not about to let it go.

"He's..." Rey stopped herself. She didn't actually know what Ben was. Friend seemed a bit premature, considered how they had been at each other's throats or more literally her fist had been at his face. Associate seemed cold, more like something he would say, teacher? Hadn't he said she needed one? "He's my coworker. Just another instructor at the academy." She settled on that for a description.

"And he's instructing you on...."

"Sinawali," Rey replied, as if the one word explained all of it.

In truth, it explained nothing. It didn't explain how intensely they stared at one another, as if the entire word merely existed in that singular moment. It didn't explain why she felt connected to him — him, a man she barely knew — a man she should sooner forget and stay away from instead of spending time with. It didn't explain the heat she felt when he got close to her. Or the heat blossoming up in her cheeks now just from thinking on it.

"Is that what the kids are calling it nowadays?" Jess continued to laugh.

Rose leaned forward, placing a hand on Rey's shoulder. "I think it's sweet," she told her. "Maybe he just needs a companion, you know, someone he can talk to."

"Exactly," Rey latched onto Rose's idea, desperate for some explanation to quiet her thoughts.

"Whatever you say, girl," Jess was still wearing a grin that said 'yeah-right,' but thankfully, if either of them noticed, neither of her new friends remarked on her growing blush.

"I only met him the one time," Rose admitted, going off on a new tangent. "But Maz knows him. I think she used to babysit him."

"Shut up!" Jess cried, breaking into another round of hysterics. This time Rey joined in. The thought of petite Maz administering discipline on the towering form of Ben Solo had all three girls cackling the rest of the ride to the store.

Echo Base was a consignment and thrift store with several rooms that wove into one another. Their mission statement called the recycled items echoes of their former self, re-purposed for new life and a new home. While most of the rooms were organized into specific types of items, such as furniture, apparel, or home goods, there were some boxes haphazardly collected in available corner spaces or under racks of clothing.

During her earlier trek, Rey had found a cherry red leather chair and a set of large gray couch cushions, whose color changed depending on the lighting. She thought they would bring some color to the plain white walls of her place. Even better was that together they were under a hundred dollars. It was a bargain in her mind, but also the reason for roping Jess and Rose into helping her get the pieces back to academy.

She had picked up some decorative objects on her prior visit, ones that did actually fit in her side sacks. There were translucent curtains, a boho chic rug, and a couple of pillows which would go with both pieces. She'd have to build a frame for the couch, only handing the cushions and pillows. For it and other pieces, Rey had talked to Maz about utilizing her leftover crates and pallets from the coffeehouse shipments.

Though mechanics was her specialty, Rey had been building things her entire life. She was confident she could build the basics she would need to compete her apartment out of the cast away wood. She
had already researched some designs online after hours at the dojo. Most of the construction was fairly simple. It was just a matter of having the correct tools and materials at her disposal.

In her rush to leave Plutt's she had not bothered to pack her tools from the shop. They hadn't been in the best condition, but they had been hers for as long as she had worked there. She missed having them, having the work to keep her hands busy when she was stressed or anxious...like how she was feeling before her friends had picked her up.

"Rey, what about these?" Rose called her, holding up a couple of wicker boxes that would fit perfectly in her bedroom cubby holes.

"Love those!" Rey cheered. Rose nodded and began gathering them up.

"You need these," Jess interrupted next. She had her hands on a set of stemless wine glasses. "Because when this place is done, we are having a christening party."

"Ok," Rey chuckled, shaking her head, because she wondered if her apartment would ever be ready for a party thrown by Jessika. The girl exuded an 'I-don't-give-a-fuck' attitude and was into the club scene, practically begging Rey to get her into Rogue One every night she worked. More often than not, she was able to persuade the bouncers to let Jess and a less-than-pleased Rose, into the club. While Jess would hit the dance floor immediately, Rose was more reserved, and tended to sit at the bar the majority of the night having a drink or two and chatting with Rey when she had downtime.

As her friends went back to searching through the shop, Rey's thoughts strayed back to Ben. They had been so close at the end of their fight. His grip on her had been strong, but he hadn't hurt her. There had been pressure; uncomfortable enough to cause her to drop her sticks, yet she had never felt in danger, as she should have. She wasn't afraid. If anything, she had been annoyed. She hated losing. It was not a fun outcome for anyone, but for Rey, a castaway orphan, it felt worse. Losing had equated to getting yelled at by Plutt. Losing had meant no dinner for the evening. Losing had been code for not making it to the closet in time to lock herself away.

It's done, she reminded herself, in an attempt to draw herself away from the shadows of her past, but when she heard the words in her head, she heard Ben's voice.

The baritone of his voice was a seductive lullaby, a song she couldn't get out of her head and didn't want to. Maybe that was why she kept feeling as if she was dancing around something, something she couldn't put a name to. It had felt like a dance, when they had sparred. As if the spinning thoughts in her head had gotten out of control and had forced her body to move in sync with them. Just as when she had gone against him before, she had lost all ability to think, all sense of what was up and what was down. He made her feel out of control.

So she had reacted on pure instinct.

And that instinct had led her into a trap — both physically and mentally. When she had been pinned beneath his hold, it was twofold. His intense gaze held just as much sway over her as his hands on her wrists. She had been captivated by his eyes; those dark orbs she had originally thought were black, like his hair, which had actually turned out to be a stunning hue of chocolate.

It was a good comparison. He was bittersweet. When she thought she was getting closer to him, closer to knowing the real man, the real Ben, he'd retreat back into the cold, calculating Kylo Ren, and Rey would find herself back where she started. It was a constant push and pull, as it was with their fights. But she reminded herself of the need to remain guarded. Training was one thing. Her heart was another.
And she'd be lying if she didn't admit, even if it was only to herself, she was becoming more and more interested in the enigma which was Ben Solo.

Desire had a tendency to overpower clear thought. She had seen it happen to countless girls in her high school. Graduating without being knocked up was almost award worthy in the administration's eyes. Rey had never fallen for the cheesy lines or veiled attempts of her male peers. Then again, she had never felt any burning need to be close to them, the way she felt when she was near Ben.

Like a moth to a flame, she found herself drawn in. It went against all her self-preservation tactics. Her instincts were constantly screaming at her to run, to put as much distance between her and him as possible, yet she remained. She remained at the academy, remained a participant in their lesson agreement, and remained thinking of him. It was irrational.

She told herself she was staying at the academy for two reasons — one, because she needed a job, and two because she wasn't a quitter and she wasn't about to let him run her off. But the more Rey thought about it, the more she realized she was only consoling herself.

Had it come down to her being forced out of the academy, she would have survived. Her tips at Rogue One got better each night she worked and she was beginning to recognize the regular customers, who were pleased to have a female bartender with spunk, not sass like Kaytoo. The living situation would have been a pain point for a while, but she knew she could always crash with Poe and Finn until she found a new place to occupy.

No, she was fooling herself, lying to keep herself from seeing the truth — she was mental. That was the only explanation. She was developing feelings for a man who was older and more experienced than her, with gorgeous eyes and the most expressive lips. He had been so near to her. She could almost taste what it would have felt like to have those lips on her skin.

"Rey?" Jessika came around the corner of the aisle, causing her to break out of the recollection. She scolded herself for once again letting her mind wander back to Ben Solo. "Are you ready to check out?"

With help from a couple of Echo Base employees, the three girls managed to load the furniture into the back of Jess's truck to deliver to Rey's apartment. After the assistance from the thrift shop, it was an adventure — albeit a hilarious one — for the girls to get the furniture through the academy, up the stairs, and into Rey's apartment. It took the better half of the afternoon and resulted in all three being sweaty, winded, and laughing.

"Don't call me when you get a new bed, Rey," Jess teased, as they all laid on the hard wood floor of the living room.

"Me either," Rose groaned.

"At least we got our workout in for the day," Rey joked, though the silver lining didn't seem to be as appealing to her friends.

They decided take-out and a bottle of wine was in order, but since Rey didn't have a TV, Jess decided they would have a girls' night in at their apartment. It worked out in Rey's favor, since they lived on the same block as the coffee shop and she had told Maz she'd be stopping by over the weekend to gather some of the crates and pallets.

"Good thing I have the old X-wing," Jess commented, pretending to sound annoyed, as they loaded the wood into the truck bed.
"Thanks, Jess," Rey hugged her friend, once the last pallet had been loaded. "I promise to throw a party to celebrate when my apartment is all furnished, though we may have to do it at Rogue One."

"Why?" Rose asked, climbing into the back seat.

"My boss and landlord lives next door to the studio," Rey explained. "And Master Skywalker doesn't strike me as the type to get his groove on."

"His groove?" Jess raised an eyebrow. "You're a trip!"

Once they had picked up a pizza and a bottle of red, the three settled into Jess and Rose's one bedroom apartment. It was slightly smaller than Rey's, but was well furnished with hand me down furniture, lots of knick-knacks, and dozens upon dozens of photographs. While Rey scanned the various family shots along the walls, Rose uncorked the wine and Jess navigated through their Netflix queue to find a show to watch.

Rey felt a pang of familiar jealousy as she noted the numerous pictures of Rose with an older girl, who Rey assumed was an older sister or cousin. The two appeared inseparable, always side by side in the photographs and more often than not hugging. Jess's pictures were only of her and her parents. There were no siblings or additional family members present. And she recalled how Jess had gotten into the States. Her jealousy vanished instantly.

Being under Plutt's care had not been pretty or very legal, but for Jessika, her freedom came at the price of a mobster. Rey wasn't sure which was worse.

"Are you seriously going to work on that while we are bonding?" Jess chided, as she sat on the couch, the remote resting on her knee. She was eyeing the crates Rey had brought up. "It's Orange Is the New Black!"

"I can multi-task," Rey insisted, pulling out a sheet of scrap paper and a nub of a pencil she had borrowed from Luke's desk. "I am watching. I promise."

"Let her go, Jess," Rose said, kindly, setting the pizza box down on the coffee table within reach of each of them.

She took the seat next to Jess on the couch, while Rey remained on the floor, her collection of used crates from Maz laid out in front of her. With the tool set from the Rose's room, she was eager to get to work. Rey knew she'd have to buy her own, but for now, borrowing Rose's was a great substitute. She already had a vision for the living room area. She could make up a table out of four of the crates. The remaining ones could be turned into accompanying seats. Rey knew she would need some stuffing and fabric, unless she lucked out at Echo Base again. If she could find a few cushions, they would work too.

As Jess started off the pilot episode, Rey took the pencil and started marking where she would need to adhere the crates, where she would need to cut, and which side they would sit on. The episodes ran by as she worked. She barely listened to the dialogue, her mind fully focused on the task in front of her, but she was aware of how nice it was to share a space with friends.

Though she spoke to Poe and Finn regularly, she hadn't seen them since they had helped her to move in. They had told her they wanted to come visit one night while she was working at Rogue One, but they had been busy with their jobs, Finn taken on some extra hours at D'Qar in hopes of impressing his boss enough to be considered for a promotion. Poe, unfortunately, was not being considered for a promotion after his stunt with Holdo, he was conducting more and more weekend tours over the city.
Rey still missed them every day. Nighttime was the worst. Her apartment was eerily quiet, but since she had started at Rogue One and made friends with Jess and Rose, there was no end to the texts she got throughout the day reminding her she had friends who cared about her. It softened the fear of being alone, of being abandoned all over again.

She couldn't remember her parents. Rey didn't even know their names. Her earliest memory was of being left with Plutt, while the social workers fought over what to do with a child abandoned in the States without proper documentation or a next of kin. It hadn't been until later she had learned she wasn't originally from here, but Britain. The country had been the center point of many of her school projects as she grew up, attempting to find a connection to her home, to anything that may have sparked a memory of her parents. It never had.

For years her abandonment had eaten away at her, coupled with Plutt's actions, she had had to keep finding ways to remind herself of her own worth. It was hard, nearly impossible on some days. But she kept it up, laboring under the false hope that one day her parents would return for her, take her back to her home away from the dry desert.

Years later, a tiny part of her still held to the hope she would be reunited with them. It flickered like the dying embers of a fire, but it never extinguished.

She bit down on the inside of her cheek to keep from a tear sliding out. Rey had made peace with her past after she had gone to college. After she had become friends with Finn and Poe, she recognized her parents would not be returning. Even if they had, she wouldn't have had any way of knowing who they were. She doubted they would have been able to do the same with her. After all, she actually wanted to know them. They had chosen to leave her.

There were times when Rey tried to understand why. Had she been a bad child? Had she done something wrong? There were other times when she wondered about what would have happened if they had stayed. Would she have seen them as bad parents? Would they have done something wrong? Would she have left them?

Ben Solo did, her mind pointed out.

Rey hadn't let herself think about him since their scavenging at Echo Base. Somehow he always managed to get into her head. It should have been annoying. It should have had her joining Jess and Rose on the couch with a glass of wine and throwing herself into some senseless TV drama. There was a flaw in that plan. She tended to be overly talkative and friendly when she drank.

And she had Ben's number.

She had put it in her phone after agreeing to train with him, but she had never used it. Knowing she had a means to communicate with him whenever she wanted, stirred the unnamed something inside of her. She pushed the impulse down. Instead, she masked her renegade reflections with her determination to complete more of her crate design and construction.

Working with her hands had a calming effect on Rey, more so than the meditation Master Luke made her do. Meditation meant being still for a length of time, a past time Rey had never been comfortable with and strongly believed she would never master. Her work with the crates, however, was more effective, clearing her mind of all other thoughts as she carefully applied wood glue, bolts, and other fixtures to the various pieces until it began to resemble a table, like the picture she had seen online. The minutes ticked by, I noticed, as she glanced between her sketched plans and the materials in front of her.

By the start of the third episode, the bottle of wine was three quarters of the way polished off and the
pizza was gone. Rose was dozing off on the edge of the couch, but Jess was glued to the screen, while Rey remained working on her design, noting any additional materials she would need to complete it. She believed if she could keep up with the same progress between teaching the morning classes and the padawan level courses, she'd have her living room complete in a couple of weeks.

The bedroom set-up was where she was struggling. The main problem was a mattress. She had never had one and didn't know how to go about buying one. It was one of those things she actually wanted to splurge on and get brand new, but she was embarrassed to walk into a store and have to explain her background to a sales associate who would probably doubt her ability to purchase what she needed. Without a mattress though, she couldn't construct a proper bed frame or an end table because it would be reliant upon the measurements of the frame.

Rey sighed. She was at a standstill until she worked up the courage to purchase a mattress. Maybe if she asked Jyn, her boss would go with her. She could put up with the snide remarks Kaytoo was sure to make, if it meant she'd finally have a bed of her own. Deciding she would ask Jyn tomorrow during her shift, she stood up, stretching her limbs after having sat for so long on the floor.

Jessika caught her motion and, after a quick glance to check on her roommate, offered to drive Rey and her new coffee table home.

The drive back to Coreilla was about eventful as his drive to Tatooine had been earlier in the day. Kylo ran a hand through his hair, noting he was in desperate need of a shower. Normally, sweat was a sign of a rather effective training session; however, he knew his perspiration was only partially due to that.

The moment Rey had departed from the academy he had felt the loss of her presence. It was ludicrous for him to lose his head over a girl, especially a girl who came from nothing, a nobody from Jakku. Yet even as he traveled the familiar line of insults, he felt himself twisting away from his own words. She wasn't nobody to him. She was light and power, grace and innocence. She was everything he wasn't. And even with all the reasons he kept giving himself for why it would work out with her, he hoped it would.

Hope.

Such a foreign concept after all his years alone, disappointed by those he cared about and most trusted. It was foolish, he knew, to hope, but still he yearned to feel her beneath his fingertips once more, to see the flush of her skin, to hear her call him that name, a name he normally couldn't stomach. Hearing it uttered from her lips in that moment of resignation, after so much defiance, was rousing.

He had never heard a more stimulating sound. It had struck a nerve so deep within him; he hadn't realized he had the capacity to feel such an awakening of emotion. But it had all come crashing down the moment her friends had arrived and he had once again reminded himself of his true goal. The girl was a means to an end, nothing more. If he considered her to be anything other than what she was, he would lose.

Losing meant facing Snoke's wrath and judgement. Losing meant he would not become the proprietor of the academy. Losing meant while he remained undefeated in the league, he would forever bare his failure in the privacy of the organization, a shameful black cloud on his record.

Kylo Ren did not lose.
So he returned to his planning, to considering what techniques would best suit the girl's developing fighting style and how best to prepare her for an audience at the First Order. She had responded well to his offering of tea, once she had gotten over the source. He would keep up with that, make sure he continued to build trust with her until she relied on him and no longer allied herself with his uncle.

Her friendships would be harder to deal with. She appeared extremely loyal, even in the short time he had been able to observe her interactions with those she associated with. Her demeanor was always lighter, happier with them. She wasn't as guarded as she was with him or in front of the students. Kylo needed to change that. It would take more consideration and planning on his part, as he was ill-equipped with how to deal with relationships in general.

Upon returning to his apartment, Kylo sunk into his couch, contemplating whether to order take-out or enjoy another liquid dinner. The decision was made for him when he realized his whiskey was gone. He began searching his contacts for his favorite burger place when Hux's name appeared on his screen, as if the universe was mocking him for allowing his general manager to be his most constant contact. One couldn't consider it a true relationship, as it was born of necessity, but Kylo felt the old pangs of loneliness as he recognized how pathetic it was. He didn't even like Hux. The red head was a constant nuisance.

"Yes," Kylo answered, already regretting connecting he call when he heard his manager's voice.

"Phasma is going to be off the next two weeks and apparently you authorized Sol to replace her."

"I fail to see the issue."

"You don't have the authority to redirect my subordinates," Hux hissed, seething on the other end.

"I do and I did."

"So undo it!" His general manager let all pretenses fall away, as he raised his voice.

"No."

"Ren, I swear to God, I'll take you to Snoke over this!"

"Go right ahead, Armitage."

"He'll throw you out of the league," Hux barked, his tone taking on a lower, more sinister tone.

"Then you'll have to find yourself another champion," Kylo grumbled. "Good luck with that." It was an empty threat and his manager knew it but Kylo was already bored of the conversation. Hux was predictable. He had expected a call like this, after he had granted Phasma leave.

"You have a contract," Hux snapped. "You belong to the First Order."

"I don't belong to anyone," Kylo growled. He did not appreciate his manager's choice of words. Armitage Hux was many things — mostly an annoyance, where Kylo was concerned — but ignorant wasn't one of them. He knew Kylo was loyal to the First Order. Now he was purposely toying with the fighter, attempting to achieve a certain gain. "What do you want?"

"You owe me, Ren," his manager replied.

"I make you rich and you keep me in the league. I owe you nothing."

"I also keep your expenses paid, your anger issues from destroying your career, and your true name
from being leaked...Ben."

Ah, so that is his angle.

Kylo hadn't expected Hux to go there. This wasn't an empty threat, though it would end badly for both of them, Kylo considered he may have finally pushed Hux to the edge of reason with his antics. "Again," he grumbled, "what do you want?"

It was that very question that altered the outcome of his evening. Hours later, Kylo Ren found himself not enjoying a fresh bottle of liquor and a burger in the privacy of his penthouse, as he had intended, but out at Supremacy drinking an excessively expensive glass of whiskey on the rocks, while his manager flaunted him and his status around, using his dangerous reputation to draw in prospects for his evening.

Kylo abhorred being manipulated for his manager's extracurricular pursuits, however, even Phasma had told him there was a need to leave his home and be seen in public. As rare as it was, it was important for his image. It reminded his fans he could be spotted at high-end establishments, who may then support the First Order or connect them with paying sponsors. Though Hux operated under the guise of singling out said supporters while they were out, more often than not, the 'sponsors' he found were more into him and his position than the company he worked for.

Hux could turn on his charm the way Kylo turned on a light. The ginger thought he was God's gift to women when he got into a mood like this. The amount of liquor he had consumed may have had a hand in how much easier he became to deal with. Hux sauntered away from the bar and Kylo watched as he began catching up this evening's target. Hux would lure her, Kylo was sure, but he knew the game his manager played. Hux would be an absolute gentleman, lay on the charm rather thickly until he got what he wanted. Afterwards, once he was sober, the normally chilled exterior would resume and Hux would revert back into the asshole he was, not even permitting his latest conquest to stay the night. It was like watching a twisted version of Groundhog Day. The outcome was always the same.

Kylo had no intention of watching the scene unfold. He finished his whiskey, leaving a generous tip on the bar, before he stalked out of the club. No one here interested him. No one here had chestnut brown hair and hazel eyes with a dusting of freckles and a smile that made him ache for a different kind of life. No one here could rival his temper, even after having been the one to rile him up. No one here was worthy of his time or his attention, the way one student was. No one was a challenging, confusing, compulsive pain in his ass, remaining under his skin and constantly on his mind.

No one here was her.

As he stepped out into the crisp night air, he felt his cell vibrate in his pocket. Curious as to who would be texting him at this time of night, he fished it out. It was an unknown number. He hesitated for a moment; his thumb hovered over the touch screen, ready to delete it, before deciding to see who was reaching out to him.

UNKNOWN: Hey old man, thanks for today.

Kylo stared at the text for a moment longer than necessary. Despite the girl's insistence on calling him by that terrible nickname, it had given him the answer to his question. He quickly typed out a reply, as he waited for the valet to pull up his vehicle, and saved her contact information.

KYLO REN: You're welcome.
Her response was almost immediate.

**REY NIIMA:** You're up? It's a bit late for you, isn't it?

His scowl returned. She sounded like Hux. Maybe once she joined the First Order, he'd let them find each other. It would solve his problem of dealing with whatever it was he was starting to feel for her and he was sure Hux would waste no time in adding her as another notch on his belt. Yet, as soon the thought manifested in his head, he gritted his teeth. No, he would not let Hux anywhere near Rey.

He would not allow her beautiful smiles and carefree laughs to be tarnished by his general manager. The red-haired manager would charm her away from Kylo with his charisma and would try to take credit for her talent in front of Snoke. Kylo would never allow it. Bringing her in was his goal, not his manager's victory. Besides, he needed to keep Rey away from distractions such as relationships. She needed to be focused on her training with him. Hux would only get in the way.

*Get in your way, you mean,* his inner voice clarified.

The memory of Rey staring up at him and saying his name in the dojo flashed in his mind, as if he was reliving it all over again in perfect detail. Seeing her in such a state after their rigorous session had sparked feelings in him he had never felt before. Lust was common and useless. He dealt with it the way most single men his age did, alone in the privacy of his shower. But what he felt towards the girl was different. It didn't have the tainted feel to it the way lust did. There was something between them, something unnamed and more potent.

His fingers ran across the touch screen, entering a response to her. He tried to remain civil, while ignoring her teasing and his developing attraction to her.

**KYLO REN:** Is there something you need?

Once again, her reply came back within seconds from his.

**REY NIIMA:** Can we go over the Sinawali drill again next week?

For a moment, he wondered if she truly meant the drill or what had occurred between them once he had trapped her. He contemplated asking if she wanted to add an additional session before Sunday, another opportunity to get her alone, before he remembered she had told him she had another job. Kylo still hadn't discovered what it was. Maybe he needed to place another call to Phasma.

The thought of Rey working nights somewhere, bothered him. What type of job had a single young woman working such late hours? An ugly feeling twisted in his gut at the usual available options. Before his mind could go too far down that path, he responded to her. Kylo didn't need to worry about the girl. He couldn't go down this road with her. She was another task for the First Order and for Snoke. He could not allow any personal feelings to distract him from bringing her in. Besides, she had proven she knew enough to take care of herself.

And it wasn't as if she was his. He reminded himself that she belonged to another.

**KYLO REN:** Yes. Your footwork needs improvement.

His feelings towards her were strictly professional and self-serving. He wanted her because of her talent, because of what she was capable of. He was drawn to her because he could see himself in her youthful determination and commitment to the sport. At least that was what he told himself. It had absolutely nothing to do with her smooth skin, her radiant smile, or those striking eyes that changed
color when they fought, as if he was sparking something deep within her soul. No, none of that mattered. What mattered was how her presence at the First Order would solidify his standing with Snoke.

**REY NIIMA:** Your footwork needs improvement, loser.

*Loser?*

Were they five? He wondered if she had been there in front of him to call him that, if she would have stuck out her tongue too. The vision of her doing so sent him spiraling down another series of unbidden thoughts, primarily around what he'd like to do with her tongue and he had to shake his head to right himself.

The girl had nerve, attempting to continuously provoke him in such a manner. He had half a mind to drop his phone back into his pocket. Yet, this conversation was more stimulating than the one he had shared in the club with Hux. He found himself texting back.

**KYLO REN:** Excuse me?

**REY NIIMA:** I beat you. Again.

Kylo glared at his phone, his fist squeezing around the small electronic tightly. The plastic case around it strained under the pressure of his hand, starting to crack. He doubted Hux would enjoy getting an expense request for a new phone tomorrow morning, but the girl was trying his patience. She was intentionally testing him, poking at places, finding what made him tick. Her methods were working.

Hidden beneath her rosy demeanor and sunshine personality, but he recognized the effort — she was working him. She was delving deeper; looking into him in her own way, searching for something, the way he had searching more on her, though his methods had been immoral and most likely illegal. Before he could squash the device in his palm his phone chirped with a new message.

**REY NIIMA:** Good night, Ben.

This time he did not reply.

He switched his mobile off, just as the valet pulled up with his car. He did not respond to his given name, a name he had specifically asked her not to call him. She was still playing with fire. Maybe she didn't realize how close to getting burned she was. She was dancing on the edge of his desire to have her join him and his desire to lash out at her. It was a dangerous game for both of them. He wondered if she understood that.

Perhaps he would need to teach her.

**Chapter End Notes**

A HUGE thank you to everyone who has commented, submitted kudos, bookmarked, and follows this story. I was having trouble getting the next chapter out, but your constant support has me pushing through it!

My pieces for the RFFA's More Than Love event are now up. One is a one-shot in the
canon-verse, post TLJ and the other is a canon-verse AU loosely-based on the 1997 Anastasia with a gender-bent twist. If you like this story, let me know what you think of my others.

Thanks again to AbyssalSpark for beta-ing for me. Without her, this update would not have happened so quickly.
Chapter Summary

In which the past visits Rey and has consequences...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes
Rey moved about the bar with one goal in mind — do not look at your cell. After she had thoughtlessly texted Ben last night, she had been waiting for a reply, a “goodnight” or an “ok” would have eased her mind. He hadn’t sent a single response. Now almost a full day later, the lack of a comeback had her on the verge of starting up another conversation.
She assumed he hadn’t replied because he was annoyed with her calling him Ben. She was resolute in her decision to continue calling him by his birth name.

She was not going to call him Kylo Ren. At least not to his face.

In an effort to understand him, she had given into her curiosity and YouTubed clips of his fights. What she had seen had confirmed her friend’s warnings. He had gone after his opponents with no hesitation or remorse. He moved swiftly and effectively. Like a demon from a legend, he had attacked with such deadly precision most of the battles lasted mere minutes. And he made sure to, Kylo Ren was a professional fighting champion and all around pompous ass. Kylo Ren was bad news, as Finn and Poe had warned her, who had gotten suspended from his league. Kylo Ren was a monster.

But he was also a mask — Ben Solo’s mask, to be exact.

And she was fooling herself if she tried to act as if she wasn’t intrigued by the darker side of him, the side that brought out her own dark side, the feral fighter she had become in his presence. He had a controlling personality, a need to be in charge at all times. He had pushed her, backed her up against a wall… or a bag, as it were. She wondered if his dominance extended to other areas of his life. Rey felt the beginnings of the familiar heated flush running over her body.

She was playing a dangerous game.

Rey wasn’t sure what had prompted her to text him when she got home from her girl’s night in. They had only had one official training session and she was already itching for more. He was extremely hands on, a detail she had not missed or regretted, despite her normal aversion to allowing people to touch her.

Letting people get close to her had been something she avoided in the past, but since coming to Tatooine, her old rule book had gone flying out the window. There was something about the town and the people within it that made her feel at peace and almost hopeful.

Despite that, she still yearned for him. She didn’t understand the desperation. Her friends had been with her the entire afternoon, she had two jobs to occupy herself with, and yet, for some reason she felt as if something was missing. It was a strange sensation, as if she had forgotten her keys back at her apartment or had left a favorite t-shirt back in Coreilla at Finn and Poe’s place.
Ben Solo had finally gotten to her.

With a sigh, she contained stacking glasses, preparing for the evening rush. Rey wasn’t sure when it had happened. Had his training really affected her? Was it his surprising kindness? Or did it have to do with the way he looked at her, that stare which held her with a level of intensity she didn’t believe she would ever match.

He had bested her yesterday. After beating him during their first fight, she had assumed she’d be the one who came out on top. The competitive side of her struggled with the idea of losing again. She’d need to train harder with Luke this week to make sure she was ready for Ben on Sunday.

“Rey?”

Glancing over her shoulder, she saw Jyn walking over, a box of new glasses in her arms.

“Everything ok?”

“Yeah, of course.”

“You’ve been holding the same glass for a full minute,” Jyn pointed out.

Rey stared down at the tumbler in her hand before she placed it down in its rightful place.

Jyn came up alongside her. “Are you sure nothing is on your mind?”

“I’m fine.” Rey flashed her boss a smile.

The other woman smiled back, but she didn’t believe her. “Yes, you’re fine. That isn’t what I asked though, is it?”

Shrugging her shoulders noncommittally, Rey began unloading the dishwasher under the liquor
island. “I had a one on one training yesterday. It didn’t go the way I thought it would.”

Jyn placed a hand on her hip, cocking her head to the side. “And how did you think it would go?”

“I thought I’d win.”

“How long have you been training?”

“With him?” Jyn nodded. “We started yesterday morning.”

The owner of Rogue One laughed. “You remind me of me at your age.”

Rey raised an eyebrow, as she worked to organize the clean glasses.

“When I joined the Rebels, I thought I knew everything about everything,” Jyn explained. “I didn’t.”

“The Rebels?”

“The Rebel Alliance,” Jyn clarified. “It was a group of freedom fighters in Iraq. Being part of their organization was how I met Cassian.”

“As I recall, you didn’t join us voluntarily,” the co-owner of Rogue One strolled in, carrying a crate of liquor bottles.

Rey watched the couple, as they moved together, a team working side by side to unload the contents. Jyn had a special smile which only appeared when Cassian was near her and he worn a half-grin, half-smirk in her presence. It might not have been obvious at first, but now Rey could tell they were very much in love.

“I didn’t know you two fought in the war,” Rey commented.
The owners resumed their work, both appearing softened by their past. Rey assumed it was a sensitive subject. She had seen some veterans while helping out at Resistance. Coming home after serving left a mark on the soul. Some scars weren’t physical and some never faded.

“I was a mercenary for an extremist group before I was abandoned behind enemy lines and imprisoned,” Jyn told her. “I was in a labor camp for about three months before the Rebels broke me out.”

“So it was a rescue mission?” Rey asked, thinking how romantic it must have been to meet the love of your life while being saved from such a horrid place.

If her knight in shining armor had rescued her from Plutt, she would have been eternally grateful. In reality, she had become her own hero. It was empowering but she couldn’t discount the fact she wished someone would have come for her, made her a priority.

“Hardly,” Cassian scoffed.

Rey shot him a confused look.

“She tried to escape. Almost took out one of our guys in the process.”

“I didn’t know who they were;” Jyn stated, with lingering irritation.

“Good thing Kaytoo put her down.”

Oh, so that’s the reason, Rey thought.

Jyn and Kaytoo had an extremely tense relationship, which Cassian didn’t pay any mind to. Given their past history and June fierce independent nature, Rey could understand how having the man knock her down a peg would rattle the ex-mercenary.

“I was starved and out of shape,” Jyn insisted. “He couldn’t do it now, if he tried.”
“Still want that rematch, little sister?”

“Hi Baze. Chirrut,” Rey greeted the club’s bouncers.

Baze Malbus and Chirrut Imwe, the town’s founders, were old friends of Jyn’s and by association, Cassian, though Rey had noticed they favored the female owner. Baze always called her ‘little sister’ and Chirrut always sided with Jyn when the Rogue One employees voted on a business decision.

The two took seats at the bar, opposite Rey, while she finished up with the dishwasher.

“How are you, Sunshine?” Baze asked.

“Good, how are you two?”

“Lucky,” Baze grumbled in his usual hard-ass manner.

“Lucky?”

“Lucky that I don’t murder this one in his sleep,” he gestured to his husband.

Rey had to giggle at it. Baze looked rough. He had the build of a warrior and a glare to match. As a bouncer, he served well, but Rey knew under all his attitude was a big softy. He was about as mean as Rose. Still, he put up a good front.

Chirrut was an entirely different matter. There was no front. He was transparent with an uncanny sense of the world, despite his inability to see. Before Baze could check IDs, Chirrut could tell if someone was underage or lying about their level of intoxication. He was a human lie detector.

He often spoke in riddles, as if he was reciting an endless collection of fortune cookies. Rey thought he’d get along very well with Maz. She made a mental note to introduce them one Sunday.

“You’re lucky I put up with you, after all these years” Chirrut retorted, as he ran his fingers across the wood of the bar counter. “Rey, what has your mind entrapped?”
Rey didn’t miss the knowing look Jyn sent to her husband. It was unclear to her what the exchange meant.

“I lost while sparring yesterday. I don’t like losing,” she admitted, feeling childish.

“It is a teaching moment,” Chirrut consoled her. “Learn from your mistake and it will not be a loss. It will become a gain.”

Rey considered his words, for once understanding what the cryptic man had told her.

“Thanks, Chirrut.”

“You’re most welcome, though I sense your mind is weighed down by more than the loss.”

She froze.

“You did say he,” Jyn reminded her.

“Interesting,” Cassian commented, though he was beginning to channel Baze’s hard-ass glare. He crossed his arms over his chest, adding to the effect.

“What is his name?” Chirrut asked, genuinely interested.

Rey felt her cheeks turn pink. Suddenly everyone was watching her, waiting for her to explain the man who was tormenting her thoughts, the man who was unexplainable.

“Be-Kylo. His name is Kylo.” She caught herself.

While those in Tatooine knew Ben as the son of Leia and Han, closer to Coreilla, he would be recognized as the famous fighter he was. If he wanted to keep his two identities separated, she wouldn’t stop him.
“Kylo,” Cassian frowned. “Don’t hear that name very often.”

“Kylo Ren?”

Of course Jyn would piece it together. She had training. Being a mercenary meant combat skills. Rey wouldn’t be surprised if she followed the First Order league and knew all about his fighting statistics.

“Yes.”

“Can you get me an autograph?” Jyn was practically beaming now.

“Sure,” Rey laughed, nervously.

“Kylo Ren is training you?” Cassian questioned, his rough expression darkening.

“Yes.”

“And you were alone with him for this?” Her boss continued to press.

“Yes. Is there a problem?”

“I don’t like him,” Cassian mumbled.

“You don’t like anyone,” Jyn swatted him.

“He’s not what people think.”

Rey hadn’t been able to make heads or tails of where Ben Solo ended and Kylo Ren began, but she was convinced he wasn’t the monster she had originally thought him to be. There was more to him,
the man beneath the mask, than he cared to outwardly show.

“Most people aren’t,” Chirrut mused.

“You’re being ridiculous about losing to him,” Jyn told her. “He’s the best fighter out there. He’s undefeated.”

“Maybe in be league,” Rey muttered, not intending for anyone to actually hear her.

“What’s this now?”

“I may have landed a punch square to his jaw,” she admitted with a shrug.

“That’s my sunshine!” Baze grinned.

Cassian looked satisfied by her words too. Jyn and Chirrut were harder to read. Chirrut regarded her with a thoughtful expression which played across his face for a moment or two before he broke into a smile. Jyn noticed the grin and began to wear her own, before she told them all to get back to work.

“That’s enough workplace gossip for today,” she ended the conversation.

“As usual, I can see I didn’t miss anything of importance,” Kaytoo commented, entering the club from the side entrance.

“Nice of you to join us,” Jyn snarked back.

“As I recall, you told me you and Cassian could handle the set-up today.”

“And as I recall, you never listen to me, so why start now?”

Rey tuned out their bickering, her thoughts going back to Ben. She hadn’t seen him earlier at the
academy, having gone to the grocery store after her last class to stick up for the week. Her growing popularity at Rogue One meant she could afford more than ramen and spaghetti this week. She had actually splurged for chicken breast, intending to make herself real food to aid her training. She couldn’t be expected to be at her best without eating properly.

The fact it had only been a day since she had seen him was not lost on her. It was borderline obsessive how aware of it she was. And it bothered her.

Rey had never relied on anyone, mostly because she had never had the option. Dependency was a concept that scared her.

Infatuation was one thing. She could acknowledge Ben was attractive and had several key features to make her want him, including his deeply sensual voice.

Curiosity was certainly a part of what she was experiencing. Ben’s mysterious nature kept her asking questions, kept her wanting to unearth more about him.

Lust was another notion she would have had no problem embracing. It was explainable. She was inexperienced and a newcomer to the promise of having a partner in anything, especially activities which had them pressed so closely together. It was only natural she’d be drawn towards her instructor after the rush of endorphins she felt from their physical activity and close proximity.

Nevertheless, Rey recognized none of those options were what she felt. No, the draw she felt towards Ben Solo was deeper than a fleeting attraction or virgin desire. There was a part of her which felt connected to him, as if he was the missing portion of her soul, the last piece of an elaborate puzzle finally slipped into place.

It was hard to define and even harder to explain, even if she was only trying to describe it to herself.

Only a couple of hours later, the club was booking with the bass of the speakers and overrun with business people looking to blow off steam from their first day back at work after the weekend. Rey ducked around Kaytoo, Jyn, and Cassian as she attempted to grab every unattended customer and supply them with fresh libations.

The tips were generous and became even more generous as the night continued. The perks of being closer to the city was the lure of an escape for their patrons. The club was close enough for a good time yet far enough away from their reason for coming out in the first place. It was the best of both
worlds and Rey got to reap the benefits.

As she danced around her co-workers; she wasn’t aware of a pair of eyes following her every move. It wasn’t until someone shouted her name over the music blaring from the DJ table, she turned to notice Teedo.

He was a short, thin man, who had the build of a jockey. Given his stature, one might assume he was soft-spoken or submissive, but Rey was familiar with Teedo’s temperament. He was none of those things.

“What do you want?” She snapped, icily.

“Didn’t think I’d see you here,” he replied, not answering her.

“Do you want a drink? I’m working.”

“Little Rey,” he sneered. “You always did think you were too good for us.”

Rey clenched her hands at her sides, willing herself to not take his bait. She enjoyed working at the club. The Rogue One crew had become her own tiny family and she refused to let the Jakku resident ruin it for end.

“I simply made a change,” she told him, pouring a beer for a man aside of him.

“I wonder what Plutt would think of your change,” Teedo shot her a look. It wasn’t threatening, but she could hear the promise in his words.

In a fight, she was confident she could take him. Teedo was a bully, nothing more. He had always behaved callously towards others. He had no manners. His attitude wasn’t what worried her. It was his affiliation with her former foster father that had nerves kicked up.

“He doesn’t own me.”
“Says you. Plutt feels differently.”

Rey turned away, kneeling down to get a fresh Coors Light out of the fridge, before handing it over to the girl who had ordered it. When she spun around to where Teedo had been seated, he was no longer there. She scanned the crowd, but she didn’t see him.

The remainder of her shift passed by in a blur, as Rey felt the peaceful sense of being safe leave her, as abruptly as Teedo had.

When Rey woke the next morning, she was still feeling the effects of her nervous energy. Her sleep had been interrupted by numerous dreams of Plutt coming for her. Even though Teedo had no idea where she lived (she had made sure to check if anyone was following her on her drive home) she wasn’t convinced he wouldn’t be back to antagonize her or provide her work address to his friend.

Having gotten up earlier than normal, Rey decided to go for a run. The fresh air and exertion would hopefully remove the lingering fears from last night. Lacing up her sneakers, she didn’t glance at her phone’s notifications before she selected a playlist.

The academy was empty when she came downstairs. She was thankful. As much as she liked greeting Luke in the morning, today she wanted quiet. She needed time alone to clear her mind. He would have suggested meditation in the garden, but Rey chose running.

Sliding the ear buds in, she took off.

The bartender she had replaced, Bodhi Rook, had been a native of Jedha and an amateur DJ. Jyn had given her a collection of his mash-ups, which now played. Rey hadn’t had an opportunity to listen to them before, but found herself humming along as she raced down the road.

All of the tracks were a clever combination of popular hits. She appreciated Bodhi’s ability to recognize similar underlying tones in the tracks and mesh them together with perfect transitions into an entirely new song. It was art.

The beats pumped through her as she sped up, increasing both her pace and her heart rate. She let her mind focus on the lyrics, the melodies, and nothing else. She forgot about Teedo’s appearance at the bar, forgot about his warning regarding Plutt, and forgot about her nightmares as a result of it.
By the time she returned to the academy, she was covered in a sheen of sweat and her lungs were burning. She jogged up the stairs to her apartment to take a brisk shower before she changed and began the first class of the day. She hadn’t had time for breakfast. It wasn’t until she noticed Ben enter the academy that she realized how hungry she was.

Glancing at the clock, she knew she had enough time for a meal and a couple hours of rest before she needed to return to Rogue One.

The thought of going back suddenly had all her nerves from before resurfacing. She barely managed a wave at Ben before she was escaping up into her apartment, too consumed by her anxiousness to consider her instructor or her growing attraction to him.

For the first time since she had moved in, Rey put the deadbolt in place upon entering her space. The tell-tale click of the mechanism securing the door should have helped her anxiety. Unfortunately, it only served to put her more on edge.

She felt her prior confidence slipping away. Before she could unravel, she dialed Finn’s number.

There was a series of rings, before the call connected.

“Hey Peanut, everything ok?”

Rey knew she was calling in the middle of his day. She knew he was at work and vying for a coveted position in the upper ranks. The promotion included some travel, which would help him expand his knowledge beyond what he had researched in books and articles. Real life experience was always more beneficial. She hated interrupting his day, especially knowing how hard he was working towards this new goal.

“Peanut?”

“Finn,” her voice came out raspy, as if she had just come back from her run. “Teedo-.”

It was all she was able to get out before she started to cry. She heard Finn cover the bottom of his phone, so he could say something, probably excusing himself from his lab for the time being.
“Peanut, did he hurt you?”

“No, no,” she gasped, angry at herself for allowing her fears to get the best of her. She was stronger than this.

“I’m coming to get you,” Finn announced. “Are you at your apartment?”

“Yeah, but Finn-.”

“No, Rey, this is not okay. They can’t be coming after you. It’s harassment.”

“But your job-.”

“It will be here when I get back,” he assured her. She heard him ruffling around, most likely grabbing his keys to start driving out of the city.

“Plutt wasn’t there,” she told him. “It was just Teedo being...well Teedo, but he made a comment.”

“What kind of comment?”

“About how Plutt wouldn’t like me working at the bar.”

“Shit, Rey! He knows where you work?”

“Yes.”

“You need to call the police.”

“What are the police going to do?” She questioned. “He hasn’t done anything to me.”
“Yet, Rey. Yet. It’s only a matter of time.”

“The police didn’t do anything in Jakku,” she reminded him.

“You aren’t in Jakku anymore, Rey,” Finn retorted. “Plutt doesn’t own the precinct in Tatooine or New Jedha.”

Her tears had stopped now, subsiding the longer she was on the line with Finn. He had always been able to soothe her. Despite his fierce protective nature and the truth of his words, her fear was still present.

“I’ll give them a call,” she promised.

“Good,” Finn sighed on the other end, sounding as if he had been holding his breath. “I should be there in about forty-five minutes.”

Rey shook her head. She knew he couldn’t see her, but she also knew she couldn’t let him take a half-day when he was so close to securing this promotion. Besides, there was nothing he could do. Calling the police was the only action she could take for now.

“Finn, go back to work. I’m fine.”

“No, Peanut, you’re not.”

“I just need some sleep and some food,” she argued. “I didn’t eat breakfast this morning. You know how I get when I skip meals.”

He chuckled at that. “Yeah, yeah, I do.”

“I will call the police and tell Luke, if it will make you feel better,” she added, sensing him backing down.
“Before you go to work?”

“Yes,” she vowed. “Before I go into work.”

“And you should tell your new friends — the girls you met, so they can help keep an eye on you.”

“Ok.”

There was a pause on his end of the line, as he debated.

“Alright,” he sighed again. “But you text me when you get to work, when you leave, when you get home-."

“You got it, Dad.” Rey tried to act playful to reassure Finn.

“I wasn’t done.”

She bit her bottom lip, realizing how concerned he was. Finn rarely used such a stern tone with her.

“I want you to watch yourself when you leave your place and when you come home. I want updates regularly or Poe and I will be coming there to make sure you are safe. I don’t care if I have to take off a week from work. Do you understand?”

“Yes.” Rey fought to keep her voice from cracking. She didn’t know what she had ever done to deserve her best friend. He was more than she could have ever hope for.

“I love you, Peanut.”

“I love you, too.”

They remained on the line for a long moment, silently holding onto one another until Rey broke the
quiet with a teasing remark.

“Get back to work, Big Deal.”

“You get some rest!”

“Will do. Text you later.”

“You better.”

By the time Rey had woken up from her nap, she had scarce few minutes to eat a bowl of ramen before she was rushing out the door to her Triumph. She passed both Ben and Luke on her way out. Though she had promised Finn she’d talk to Luke, she didn’t want to have the conversation in front of Ben, so she left without saying more than goodbye to each of them.

When she pulled up, Kaytoo was smoking at the employee entrance.

“You’re late,” he commented, off-handedly.

Rey checked her phone, frightened she had taken longer than normal to commute over. The clock showed it was 8:45.

“You’re a liar,” she shot back.

He shrugged, clearly untroubled by her rebuttal.

She found Baze and Chirrut seated at the bar with Jyn and Cassian huddled in the corner of the bar in deep discussion.

“Sunshine,” Baze pulled her into a hug as she approached.
Closing her eyes, Rey let herself be held for the moment. Baze and the rest of the Rogue One crew made her feel a part of the club. It was oddly comforting how quickly she fell into a rhythm with them, just as how she had adapted to having girl friends and working at the dojo. It had to be something about this area, these towns just outside of the city, which had welcomed her, as if they had always been calling her home.

“You look tired,” the bouncer remarked, as she finally pulled back.

Her promise to Finn nagged at her. She needed to tell someone. Baze and Chirrut wouldn’t think less of her for bringing up Teedo’s appearance from last night. Would they?

Chirrut patted the seat aside of him. “The clock says you still have five minutes before you need to start. Tell us what is bothering you.”

Rey sat on the bar stool, twisting her hands in her lap. She ran through her encounter with Teedo, gave them both a brief background on who he was and why she was concerned about him telling Plutt where she was.

She didn’t go into detail about her hospital visits as a child, or the numerous times she had implored the local sheriff’s department to stop Plutt. It hadn’t been until she was older, she realized Plutt paid them off to run his illegal salvage operations, among other things.

“If you see him in here, give us a signal,” Baze told her, all the calm gone from his face.

For once, Rey was actually scared of him. His murderous expression usually only worked at the door, but she found herself a tad intimidated by the massive bear of a man next to her.

“The universe has a way of balancing the scales in its own way and in its own time,” Chirrut told her, this time reaching over to give her a pat on her knee.

“Well the universe better hurry up or I’ll be the one doing the balancing,” Baze growled.

The girl from Jakku laughed.
“Social hour is over, boys,” Jyn called from the corner.

Rey hopped off the seat, giving each man a quick hug, before reporting behind the bar for her shift. Finn had been right. She had needed to confide in someone. After speaking with Baze and Chirrut, she started to feel her anxiety lessen.

Her night went by without event. She saw no sign or either Teedo or Plutt. After closing time, she flashed a smile over the heads of the exiting patrons to Baze. He gave her a thumbs up gesture, which she reciprocated.

The remainder of the week went by in much the same fashion. Though her sleep was still plagued with nightmares of her former guardian, Rey kept herself busy. When she wasn’t working at either the studio or the club, she continued to build her furniture out of the crates and pallets Maz had given her. By Saturday night, she had crafted a coffee table and an end table. It helped complete her living room.

She was aware she was beginning to feel run down and she had barely spoken to anyone but the Rogue One staff and Finn all week, only reaching out to her best friend because he demanded constant texts as a form of check-in.

In the back of her mind, she told herself it was just a phase. She would get back to hanging out with Jess and Rose. She would have time to train with Ben, who had still not texted her back, and she would forget Teedo ever came by.

Her shift at Rogue One started it the same as any other. She helped Jyn with the set-up, helped Cassian run the DJ through his sound check, and ignored more of Kaytoo’s sass.

It ended completely differently.

Around last call, her regulars were ordering their final round of the night. Kaytoo has gone out for another smoke, leaving Rey, Jyn, and Cassian to get all the drinks made and tabs closed. Through the hectic chatter, one voice cut straight to her core.

“Rey-girl.”
Her blood ran cold. The fingers she and wrapped around her customer’s credit card almost cracked the flimsy piece of plastic in two. She turned back around, carefully avoiding him, to hand the card back to its owner.

“Don’t be like that,” he feigned a whine. “I just stopped by to see your new job. Nice place. Much nicer than the junkyard.”

A couple of people stared at him, but not one said a word.

Rey continued to shuffle around the bar, taking orders and handing over tabs to be paid. Each time she moved, she attempted to catch Baze’s eyes, but he was busy watching the doors, careful no additional patrons tried to sneak back in.

“I know where you work, Rey-girl. How long did you think you could hide from me?”

Plutt’s words were lower now. He had always been careful not to draw too much attention to himself in public. He couldn’t bribe everyone. She gritted her teeth and walked past him.

“You think you’re better than me, huh? You can lie to these people, keep trying to be something you're not, but we both know the truth. You’re a cast-off. You’re unwanted. You are nothing.”

Rey stilled. Her hands were shaking and she couldn’t swipe the card in her grasp.

You are nothing.

She couldn’t put a number to the amount of times Plutt had told her. He said it so often it had become somewhat of a mantra he recited when he was drunk or in a foul enough mood to strike her.

Memories of her youth came flooding back. She saw herself hiding under the backseat of a van in the salvage yard. She heard the echoes of her cries after Plutt had broken her first rib. She smelled the stench of his booze after another bender, before she tucked herself away in the closet at his house.

He had never registered her as a person. She was an object, something to be owned. She was a tool, not a person. She had been his meal ticket, not a child. He had never seen her as anything of value.
She was nothing.


His callous words repeated over and over in her head.

“Rey!”

Her eyes snapped to Jyn, who was standing next to her, reaching to wrap an arm around her shoulders.

“Are you alright?”

She barely managed a shake of her head. That was all it took, apparently, because Jyn’s eyes left her face and trained in on Unkar Plutt.

“Is that him?”

Rey didn’t ask how she knew or when the bodyguards had filled the owner of the club in on what she was going through. None of that mattered now. Jyn tossed a glance over to Cassian. It wasn’t the first time Rey was jealous of how effortless their relationship appeared to be. Without a single word exchanged between them, he understood what she was asking.

There was no hesitation in Cassian Andor as he leapt over the back of the bar to round on Plutt. Some guests stumble back, while others clap, as though the owner is putting on an act, instead of acting as a buffer between Plutt and Rey. His dramatic antics, caught Baze’s attention.

The bodyguard ran over and grabbed hold of Plutt’s arms before he could take a swing at Cassian. Knowing the ex-captain was a nimble fighter, Rey wondered what would have happened to Plutt had Baze not restrained him. Cassian didn’t appear to be the type to push for assault charges...if he could administer justice himself.

“She belongs to me,” Plutt spat. “Let me go! You have no right.”
“I do. And so does she,” Cassian seethed, gesturing over his shoulder at Rey. “Because she is a person and we live in a country where people don’t belong to anyone but themselves.”

Plutt started to respond, but the club owner silenced him with a glare.

“Get him out of here,” Cassian instructed Baze.

“I found you once, Rey-girl. I’ll find you again!”

“That’s enough out of you,” Baze groused at Plutt’s outburst.

He grabbed the cretin by the shirt, yanking him out of the club, while Jyn remained where she was with her arm around Rey. Her other hand was on her own hip, fingers resting on the grip of her handgun, an onyx 9mm, Rey hadn’t noticed she had tucked into her jeans.

Cassian signaled the DJ to end the set and call it a night, working with Kaytoo and Chirrut to usher the rest of the guests out.

Resorting to the familiar flow of the evening’s closing procedures, Rey moved to begin helping them clean-up.

“No,” Cassian stopped in front of her, putting a hand on her shoulder. “You and Jyn take the car. I’ll take your bike back. I don’t want to chance you going home alone after what he said.”

“Cassian-.”

“This isn’t up for debate,” he interrupted her.

Jyn gave her shoulder a reassuring squeeze, as they watched her husband catch the rest of the crew up. “He puts on a convincing act,” her boss told her. “But he’s one of the most honorable men I’ve ever met. He’s fiercely loyal and he cares about everyone here, even if he forgets to show it sometimes.”
Rey had to bite the inside of her cheek. She was sick of crying, but the tears welled up despite the pain in her mouth. “Thank you.”

It was all she could say, though those two words were never going to be enough to express how utterly grateful she was to have them in her life, to have this squad, a hodge-podge family take her under their wing.

After forty-five minutes of talking Baze down from going after Plutt with what he referred to as his ‘heavy repeated canon,’ the police arrived. Jyn sat with Rey the entire time, her hand always resting on her arm or shoulder while she gave her statement to the officer.

These uniforms looked different than the ones she had seen lurking about Jakku. They were both clean shaven, with not one wrinkle on their blues. Each made direct contact with her, one taking diligent notes, while the other kept watch.

Rey didn’t appreciate their stares, even though she knew they were trying to help. She didn’t know them and despite Jyn’s assurances these men were a trusted part of the New Jedha community, she was wary of the system. It had never taken care of her before.

The process took less than an hour and then Jyn and Cassian were flanking her, leading her out back to the garage where their car was. Cassian owned a white Nissan SUV with thick orange pin stripes along the sides. It looked a bit worse for wear, mud caked to the tires and dirty covering most of the exterior, a clear sign they made good use of the four-wheel drive capabilities.

“Get in,” Jyn told her, as she flung the driver’s side door open and climbed inside.

Rey did as she was told, noticing Cassian walking past Jyn’s motorcycle, a Harley-Davidson Low Rider. The all black and chrome finish was exquisite and she could see Jyn’s attraction to Cassian when picturing how he would look mounted on the bike.

As it was, her Triumph was smaller and less sexy with its chipped orange paint and balding tires, but he kicked it into life and followed them out of the garage.

There was something wicked in the way he moved. Rey recalled their past history and understood despite the couple’s differences, both Jyn and Cassian had had tortured pasts, yet found their solace in each other. For some reason, it made Rey feel hopeful.
She made sure to text Finn what had happened, followed by dozens of reassuring emojis and statements that she was, in fact, fine and riding home with an entourage. She promised to call him after she woke up in the morning.

By the time they reached the academy, Luke’s house lights were out, as were the majority of the lights in town. Rey thanked her managers, letting Jyn pull her into a final hug before they watched her disappear inside to her apartment.

Her sleeping bag had never looked as inviting as it did when she clambered up the steps into her bedroom. Stripping out of her clothes, she crawled inside it, allowing her exhaustion to drag her into sleep.

It was the one place her friends couldn’t protect her from Unkar Plutt.

Chapter End Notes

And I'm back! After a break for a much needed vacay, I'm happy to be back to writing and updating this story. Thank you to AbyssalSpark for continuing to be my beta!
Barefoot and Bruised

Chapter Summary

In which Kylo has a revelation and Rey faces the consequences of her bad week. Both reach a turning point in their relationship.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.
Kylo Ren paced the empty studio floor. It was 9:15am on Sunday morning and there wasn't a single text message, voicemail, or missed call from Rey to indicate why she hadn't shown. Unlike last week, he hadn't found her working in the office thirty-minutes prior to their agreed upon start time. Instead, he had been forced to unlock the doors, while balancing two hot beverages, and set-up by
himself.

Her motorcycle was parked out front, a clear sign she was in fact here, but he had yet to hear a single sound other than the ones he had made himself. Kylo had passed the time by finishing his coffee, stretching, and trying to form a game plan. After last week, he had decided he needed to be more structured. He couldn't allow her to break out onto her own just yet. He needed to maintain a level of control over the situation, no matter how out of control he felt on the inside when it came to Rey.

He was beginning to worry. It was unlike her to be late. While he had seen very little of her all week, he had attributed it to her being embarrassed about her texting him late at night. He certainly didn't want to think she would be embarrassed about anything else — anything like the almost kiss. The 'almost kiss' as he was referring to it, had plagued his mind all week, increasing his irritability and causing him to ignore Hux.

With his assistant on vacation, he didn't know how to get his manager to take a hint and give him his space. It was one of those delicate matters Phasma usually dealt with. In her absence, Hux had grown ever more impatient, hounding Kylo about the fundraiser and starting to leave him snail mail along with a barrage of constant voice mails, which had him avoiding his cell phone all together.

So it was against Kylo's better judgement, he dug his cell out of his bag in order to dial Rey's number. He ignored the list of missed calls from his manager and the accompanying voice mails. He'd either delete them tonight or continue to ignore them, whichever option irritated the red-head more.

The line rang several times, before Kylo heard a groggy voice answer.

"'Ello?"

"Rey?"

"Ben!"

"Um…yeah. Are we still training this morning?"

"What? Of course, what time-." There was a shuffling noise and then a muttered curse, before she was hurriedly replying. "Sorry. So sorry. I'll be right down. God, I'm sorry."

Before he could respond, she had hung up.

Kylo had noticed she had been absent from the studio, unless she was teaching classes this week. She had been holed up in her apartment when she wasn't working. He had had to tell himself repeatedly it had nothing to do with last Sunday. As much as he hadn't wanted to be wrong about that theory, he was concerned. Even his uncle had noticed how suddenly withdrawn Rey had become. If it was because he had crossed a line with her, upset her when she was seeing someone else, he would have thought she'd cancel on him or worse, decide against training with him permanently. When she hadn't reached out regarding today's session he assumed they were still on. Looking back on it now, he realized perhaps he should have reconfirmed.

"I am so sorry," Rey gasped, as she scrambled into the studio.

Her face still had creases in it from her bed and there were dark circles under her normally vibrant eyes. Kylo tried not to think too much on it. He hoped it had nothing to do with the 'almost kiss,' but his confidence was beginning to shrink.

"Are you sick?" he asked, handing her the tea he had purchased at Deathstarbucks on his way in for
"Thank you." She wrapped her hands around the take-out cup, before taking a long sip. "No, I had a late night."

Kylo pretended her words didn't sting. He set his phone on the counter, finishing up his coffee and tossing it in the waste can. He had presumed she was working last night, not out with friends.

*Boyfriend*, his brain reminded him.

He inwardly cringed. Of course she would be out with her boyfriend last night. It was a Saturday night, a typical date night for most couples, or at least that was what the other fighters at the First Order gym said when they came in on Sundays to train. They usually swapped stories about who got the best 'attention' from their girlfriend and compared notes. Kylo had always found the talks vulgar and demeaning to the women, but his opinion mattered little to the others, so he kept it to himself.

"Did you do anything fun last night?"

Rey's question brought him back to focusing on her.

No.

His night had consisted of sitting in his living room alone, drinking a new bottle of whiskey while he watched the city lights from the comfort of his sofa. He had been thinking of her, conflicted over his pull to her and his desire to have her next to him within the First Order. Initially he had thought the sensations were one in the same, but after last week, he was beginning to see a division. The part of him drawn to her was hungry for her touch, longing for the grace of her lips on his and the feel of her skin against his skin. The latter was focused on career objectives and ways to continue to impress Snoke. The two sensations couldn't be further apart.

"Caught the sights in the city and had a few drinks."

"Sounds nice." She grinned, conversationally, before setting down her cup on the window sill. "And here I thought you had stayed in all night, like the Old Man you are."

Kylo heard the joke in her tone and turned to face her for his rebuttal. When he saw her he knew something was wrong. Her signature smile had slipped from her face and her normally glowing skin had gone pale, as if some dark force had sucked the light right out of her.

"Ben?"

She had barely gotten his name out, such a quiet plea, before she was falling. Instinct took over, as he lunged forward, quick enough to catch her petite form before she went head first into the mat.

"Rey?"

Kylo lifted one hand to her cheek, gently turning her face up to inspect her features. Her brow was thick with sweat. He could feel the heat radiating off her. She was burning up.

Carefully, he laid her down on the floor, kneeling at her middle, so he could prop her feet up with one hand, and press her cool water bottle against her forehead with his other. Her lips had almost lost all color, appearing sickeningly white. Kylo's next impulse was to call for 911, but his phone was on the counter, out of reach, and he refused to leave her side until she regained consciousness.

The seconds felt like hours, as he watched her inhale shaky, little jerks of breath, her eyes fluttering
every so often, but not opening. It was the longest minute of his life.

When Rey finally came back to consciousness, he let out a breath he hadn't been aware he was holding. He lowered her feet back to the mat and removed the water bottle from her skin. It took her a moment to fully open her eyes and even longer for her to focus on him, hovering over her.

"Hi."

Her voice sounded raw, but stronger than when she had called out to him. And if he had thought her stubborn before, he was about to see how truly headstrong she was. No sooner had she woken, then she was attempting to sit up. Before he was able to stop her, the rush of blood had her groaning and lying back down again.

"Don't move," he warned her, placing a hand on her shoulder to keep her down this time. She raised a hand to pry him off, but gave up almost instantly when he pressed down again. She flung her arm over her face, blocking out the ceiling lights.

"I'm fine," she insisted, but he knew, at best, it as a vain attempt. Her voice was still wavering, not solid enough to reassure him she was as well as she claimed.

"No, you're not," he told her. "You were out for a whole minute. That isn't fine. That is a blackout."

She murmured something he couldn't make out, before he saw her breathing take on a different pattern and her eyes fluttered shut, under her arm, once more. His chest tightened, as he realized she had gone under again. He didn't bother calling her name this time, though he was screaming inside for her to be alright, for her to wake up and grace him with another sunshine smile and dumb nickname. Old Man. Grouch. Jerk. Asshole. He'd take anything, so long as it meant she was ok.

This time she was only out for several seconds. Nevertheless, Kylo found he had been holding his own breath again. He couldn't function not knowing what was happening with her. Normal thoughts were difficult to process with the knowledge she was unwell. As a fighter, he was used to striking his way through problems. Perseverance and endurance allowed him to overcome most obstacles, but this was another matter. He couldn't battle his way out of this. He had to wait.

And Kylo had never been a patient man.

"Ben?"

"I'm here," he assured her, reaching over to move her arm from her face. "I'm right here, Rey."

"I-I don't know what happened," she admitted, a light flush coloring her cheeks. He sighed with relief. At least her color was returning, slowly, but it was starting to come back.

"You blacked out, sweetheart."

The instant the endearment left his lips, Kylo immediately wanted to yank it back. It wasn't so much that he hated sappy names people called one another, as it was the fact that this particular pet name was what his father had always called his mother. A fact which was not lost on Kylo.

If Rey had picked up on his use of the word, she didn't react. She was lying still, eyes closed, but her breathing was deep and controlled. He recognized the pattern as a breathing exercise his uncle taught, normally during meditative practice. She must have felt better, if she was using her training to guide her. It took the edge off his anxiety.

"Sorry," she started, the hand closest to his reaching out. He latched on, not allowing her to exert
more energy than necessary. "I ruined our session."

"No," he replied, sternly. "Don't say that. You haven't ruined anything."

"You look mad," she observed.

Kylo schooled his expression, chiding himself for not exercising more control over his features. Of course she would think he was annoyed. He rarely gave anyone a reason to think he felt anything but anger.

"I'm not mad," he said, softly, hoping to put her mind at ease. "You scared me."

She let out a light laugh. It made him soar. She was coming back to herself, back to the girl he had grown to care for, the girl who was always there under his skin, in his thoughts — both a test and a temptation.

"You," she continued to giggle, "afraid of little ol' me?"

"Rey-," he began to tell her. It was right on the tip of his tongue, but he stopped himself. How could he tell her how he felt? He wasn't even sure what it was he was feeling. It was entirely new to him, a foreign impulse to put her before all else. After a lifetime of sheltering himself, of looking out for number one, he was at a loss as to how to care about another person, especially someone as genuine as this girl — his girl.

"I think you've had enough training for today." Kylo copped out.

He could only imagine how quickly she'd run away if he admitted what he was feeling. If he told her she was constantly on his mind, that he was always worried about her working late nights and long days at the studio, would she be mad? If he told her he wanted to take her away, treat her to the finest food and drink and stash her away in the most luxurious comforts available, would she slam a door in his face and tell him to get lost? She hadn't been overly attracted to the idea of grandeur before. He doubted her opinion had changed in such a short period of time. So he tucked his thoughts away and hid them deep beneath his primary concern about her immediate health.

"I just want to sleep," she lamented, her hazel eyes taking him in.

Kylo realized he was still holding her hand and leaning over her. If she hadn't fainted, the position could be considered romantic, tender even. He brushed the idea far from his mind. It was too soft, too light for someone like him.

She made to start getting up again and once again he stopped her. "Ben-."

"I told you not to move." He reminded her, removing his hand from hers so he could shift around. He laced his arm under her knees, before sliding his other under her back. She weighed next to nothing, despite her agility and power. Carrying her was easy and even more gratifying by the fact she was pressed so close to him. He was delighted when she wrapped one arm around his neck, while the other came to rest on his chest.

"I can walk, you know," she pointed out.

He pretended not to hear her, as he left the dojo floor and brought them through his uncle's office, where the door had, luckily, been left open. Careful not to hit his head on the low ceiling, he marched up the steps to her apartment. He was not as lucky with her door, which was shut and, in all probability, locked.
"Do you want me to call someone for you? Your boyfriend?" he asked, hoping his own self-serving purpose for the question wasn't apparent.

Rey made a soft titter of a sound in his arms. "Well, if you find him, give him my address, will you? I think he's lost."

"What?"

Kylo couldn't stop the flood of thoughts erupting in his brain. Had they broken up? Was that why she had been hidden away all week? Was that why he hadn't seen the dark-skinned man since she had moved in? If not, maybe they had had a fight. Was she considering breaking up with him?

"I don't have a boyfriend. Actually, I've never had a boyfriend," she admitted, actively avoiding his eyes.

He was thankful she wasn't looking at him. Kylo was positive the look of utter joy at her words was written across his face. He was suddenly filled with a possessive feeling about how she would be his first and he would be her first. They would experience everything together, new and unbiased. She was as untouched as him, but he could remedy that particular situation. He was even more thankful he had never taken Hux up on any of his offers to hook him up with one of his one night stands. It would taint his ability to give himself to Rey the way he imagined giving himself to her.

"Ben."

Her voice brought him crashing back to reality and for a split second he feared his intentions were known to her. Her gaze was fixed on her door, which was indeed closed and indeed locked. Rey reached up, aided by her height in his arms, to grab a hide-a-key from the top of the door frame. Miraculously, he was able to maneuver himself without putting her down, to unlock the door.

The apartment was not filled with frivolous items, as he had expected. In a way, the amount of open space and lack of furnishings reminded him of his own place. There was a set-up which resembled what he had seen a magazine call "boho-chic" in the living room area. The couch seemed suitable to use, but Kylo was too curious to see the rest of her home.

He followed the steps up to the bedroom, which hung over the kitchen and overlooked her brightly colored assortment of pillows, throws, and one insanely red chair. He had assumed there would be a similar treatment upstairs. He was sorely mistaken.

There was no bed, not even a futon like the one he had slept on when he had first moved into the city and needed something to crash into each night after his long training sessions at the First Order. Instead, there was a sleeping bag laid out along the hardwood, with a small lamp on one side and a cell phone charging cable on the other.

Had she been sleeping on the floor this entire time?

Anger burned through him at the thought of his uncle letting her live her without the basics. What had happened to all of his furniture? What had Skywalker done with the possessions he had left behind when he moved out? Why couldn't he have provided them to Rey?

"This is fine," she said, as if she could hear his thoughts. She shifted in his hold, preparing for him to set her down. "Poe and Finn bought it for me."

"This is not acceptable," he muttered, not willing to let go of her. He tightened his grip on her. How could her friends be alright with this situation? Didn't they care about her at all? He refused to let her sleep on the floor, sleeping bag or not, it was not appropriate. She worked hard. She trained even
harder. She required a decent night's sleep.

"It's more comfortable than it looks," she added, sensing his hesitation.

"I'm taking you home." He told her, devising it was the preferred alternative to this unfinished collection of meager belongings.

Apparently, she did not agree.

"I am home." Rey insisted, a note of frustration in her tone. She unwrapped her arm from him, pressing against his chest. "Put me down."

"No."

"Ben!"

"You just fainted. I'm not leaving you here with this," he inclined his head towards the makeshift bed.

"I was planning on getting a mattress soon," she told him. "But I need to save up for the one I want." The fury was still there, but it was laced with inhibition. She was worried about what he thought and embarrassed by her residence.

Kylo reminded himself of Rey's history, of how this was most likely the first dwelling she had ever had to herself and the need to build it up as she desired would mean a great deal to someone like her. He didn't want to cause her any additional stress. He hated seeing her this way, even if it gave him opportunity to remain close to her.

"I wasn't trying to be unkind," he explained, tone softer than before. "I was being serious when I said you scared me. I'm worried about you."

He watched as her face changed, the rage subsiding as she took in his confession. Her lips curled into a small smile and she returned her arms to their original hold on his form. "Compromise?"

Kylo arched an eyebrow at her. "I don't compromise."

"The couch is better," she told him, ignoring his comment.

He considered his options. While he had an overwhelming urge to put her in his car and drive her back to his apartment, he didn't want her to fight him the entire day. Rey needed rest. Despite her resurgence of happy energy, she still looked a bit drawn and he knew he needed to get some food in her before he let her sleep. Time was not on his side, so he relented and took her to her sofa.

The care with which he set her down was akin to someone handling a prized artifact or incredibly valuable piece of art because, to him, she was even more precious.

"I'm going to call my assistant to bring over some food. You need to get your sugar back up or you'll go under again."

"Your assistant?" For some reason the concept seemed to humor her.

"Yes."

He didn't offer up more. Instead, he reached down for his phone. His pocket was empty. It was then, he realized his belongings were still down in the studio.
"Stay there," he ordered, gingerly. "Don't move. I'm going to get our stuff."

"Ben, you don't have to stay here. Luke is right across the parking lot and--."

"I'm staying, so figure out what you're hungry for or I'm ordering for you."

He fetched his stuff, only remembering once he has already dialed her number that Phasma was on vacation. He muttered a curse, just as he was walking back into Rey's apartment.

"Something wrong?"

"Phasma, my assistant, is on vacation."

"I'm surprised you let her take time off," Rey teased, though not unkindly. At least she was well enough to crack jokes.

"I'll order delivery."

"Don't bother," she waved her hand at him, dismissively. "I'll make something."

Kylo could see her intentions from a mile away. As she swung her legs around to stand, he moved to block her. "What did I say?"

"Don't move," she replied, grudgingly.

"Exactly."

"Can you at least pass me my phone?" She indicated the cell, lying on the edge of her kitchen counter, presumably where she left it when he woke her up earlier. "I need to check in with Finn, before he and Poe show up on my doorstep."

Kylo immediately felt a rush of possessiveness take hold. He had to remind himself the two guys, who he assumed were the same ones who had helped Rey move in, were not her boyfriends but her friends.

He stalked over to the kitchen, taking a peek in her fridge. He blenched. There was nothing inside, not even a half-eaten sandwich or carton of milk. It was bare, as if no one even lived there.

Trying not to dwell on it, he opened the pantry. It was almost as bare as the fridge, but not quite. There was a box of cereal and a bag of granola sitting inside. Upon inspection, the cereal was all but out and the granola was hardly sufficient for a meal.

Kylo regretted allowing Phasma time off.

Retrieving Rey's phone and her noisy water bottle, he exited the kitchen. He handed both over, watching as she took a long swig of water before she set it on her coffee table to start quickly typing away on her device.

"There," she smiled, confidently up at him. "All set."

"What?"

"Food," she answered. "Rose is going to bring some over."

"Rose?"
"I don't have an assistant. I have friends."

He wasn't sure how to respond to that, so he didn't. Instead, he focused on her coffee table. At first, he had assumed it was a piece of modern art or some kind of contemporary furnishing from Restoration Hardware. Upon closer inspection, he realized it was made out of coffee ground crates. In fact, he could actually smell the coffee from the wood.

Rey noticed his interest while she continued drinking more water. She paused to inform him she had made it, along with the accompanying end tables in the living room area.

"You made these?"

She nodded, while sipping.

Kneeling down, Kylo ran his hand over the creation. The wood was sturdy and her construction was even more so. It was impressive, yet another hidden talent she had in her arsenal. He considered asking her when she had learned how to do woodwork, when her degree was in mechanical engineering, but he caught himself before he voiced his query aloud. She had never told him about her degree. He had read about it in her file.

"I could make you one, if you'd like," she offered.

Kylo thought of how his last coffee table had ended up after another one of his tantrums. He wouldn't forgive himself if he wrecked something Rey had labored over. She had crafted this piece with precision. It would be a horrible waste for her to create something as beautiful for him, only to have it end up shattered across his apartment floor.

"It wouldn't fit in my car or on your bike." He observed, using their lack of transportation as an excuse so as not to hurt her feelings.

"Good point."

"Are you going to make a bed frame?" He was still concerned over her lack of a proper bed.

"Yes," she replied. "I plan on doing it once I have the measurements based on the mattress I choose."

He was about to ask about how she planned on getting a mattress into her apartment, since her main mode of transportation was her bike, when there was a knock at the door.

"Rey? Are you in there?"

"That's Rose," Rey informed Kylo. Then narrowing her eyes, she warned him to, "Be nice."

With a huff, he left her on the couch, answering the apartment door. The petite Asian girl he had seen working at Kanata Kaffeine was on the other side, an impossibly large brown paper bag in her hand. When he opened the door, the smell of the food she had brought wafted through the air, indicating the warm meal inside.

"Oh, hi." The young woman greeted him, seeming unsure how to act.

"Hi.

"I'm Rose. Is Rey here?"

"Hey Rose," Rey called from the couch.
"How are you feeling?" the girl walked in, right past Kylo, to her friend's side. "Maz was worried when I told her about your text."

"I'm alright," Rey assured the girl. "Ben has confined me to the couch."

Kylo came alongside both of them, offering to take the bag from Rose. "I'll set it up in the kitchen and bring it over," he said, moving to let them continue their discussion.

"I can come over there," Rey responded, already beginning to sit up.

"Can you please keep her down? She needs to rest," he grumbled at her friend, the girl named Rose.

"He's right, Rey. You do look pale," the girl agreed, sitting on the edge of the couch with Rey.

"I'm fine. Really."

"No, you're not," Kylo bellowed from the kitchen.

He left the girls to talk while he began pulling out the contents of the paper bag. Maz had sent enough food to feed Rey, himself, his uncle, and probably another five or six people. It was entirely too much food for two, but remembering the state of Rey's fridge, he decided it was better to have extra.

There were wrapped sandwiches, some flatbreads, and a couple of muffins, which could be heated up later, so he transferred them to the fridge, moving on to the hot items. Maz had sent over two containers of soup. From the smell of it, one was tomato and the other was a stew. Kylo recognized it as his favorite, a meal Maz had made him when he was younger and in need of a pick-me-up.

He thought of how he had seen her last week when he and gone running with Rey. Could she see the boy he had once been or did she only see the man who had nearly killed his father? Kylo blinked away the thought, going through the cupboards until he found a pair of bowls to dump the soup into. Another quick search and he also found spoons. The soup would stain Rey's carpets and the hardwood floor if it were to spill, so he decided it was safer for them to eat in her kitchen, where the tile would make any accidents easier to clean-up. He finished setting up before he went back to get Rey.

Her friend noticed his presence and the girls stopped whatever they had been discussing.

"I'm going to let you go, so you can eat," Rose told Rey, as she straightened up. "Nice to meet you," she said to Kylo, with a friendly smile. He hadn't thought anyone could be as warm and welcoming as Rey, but her friend seemed equally light-hearted and pleasant.

He saw Rey, over her Rose's shoulder, mouth "Be nice" to him.

"Thank you for the food," he expressed his gratitude. Her smile widened. "I hope this covers it," he added, passing her a couple hundred dollar bills he had grabbed out of his bag.

Her eyes widened. "That-that's way too much!"

"Consider it a tip then," he suggested, "For the fast delivery and for putting up with my antics at the coffee house."

Rose seemed ready to hand back over the money, until he mentioned their first meeting at Kanata's Kaffeine. Her eyes softened and she thanked him again. Giving Rey a little wave, she let herself out of the apartment.
With Rose gone, Kylo scooped Rey back up in his arms, carrying her over to the kitchen counter, where two bar stools were waiting with the soup bowls.

"Are you going to keep doing this?" Rey asked, sounding annoyed.

"You haven't eaten all day and from the looks of things, you haven't had much this week. With your lack of sleep, it's a dangerous combination. I'm not taking any chances." Kylo sat her down at the counter, before taking his seat next to her.

"I really did scare you, huh?"

"Yes," he replied, truthfully. "Now eat your soup."

She made a comment under her breath he didn't catch, but she did listen to him. They were silent for a time, as Rey ate spoonful of tomato soup after spoonful. Kylo had wanted to share the stew with her, hoping she'd enjoy it as much as he did. Something told him Maz had sent the two containers for them because each of them had a favorite. Watching as Rey hungrily downed the bowl in front of her, he knew he had made the correct choice. Before he could take a swallow of his, he got up to refill her bowl.

"What happened?" He asked her, before he took his first sip of stew.

Rey put her own spoon down, the steam rolling off the top of her second portion, the only movement between them for several long seconds.

While he waited for her to respond, Kylo tried not to think about how the taste of the meal reminded him of his youth or the number of visits his parents had taken to Maz's place while he had been in her care. He could count them on one hand, but each had been a precious memory, cherished by his younger self, a day when husband and wife had been in love, a time when father and son hadn't bickered but been teammates against his caretaker and his mother.

_Ease up, son._

_No, not that much. I said ease._

His father's instructions from the day he had attempted to teach him how to drive echoed in his mind. His mother had been particularly unhappy about their choice of activity for that afternoon, but Han had insisted it was in everyone's best interest their son learn how to handle himself behind the wheel. His father didn't seem to care when his mother had protested he was not of legal age to drive. Maz had only chuckled and taken another sip of wine. In the end, his father had won.

Mastering the clutch on the piece of junk Falcon his father owned, however, proved to take him more tries than he was willing to admit. They had taken a break to have lunch inside with Maz and Leia, who were both fussing around the kitchen. His mother had never been a good cook, but she was happy to keep the wine glasses filled while Maz made a delicious stew. It took the chill out of the brisk fall day and enjoying it with the three adults around him without the usual squabbles had filled him with a warmth he hadn't felt in some time.

When his father had taken him back out to the Falcon, he shifted into gear the first try. From there on, it was, as Han said, smooth sailing.

Kylo could tell by the look on Rey's face, whatever she was remembering had been anything but smooth sailing. He couldn't imagine what had affected her, to bring her to such a state of exhaustion. He feared it was his own doing, pushing her too far when she already worked all week. But before he could lose himself to the guilt gnawing at him, she spoke.
"My foster father," she bit her bottom lip at the word, pausing before she let out a sigh and explained, "guardian, is probably a better word."

*Scum is a better word,* Kylo thought, but he kept it to himself. Rey couldn't know about the files he had on her.

"He showed up at Rogue One," she told him, her eyes never leaving her soup. "The bouncers took him out before he could...do anything, but he still found me. One of the patrons recognized me from Jakku and told him I was working there."

Kylo couldn't tell if she was mortified or intimidated by the visit. He decided it didn't matter. The man who had come for her would be dealt with. Kylo would see to it personally. Unkar Plutt was never going to hurt Rey again. He wasn't going to utter a word to her. He wasn't going to so much as look at her, if Kylo had his way.

He hated the idea of his fiery bobcat being reduced to this guarded shell, all her light and warmth hidden away beneath a blanket of self-preservation and pure determination. She was a survivor. Based on sheer will and her own persistence, she had rose above all those who had attempted to confine her, to hold her back. Kylo was not about to let her be dragged back down by the reappearance of Plutt.

"Does he know where you live?"

Kylo reconsidered his idea of taking her back to Corellia with him. Let the scumbag confront him at his apartment. Kylo welcomed the thought of being able to register justice with his own two hands. It would be the last mistake the overweight junker made.

"I don't think so," she replied, quietly. Then, as if reconsidering it, she gave a little shake. "He could have waited for me and followed me home from the bar one night this week. I've been a bit out of it," she admitted, her eyes shining with unshed tears.

Kylo felt his hands tightening into fists at the thought of the bastard following Rey home. The man, if he could even be called a man, needed to be removed from Rey's life permanently. Kylo would not be assured of her safety until Unkar Plutt was out of the picture. He worked to reign in his devious thoughts, not wishing to scare Rey or upset her further. She had been through enough.

He found it was harder to keep his emotions in check seeing her unable to control her own. While he battled his rage, she was fighting to hold back tears. His soup no longer mattered. He needed to go through his phone files and find the bastard's address. There was no more waiting, no more researching the cretin. Kylo would make sure the man wished he had never laid a hand on Rey.

"It's not safe for you to stay here," he advised her. Recalling how she had refused to leave earlier, he tried to keep his voice level so as not to alarm her when he bridged the topic again. She had been against him offering up his place before. That wasn't to say that if it came about as her idea instead of his own, she may be more susceptible to it. "Do you have somewhere else you can stay?"

"Jyn and Cassian offered up their couch," she answered. "They're the managers of the club."

That explained her late evenings, then. She worked at a bar. Part of him recognized the opportunity to see her outside of their sessions. Kylo was sure Hux would have him sent to Mitaka for a consult if he suggested they go or one night this week. It was out of character for him, but the idea of seeing Rey out, away from the academy was enticing.

"I don't want to be a burden," she commented, swishing her spoon back and forth in her soup, but
"Anyone who offers their place to you won't be burdened," he encouraged her. "They are being sincere."

_And that includes me._

"Yeah?" She raised her eyes to meet his. It was the first time her voice had its hopeful quality back.

"Yes. Why would you think you're a burden?"

"People tend to leave me. It's only a matter of time."

He had asked before he could stop himself. It was a stupid mistake. Of course she would consider it a burden. She had been abandoned in a foreign country, left in a poverty-stricken town where the system failed her, with a guardian who was pure filth. She may have been strong and confident in front of others, but left alone, her own insecurities came to the surface.

"When I was a kid," she started, speaking in a lower, haunted tone. "he told me I was nothing. He told me so often, I started to believe it. I've been fighting against it ever since, fighting against people like him. Last night, he said I belonged to him, like I was a thing, like I wasn't even a person. Just nothing…"

Her confession chilled him.

His anger flared up again. How dare the man say such things to Rey? She was... he stopped the next train of thought, recognizing his own hypocrisy. An evil twisting in his gut made him shove the soup away.

..._His?_

Suddenly the word felt unpleasant in his mind. It was sickening to recognize his own demented desires, which had been fueling his pursuit of her, in her childhood tormentor. He had been researching Plutt, searching for where he may have been careless so Kylo could build a case against him.

Yet, until now, he hadn't seen the similarities between himself and Unkar Plutt.

When Rey said the words out loud, Kylo had been forced to register the truth of his actions. She continued to share with him how her co-workers had protected her, brought her home, texted her afterwards to check on her. She mentioned her friends, the ones who had helped her move in were constantly checking in on her, as well. She was lucky to have good people around her.

He wasn't a good person.

He was a deviant.

Their age difference, which had never bothered him before, became more apparent as he watched her eating. She was so thin, so small looking and young. Hadn't he called her a child to his uncle? And what did that make him? The monster under the bed? Kylo felt like a monster. He had come today with every intention of convincing her to leave this place, join him in the city with the First Order, and be with him so neither of them was ever alone again.

In all his fantasies, he had never paused long enough to ask himself what she wanted.
And Rey deserved to choose what she wanted.

Kylo had seen the wary expression in her eyes when she had first woken from her spell. It was those same eyes from her foster file, the eyes of a small child, alone and afraid. Regardless of her attempts to be independent, even after her collapse, he continued to see her act as though on high-alert. She was tip-toeing around, overly cautious and he hated it.

His need to prove to her not everyone would leave, became a priority. "Your friends haven't left," he pointed out. "And, like I said before, I'm not going anywhere."

There was a glint of gold in her eyes, as she registered his last statement.

Rey was in and out the remainder of the day. Each time she woke, he'd catch her eyes as she found him. He had taken to sitting in the ridiculously red chair, which was far too low for him, but he refused to be any further from her. She never asked for a single thing, though every time she woke, she was visibly surprised to find him still occupying her apartment. He couldn't tell if it was due to him actually being in her home or something else.

While she rested, Kylo wrestled with his thoughts. He still felt the need to go after Plutt, but his desire to control Rey had been extinguished. Instead, he felt a vile combination of guilt and remorse. Her body's reaction to the stress she had been under over the course of the week was the red flag. Her words were the wake-up call.

Kylo felt as if by sharing a piece of herself willingly with him, he had earned her trust, or at least a small fraction of it. The development should have elated him. It brought him one step closer to securing the future he had been planning. Ironically, it had made him feel more unworthy than he had ever felt in his life. Rey had suffered greater hardships than he had and yet she had remained resourceful, resolute in her beliefs, and real.

He didn't deserve her or her trust.

Still, he couldn't bring himself to leave. He told himself it was because she had already been abandoned one too many times, but the truth was born of his own selfish reasoning.

His thoughts cycled through hating himself for not being able to leave her now and despising himself for how he had violated her trust before she was able to grant it to him. He attempted to lose himself in his pursuit of Plutt. The cretin was easy enough to find and would be even easier to dispose of, yet Kylo found this was another vicious cycle in his mind as he became concerned over Rey's reaction if he followed through.

He remained indecisive.

Around dinner time, she rolled over, her heavy lids opening lazily, as she searched for him. Kylo was still reading and re-reading his files from Phasma on his phone when he felt her gaze.

"You're still here." Her voice was laden with sleep.

"I told you, I'm not going anywhere."

She hummed, slowly stretching under the blanket before she began to sit up. Kylo was on his feet instantly, moving to her side. She held up a hand, signaling she was alright to sit up on her own, but he continued to hover over her, too concerned she would experience a repeat episode.
"Ben, really, I'm fine," Rey attempted to reassure him.

He had to admit, she appeared back to her normal vibrant self. Her skin had returned to its former tanned color, her lips a full pink blush, and her eyes were sparkling. By all accounts, she seemed to have made a full recovery.

Despite her change in vitals, he didn't move away. He wanted to remain by her side for as long as possible. The need was only partially to do with the reappearance of Plutt in her life and more to do with Kylo's own agenda.

"It's late," she continued. "You probably have better things to do than waste your time sitting here babysitting me."

"It's not a waste," he replied, before he could stop himself.

Her eyes widened. He scolded himself for his swift reply. Maybe she didn't want him here. Maybe she had been trying to get him to leave. He waited for the inevitable dismissal, promising himself he'd listen to her from now on. Rey had the right to choose, even if that meant she was choosing not to be around him.

Rey chooses for Rey, he told himself.

Just as he resigned himself to believing she didn't want him in her life, she graced him with the most glorious smile he had ever seen.

"There he is."

"Who?"

"The real you." She continued to smile up at him.

"And I wasn't real before because...?"

"Oh, you were," she laughed to herself, dropping her eyes. He wished she hadn't. He wanted her to stare at him with that look forever. He never wanted her to not look at him in such a way, as if he was important to her, as if he was the only person in the room (which, technically, he was, but that was besides the point).

"But this whole time, I've only seen glimpses, a piece here or there. Today, you seemed," she paused to consider something, then with a shrug, said, "unburdened. There was no ghost of Ben Solo haunting you, no pretense from a family legacy."

The Skywalker legacy, he thought, is both a gift and a curse.

"And you let your mask fall away."

"My mask?"

"Yeah," she laughed again, as if it was obvious. "Your Kylo Ren persona. I get it. I do. I even like him. He's a warrior, but at the end of the day, he's just a mask, just a way for you to keep people at arm's length. He isn't the real you."

"I like him best of all." And there it was again — the smile — the one he had only ever seen her use today, in this apartment, as she stared up at him.

Kylo didn't know how to respond to what Rey had observed. Denying it would surely result in a step
backwards, when it came to securing her trust, but it unnerved him to hear her speak about him with such clarity, as if she had known him far longer. She had become a constant in his life, from the moment he had met her at Kanata Kaffeine to now, he had felt a connection to her, a connection which grew stronger each day regardless of if he saw her or not. In a way, he felt tethered to her, bound by an invisible thread. Perhaps it was the reason for his erratic demands to have Phasma dig up files on her and perhaps it was why Rey saw him so clearly, clearer than anyone else in his life.

How could she understand? How was she able to articulate so effectively exactly how torn he felt? No one had ever seen him — truly seen him — shattered remnants of a scared boy, the fierce wall of a man he had turned into, and somewhere in between a stitched together version of both, unsure how to break out of either mold, unbalanced. His first impulse was to kneel down on the couch aside of her and capture her mouth with his own. But he quickly pushed the thought aside.

She was still recovering, exhaustion did strange things to one's mental state and he wouldn't make the mistake of putting too much stock into anything she said. He couldn't. If it turned out this was merely a play of reactions to the long day, she would regret it and he'd be left with the knowledge none of it had been true.

No matter how much he wanted it to be.

Kylo realized Rey was still staring up at him. His silence had caused her smile to falter slightly, as she tried to assess his reaction.

"I should call Jyn to come pick me up," she said, ending the lingering silence. As Rey fumbled around attempting to find her phone, he placed a hand on her arm.

"I can take you," he told her. When she looked like she would protest, he continued. "They are in New Jedha, right?" She nodded. "It's on my way back to the city."

"Thank you, Ben."

Her eyes were locked on his. He felt the familiar tug, as if he was a marionette and she was pulling at his strings. It took everything he had not to close the distance between them. He wanted her. He knew he wanted her and until today he had allowed himself to believe he wanted her for his career or solely out of loneliness, but after the last several hours spent in her presence, most of which she had been unconscious for, he knew it was more than that.

So much more.

He wanted all of her. He wanted those gratifying smiles. He wanted to see her waking up with lazy, sleep-filled eyes that searched for his own. He wanted to hold her in his arms for the singular reason he could. He wanted to be there for her when she was struggling with her invulnerability. He wanted to run his fingers through her hair and rub circles into her back when she cried. He wanted to share another meal with her, hear more about her life — the good and the bad. He wanted it all. With her. With Rey.

"I'll drive you." He heard himself say, surprising both of them and ending whatever moment they had been having. Part of him hated himself, but the other was relieved.

He strode to the door, ignoring the desire to glance over his shoulder to see if she was still watching him. He thought she was.

"Do you need help packing?" he asked. She replied with a brief 'no'. He nodded, before exiting her apartment and leaving any chance of sharing another agonizingly moment with her.
The dojo was quiet, as he rushed out to his vehicle. He needed to put as much distance between himself and the girl as he could. He didn't trust himself in this state. His emotions were beginning to get out of control. Historically, it led him to make rash decisions, such as running back up the steps to bang on her door and pull her back in his arms so he could have the kiss he yearned for. The idea of taking her by surprise, of the shocked gasp she'd make when he lifted her off the ground, of how her cheeks would color at his gesture, had him groaning, as he flung himself in the driver's seat of his Vanquish.

Why had he agreed to take her?

He wouldn't last one minute in the car alone with her.

Chapter End Notes

This is the longest chapter so far! YAY! Also, this one was deeply personal for me. Rey's blackout was written based on one of my own. If you train or exercise vigorously, please make sure to take care of yourself. Make sure to keep hydrated and eat enough so you don't cause your body to go into shock. And as always, a HUGE thank you to my beta @AbyssalSpark for taking the time to read through and help keep this story on track.
Landmines

Chapter Summary

In which Kylo is confronted by Cassian and Rey receives some advice from Jyn, while both attempt to navigate their developing relationship...

Chapter Notes

First and foremost, THANK YOU to everyone who has supported this fic by reading, providing kudos, commenting, etc. We hit 800 kudos last night!!! I can't even begin to express how amazing it feels or how appreciative I am for the support. This community is incredible and I have never felt so connected or inspired by another group. Thank you.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Luckily, the ride to the apartment was quiet. Kylo put the radio on, hoping the music would drown out any lingering thoughts on his end. It did, but only long enough to get them to their destination, a repurposed warehouse. The club took up the majority of the space, but Kylo noticed a couple of windows on the second story emitting warm light.

“They live where they work?”
“Yeah,” Rey replied, already unbuckling her seat belt to get out. “Like me.”

“Makes the commute easier,” he commented, feeling as though he sounded too much like his uncle. He didn’t like it.

He followed her to a side entrance, holding the door open for her once she unlocked it. They climbed a metal stair case at the back, passing a couple of doors — office, storage room — before coming to the end of he corridor where a thick wooden door was situated.

Rey knocked, while Kylo waited awkwardly behind her. He knew she trusted these people, but he wasn’t about to leave her — not until he was confident she’d be taken care of. He recognized he was dragging his feet, unable to end his time with Rey. So he lingered behind her, silent and unflinching.

The door opened to reveal a Latino man with dark brown hair covering his face and hanging past his ears. His eyes were welcoming when they saw Rey. However, when the man turned his attention to Kylo the warmth turned to mistrust and he appeared unimpressed.

“Hey, Cassian.”

“Come in.” He responded, backing up to swing the door wide open, so they could pass.

“I didn’t hear your bike. How did you get here?” The man asked, as he shut the door behind them.

Kylo could tell from his tone the man knew exactly how Rey had arrived on his doorstep. He was merely asking to be polite, while he continued to size Kylo up, over her head. It was abundantly clear to him the man was protective of Rey, probably more so than usual given the recent events within his club. What Kylo couldn’t reconcile was the man’s obvious disdain for him.

He extended his hand before Rey could offer up his name. “I gave her a ride. I’m Ky-.”

“I know who you are,” Cassian grumbled, not taking his hand.

“Cassian.” Another voice entered the fray, as a petite woman with brown hair and green eyes appeared from somewhere else in the apartment. “Hi.” She immediately reached out to shake Kylo’s
outstretched hand. “Jyn. It’s so nice to meet you. Rey’s told us about you.”

Rey talks about me?

“It’s my pleasure.” He replied, hoping he didn’t sound too enthusiastic.

He was pleased to know Rey had mentioned him to her friends, until his lingering doubt came and sat like a dark cloud over the statement. What did she say about him? Was he just a trainer to her or something more? Did he want her to consider him as something more?

“What happened?” Jyn asked Rey, turning her attention to the younger woman.

Kylo watched her shrug. “It was nothing. Just a small fainting spell.”

Jyn glanced up at him, clearly noting Rey had downplayed the events of their morning.

“She blacked out twice. The first time it lasted over a minute, but the second time it was only a few seconds. I didn’t want her to be alone until she had gotten more rest and eaten,” he explained.

Jyn nodded. “You’re lucky he was with you,” she said to Rey.

“I know.” She was responding to her boss, but her eyes were on Kylo. There was a hint of a smile there.

“The cops are looking for him,” Jyn mentioned, assuming Kylo knew the cause of Rey’s distress. He noticed how Rey shifted at the news. She was still afraid. “They haven’t found him yet, but they will.”

Or I’ll find him first, Kylo thought, angrily.

“We made up the spare room for you,” Cassian informed Rey. “Jyn,” he gestured to his wife to show their guest where it was. His eyes had remained on Kylo the entire time, ever the watchful guard.
“I’m going to go,” Kylo announced, taking it as his cue to leave. “Thank you for offering up your home.”

“She’s family,” Jyn stated, slinging an arm over Rey’s shoulders.

Kylo gave a quick nod to them and exited. He needed to get back to Coreilla before his determination to end Plutt had him driving in a different direction. Seeing the flash of fear in Rey’s eyes had him thinking irrationally. His mind was already calculating the drive to Jakku, given the address he had located on his files from Phasma. It would be out of his way, but well worth the additional mileage on the Vanquish.

He would hunt the scum down, strike fear into the coward, as the cretin had done to Rey. Kylo would ensure he felt as small and weak as he had made his foster daughter feel for years. He’d make him petty and miserable and only after he had achieved such a state, would he physically beat the man. His mind was plunging down into a dark vortex quickly, as if an old friend was welcoming him back.

He had all but made the decision to go when he heard her voice breaking through the black.

“Ben!”

He turned around to find Rey hurrying down the hallway towards him.

“Were you going to leave without saying goodbye?” She asked, when she reached him.

“You were busy.” The excuse sounded half-assed, even to him.

Rey’s face turned up towards his, her position only a foot away, causing her to crane her neck to be able to see his face. “I wanted to thank you for today.”

“You already did.”
She bit back her bottom lip and he could sense there was an uneasiness in her. She released a breath, before she continued. “I have been alone most of my life,” she told him, as if she felt the need to explain herself. “Poe and Finn have been looking out for me the last few years, but before them, I never had anyone but myself. I’m still getting used to people being in my life, but what you did today — for me — I just want you to know I appreciate it.”

“Rey, you don’t-.”

“No,” she interrupted him. “Let me say this. I was wrong about you. When we met at Maz’s, I thought you were a self-entitled prick and I wanted nothing to do with you.”

He tried not to visibly flinch as he recalled how he had initially treated her and how he had initially thought of her. He was the one who had been wrong about her. It was hard to reconcile the way he had been then in comparison to now.

“I’ve never been so glad to be wrong.” She was smiling up at him. It was that beautiful, brilliant smile that felt like it was burning through him it was so bright. It caused an ache in his chest and made him feel weak in his limbs. “There is so much more to you, Ben Solo, so much more than you let on.”

Kylo felt the ache surge within him. Was this what a heart attack felt like? He was beginning to feel dizzy and he wasn’t able to feel anything but the overwhelming warmth from her smile. It was almost like having an out of body experience. All he could see was Rey’s shining face. All he could feel was her light washing over him. Everything else fell away. Yet, somehow he stupidly managed to defy her.

“No, there isn’t.”

She shook her head. “You’re wrong. You underestimate yourself.”

And then her lips were on his skin.

It wasn’t a full kiss. It barely counted as a kiss at all. Had he been quick enough to anticipate her movements, he could have tilted his head to feel her lips against his own, but as it were, he was too shocked to have her in such proximity without the build up of their sparring. She had risen up on the balls of her feet to close the space between them. Her lips brushed across the edge of his mouth, halfway between the target he hoped she would hit and his cheek. Still, it felt magnificent and though
it lasted but a second, he could barely remember what he was thinking of or what his name was, let
alone how to react.

As she lowered herself back down, eyes searching his face to gage his response, he was faintly
aware he needed to do something — anything — but merely stood there stupefied in her presence.
Time seemed to tick by, before he was able to muster up the brain power to speak. By the time he
did, she was fully covered in a pink blush across her face.

“C-can I pick you up tomorrow morning?” He asked, suddenly feeling as nervous as a teenager
asking a girl to the school dance. What was wrong with him? She had hardly kissed him.

“Could we make a pit stop at Kanata Kaffeine?”

“Sure.”

“Then it’s a date!”

Rey chooses for Rey, he reminded himself, attempting to not get too elated by her glowing response.
It wasn’t really a date. It was just something people said, like ‘skinny as a rail’ and ‘out with my
boots on’. Besides, he wouldn’t know a date, if he was drug into one. He’d never been on a date.
Not that it mattered. Kylo knew he didn’t deserve Rey — not now, not ever. Yet, it was as if he was
trapped by her light. He didn’t have the strength to let her go and if he couldn’t let her go, he needed
to be better.

“Goodnight, Ben.” She said, as she wrapped her arms around him, hugging him. He felt the
embrace, felt her squeeze him, as his last ounce of self-control evaporated.

Damn it to hell.

He started to pull her closer, haul her upwards to kiss her, to complete all the prior half-attempts,
when the apartment door opened again. Cassian Andor stepped out into the hallway, a murderous
expression on his face. Rey couldn’t see, with her back towards him, but Kylo got the message loud
and clear.

Releasing Rey, he saw her give him a slight smile before passing Cassian.
“I’ll just be a minute,” he told her, as she retreated inside.

Cassian approached him, keeping an ear towards the apartment door until there was the tell-tale click of it closing, indicating Rey had indeed gone inside.

For a moment the two regarded one another. Unlike most, Captain Andor was not put off by Kylo’s size. In fact, he was glaring at him with such animosity, one might assume he was actually enjoying giving the larger man such a look.

“I appreciate what you did for Rey last night.” Kylo broke the silence first. “Had I been there, I’m not sure there would be anything for the police to search for.”

Cassian’s eyes narrowed at the underlying insult. “I can’t keep my people safe from behind bars.”

“It would have been self-defense. Instead you let her become more of a target. Now he wants revenge.”

“What do you know?” Cassian nearly shouted, his own anger flaring.

“I know I would have put a stop to him instead of letting him continue to torment her.”

“If you knew Rey, you’d know this wasn’t the first time he’s come at her.”

“Believe me,” Kylo growled. “I know.”

“If you knew then why didn’t you do something before last night?”

“Excuse me?”

“We don’t all have the luxury of deciding when and where we care about something.”
“You think I have a choice?” Kylo snapped. “I can’t control how I feel about her.”

Their voices had risen in the exchange and paired with his confession, he took a step back. He hadn’t meant to announce it out loud. If Cassian was surprised, he didn’t show it, but his voice was back to its calm tone when he spoke again.

“Have you told her?”

“No.”

“Why not?”

Kylo ran a hand through his hair, absently. This was not the direction he had assumed this conversation would go in.

“I left my family by choice to fight professionally. I’m constantly training, looking for new techniques on how to hurt people for a living. The only reason I met Rey was because I’m on court ordered community service and weekly therapy sessions. What kind of person does that make me? I’m a monster.”

“That is what is holding you back?”

Kylo nodded.

Cassian fixed him with his gaze. For a second, Kylo wondered if the man meant to strike him. Then, with a sigh he started.

“I’ve been fighting since I was six years old, not for an outlet or for a hobby, but out of necessity. When you grow up with the constant barrage of violence, it becomes common place. You lose some of your humanity.”

Kylo noted how dark Cassian’s eyes went as he continued, as if he no longer in the hallway, but
far away in both time and space.

“When I joined the Rebellion, I did things — terrible things — on behalf of the cause. I became unrecognizable, morphing into a spy, saboteur, assassin, but everything I did, I did for the Rebellion. Every time I walked away from something I wanted to forget, I told myself it was a cause I believed in.”

“Then I met Jyn. I thought she was like the others, just doing what she had to in order to survive, no loyalty, no family. I wrote her off until I saw her throw herself into the line of fire to save a child. I could have done it. I was closer, but she went without hesitation. She could have died. And that’s when I realized, I was the one who was dead. I was the one who had died.”

“She brought me back. I hadn’t treated her well. She had no reason to care about, but she showed me a life worth living, away from the chaos. She saved me.”

Cassian finished, giving Kylo a knowing look.

“Why are you telling me this? It doesn’t change anything.”

“Doesn’t it?”

“You’re talking about war. Like you said, you didn’t have a choice. You had to fight.”

“So did you.”

“No.” Kylo insisted. “I choose to fight.”

“I’m not talking about the MMA.” Cassian corrected. “A friend once told me there is more than one sort of prison. He said I carried mine wherever I went.” Kylo raised a brow at the words. “I didn’t understand him then, but I do now. You are caged in, Kylo Ren.”

“I’m completing my court requirements. Serving time is no longer on the table.”
Cassian shook his head. “A self-imposed cage is a far worse sentence.” There was a retort on his lips, but Cassian added, “You’re not the only one who lost everything, Mr. Solo.”

Kylo stilled. How did Captain Andor know his former identity? Had Rey shared his history with her friends? It wasn’t like he had told her not to, or had asked her not to speak about what he was doing at Ahch-To, still he was surprised how uncomfortable he felt with the knowledge another had called him Ben. It felt like something sacred between him and Rey. He could only stomach the name when it fell from her lips.

Before could ask, Cassian had gone inside, leaving him alone in the corridor.

Not wanting to linger another moment longer, Kylo returned to his vehicle. The drive back to Coreilla was quiet. His mind was full of chaos. The pros and cons of continuing down this rabbit hole with Rey continued to wage war in in his head. Back and forth he went with how wonderful it had felt and how terrible it would end, because he knew, deep down, that ultimately it would end. He turned up the volume until the radio was blaring, but the noise couldn’t drown out the words he kept hearing over and over again in his head.

*There he is…*

*…the real you.*

He saw Rey’s special smile and felt the ghosting of her lips on his skin.

*I like him best of all.*

Rey struggled to sleep that night. After Cassian had gone out to talk to Kylo, Jyn had shown her around the apartment and helped her get settled into the guest bedroom. While her manager’s main motive was to get her comfortable, that wasn’t to say Jyn didn’t have an ulterior motive behind helping her. She had also come to impart some advice to Rey. Now, lying alone in this foreign room, her conversation with Jyn was all she could think about. One phrase in particular kept running through her head.

*Trust goes both ways.*
It wasn’t a surprise Rey hadn’t been trusting of Ben when they had met. His arrogance alone had made her recoil. When she recalled the first time they had met in Kanata Kaffeine, she giggled to herself. He had been so intimidating, so cold, and covered from head to toe in darkness. If someone had told her she would be willingly taking lessons from him which would lead to her developing feelings for him, she would have done more than giggle. She would have laughed outright in their face.

So much had changed in the last couple of weeks. He could still be intimidating at times, though Rey was not the type to back down. His coldness towards her had disappeared and while he continued to wear a mostly black wardrobe, she was sensing a lightness to him, a peaceful calm settling in where before it was only conflicted chaos.

Her training session with him had been the only thing she had been looking forward to after her run-in with Plutt. After she had received his wake-up call, she had been mortified for keeping him waiting. In her rush to get downstairs, she had failed to grab anything to eat, not even a quick handful of cereal and after her late nights and limited amount of food all week, her body finally took control, forcing her down.

She hadn’t expected Ben to be as attentive as he had been. The stubbornness was in character, but there was a protective quality to it that had made her feel as though he cared, more so than he had ever let on before. The way he had watched her, how insistent he had been she not move, and how he had held her — those were all the actions of a man involved, not a cold-hearted loner.

After making light of the change to him in her living room, she had half-expected him to revert to his former scornful self. Yet, he had seemed shocked, almost perturbed by her observation.

Rey hadn’t expected him to walk her inside Rogue One or to the door of her managers’ apartment. It was another anomaly. What was more confusing was Cassian’s reaction to meeting the famed fighter. Rey had known he was not impressed to learn the ‘great Kylo Ren’ was her trainer, but she hadn’t seen a reason for him to be so callous. Then again, Cassian hadn’t been her biggest fan when she first arrived at the club either.

His wife had convinced him to give Rey a chance and once she had earned his respect, he had become as close to her as Chirrut, Baze, and Jyn. He was, by nature, a standoffish person, usually keeping to the edge of the crowd, watching. Rey had witnessed him join in on a handful of occasions, usually once Jyn prompted him. It was comical, in a way, since Jyn had her own rough personality, at times. They were each fighters in their own right, dangerous, but when they got together they were a lethal combination.
It made her wonder more about how they had finally come together, how they had gotten over their skepticism long enough to take a chance on one another, to see where their attraction could go.

*Trust goes both ways.*

As Rey thought about it more, Jyn’s advice made sense. Ben was guarded in the same way Rey was. If she wanted to explore the feelings she was developing, if she allowed herself to admit she had feelings, she would need to remain open with him. It was the only way they were going to be able to move forward.

Grabbing her phone off the bedside table, she pulled up his name.

**Rey:** Thanks for today. Hope I didn’t keep you from anything important.

**Ben:** You should be sleeping.

**Rey:** So should you. It’s late.

**Rey:** I slept all day.

**Ben:** You also blacked out. You needed the extra rest.

She wanted to argue with him, the survivor in her not willing to give an inch or let anyone have the upper hand. Rey reminded herself she was trying to be less guarded. She may be the younger of the two of them, but if she wanted to get to know Ben Solo, the enigma, she would have to be the mature one, by letting her walls down first. She deleted her original rebuttal and shot off a new response.

**Rey:** I know. Thanks for looking out for me.

**Ben:** You’re welcome.
Rey: What did Cassian say to you?

Ben: Nothing you need to concern yourself with.

She tried to not read too much into his cryptic response. A few lines of text messaging weren’t going to break down his walls. She needed to remain constant in her efforts, stay open, and above all, she needed to be honest with him. If she wanted him to trust her, she needed to show she trusted him too.

Rey: He didn’t like me at first either. Jyn was the one who convinced him to hire me, but he was the first one to jump into action when Plutt came after me.

Ben: He’s not afraid of much, is he?

Rey: He’s ex-military. I’m sure he’s seen far worse.

Ben didn’t respond to that. It made her wonder if Cassian had alluded to the fact of his past history. Jyn hadn’t given her many specifics, but Chirrut had often mentioned how tormented Cassian had been and how the shadows of his sins followed him about even now, like ghosts staking claim to their permanent haunt.

Rey decided it was best to change the subject before she ended up waiting until morning to speak with Ben again.

Rey: Can you see the stars from where you are?

It was a rather intimate question, making her think of how he looked wherever he was, stretched out on black silk sheets or seated at a lush leather couch sipping an expensive glass of bourbon. Either option seemed realistic to her and rather enticing.

Ben: Not unless I open my curtains. How about you?

Rey: The guest room faces out into the desert. I can see everything for miles. It’s beautiful.
Ben: All I can see is other buildings. It’s nothing special.

Rey: If you could live anywhere, where would you live?

Ben: You first.

Rey: I asked you first, Mr. Solo.

As soon as she hit ‘Send,’ Rey realized her mistake. Ben was estranged from his parents. While calling him by his birth name was tolerated, she wasn’t sure how he’d receive being called by his surname. Luke had made some remarks, leading Rey to believe the relationship between father and son was far more strained than the relationship between mother and son. Quickly, she typed out another text.

Rey: Sorry.

Ben: Why?

Rey: I know you don’t like that name.

Ben: I don’t, but I’m used to you saying it.

She wasn’t sure if she wanted to laugh or cry at his reply. Without being able to see his expression, she was left to imagine how he was staring at his screen. She pictured his lips turning up in a half smile, half smirk. It was one of her favorite expressions he wore. When he did, she could see all of him, both the light of Ben Solo and the darkness of Kylo Ren. Then her phone dinged and she saw he had sent another text.

Ben: Naboo.

Rey: You have expensive taste, not that I didn’t already know from your car and your sunglasses
and basically everything you own.

**Ben:** You make me sound like a snob.

She couldn’t resist poking some fun at him, mostly because she was all but laughing in bed and it was the least stressed she had been all week. Talking to him was getting easier and she was glad she had taken Jyn’s advice.

**Rey:** Well, if the shoe fits...

**Ben:** And where would you live?

**Rey:** I’m happy where I am.

**Ben:** Tatooine? Or New Jedha?

**Rey:** Both. They feel more like home than Jakku or Coreilla ever did. Must be the company. :)

She held her breath then, not sure if she had been far too obvious or too subtle for him. He had to know she cared about him, even if she was still trying to figure out in what context she cared.

Before he had left, she had wanted to kiss him. After their near kiss a week earlier, the moment had seemed equally perfect, primed for a release of the magnetic energy which had been building between them since they met at the coffee shop. But at the last second, she had chickened-out. She had landed the kiss on the edge of his mouth, almost close enough to her original target, with just enough of a boundary to be seen as a friendly thank you, if he protested.

He hadn’t.

In fact, he had seemed in awe of her when she had pulled away. Rey was still working through what his expression had meant, when her phone dinged.
Ben: You have great friends. They all love you.

From the way he worded it, she knew he didn’t include himself in that statement. In her imagination, the Ben she saw was sitting in his apartment, alone, on the couch, typing away, as if her previous text hadn’t alluded to the fact she cared. She wondered why he didn’t think anyone could care about him, when he had so many I adoring fans. There was an entire world of people who loved him. Was it so difficult for him to believe she would care for him in spite of his fame and fortune?

Rey: You know, I consider you part of the reason I feel that way.

Ben: You shouldn’t.

Rey: Why?

There was no response. After a minute, Rey considered asking again. She didn’t understand why Ben was arguing with her on this point. She couldn’t control the fact she cared about him anymore than she could control the weather. He had come into her life by chance or fate or whatever people believed in, but now he was a part of her life here. Despite their first impressions, and regardless of their different pasts, they had bonded over their passion for fighting. Now he was as constant as Rose and Jess or Finn and Poe. It was unexpected — unexpected and encouraging.

Her phone dinged, signaling he had responded. It wasn’t encouraging.

Ben: Goodnight, Rey

Rey: Wait! Answer my question, Ben. Why?

He never did.

The next morning, Rey woke to her alarm, a series of chimes alerting her that she had to get up to be ready in time for Ben to pick her up. She was conflicted about seeing him after their conversation had ended so abruptly the night before. Her anxiety must have shown on her face. When she exited the guest bedroom, Cassian was in the kitchen, pouring coffee into a large mug.
“Morning. Caf?”

“Please.” Rey nodded, walking over. She normally didn’t bother with coffee, but after her rough day, she figured a boost would help her get through her classes. He retrieved another mug and filled it up for her. “So what did you say to Ben last night?”

“Only what he needed to hear.” She quirked an eyebrow at her manager, but he provided no additional details.

“Must have been some talk. Neither of you are willing to tell me. Part of the bro code?”

Cassian smiled. “Something like that.”

Rey took a sip of her beverage, wincing at the bitter quality. She hadn’t had coffee since her last finals week back at the university. She hadn’t missed the taste of the drink, but she had missed the added lift the caffeine was able to provide. She’d need it for this morning’s class, so she took another long sip.

“Do you need a ride into work?”

“No.” Now it was her turn to smile. “Ben is picking me up.”

“Of course he is. I’m going to go wake the missus. See you tonight.” Cassian gave her a nod and took his coffee with him as he retreated back into their bedroom.

Rey didn’t have time to ponder over his response before there was a ping on cell phone, signaling Ben had arrived. She finished the rest of her mug in one large gulp, before wiping her mouth with the back of her hand. With her bag in tow, she rushed downstairs.

She met him out front, feeling her earlier uncertainty come back as she moved to climb into the Vanquish.
“Morning,” she said, cheerily.

“Morning,” he replied. Putting the car in gear, he pulled away from the curb in the direction of Tatooine.

Rey bit her lip, the silence between their greetings dragging on as they car made its way toward Kanata Kaffeine. Ben had the radio playing softly, but she couldn’t concentrate on the song playing. All she could hear was her thundering heartbeat in her chest and how suddenly the coffee felt like pure acid in her stomach.

She tried to focus on the scenery passing behind her window, or the lessons she needed to provide today, but her mind kept wandering back to the text conversation she had shared with Ben last night. She had thought they had made progress. She had thought he was beginning to open up to her the way she was opening up to him.

Whatever walls they had managed to get past yesterday were now up again. Rey sighed. Maybe she had imagined Ben’s tenderness. Perhaps she had seen only what she had wanted to see yesterday and any chance he wanted to get to know her better was only a fleeting illusion. After all, he had been the one to say she didn’t belong at the academy. Two weeks was hardly enough time to change his mind, considering how stubborn he was.

By the time they had pulled into Maz’s, Rey was more than ready to be out of the car and its deafening silence. She practically bolted out of her seat to go inside where her friends were. She didn’t even glance back to make sure Ben was following.

As with all weekday mornings, Rose was at the front, taking orders, while Maz went back and forth in the space, helping out wherever she could.

Her eyes found Rey almost immediately, but then focused higher, on something behind her.

“Ben Solo!” Her voice boomed across the cafe and everything stilled. All eyes went to the new person of interest.

Rey turned to see Ben visibly blushing under the scrutiny. He waved sheepishly at the older woman. “Hey Maz.”
She approached them, where they had stopped halfway between the exit and the counter. Maz took Ben’s hand in her own. The size difference was comical, but Rey didn’t laugh. There was nothing humorous about the way the two were regarding one another. The old woman stared long and hard at Ben, silent for a time, before she let out a long breath and gave him a nod. He didn’t do much as flinch.

“I was about to ask where your boyfriend was.” Maz commented to Rey, who mirrored Ben’s earlier flush, at the woman’s assumption.

“Ben picked me up for work, Maz.” She explained. “We aren’t together.”

“Right, right,” the cafe owner waved at them both, chuckling at their blush tainted faces. “Well, come in then. If you’re here with him, you must need a drink, desperately.”

*Something stronger than tea,* Rey thought to herself. This morning was not shaping up the way she thought it would.

As directed, they followed Maz to the counter, where Rose proceeded to make one green tea with honey and a black coffee, without requiring the order from either of them.

“Thanks, Rose.” Rey flashed a grin at her friend, reaching over to grab hers.

“You look better today,” her friend commented, “You have more color in your face.”

“I feel better.” Rey thanked her for her observation.

“Thanks for taking care of her.” Rose said to Ben. He was staring at Maz, whose back was turned to the group, as she spoke to another customer, seemingly unaware of Ben’s attention.

“Ben?” Rey placed her hand gently in his arm.

He barely acknowledged her touch, but when she spoke his name, he glanced down at her, fixated on her hand. She felt the flush returning to her face and pulled back, just as his hand came up to wrap over her own.
“Can we go?” He asked her, quietly, his face unreadable.


Before her friend could reply, Ben was handing over a hundred dollar bill, which surprised Rey but had little to no affect on Rose, who responded with, “You’ve got to stop doing this. You’re making me and my roommate way too happy.”

Ben didn’t bother to comment on her words, instead moving his hand to Rey’s lower back to guide her out of the cafe. She wanted to wave goodbye to Rose and Maz, but he was already maneuvering her out to the car.

“Are you alright?” She asked, as soon as they were seated in the Vanquish.

“I haven’t seen Maz in years.” He admitted, hand hovered over the ignition. He hadn’t started the car yet and he appeared to be torn over staying and leaving.

“I can walk to the academy, if you want to talk to her.” Rey offered.

The expression on his face altered dramatically. The same protectiveness he had shown yesterday came to the surface instantly. “No. I am taking you to Ahch-To.”

“Ben, you’ve done so much for me already. If you need to talk to Maz, you can stay. I’ll be fine.”

“I can come back later.” He decided, the engine roaring to life, as he spoke.

Rey didn’t push it further. Ben was obstinate, nearly as obstinate as her. She understood there was no fighting him on this topic, so she picked a different one.

“That was some tip you gave Rose.”
“You told me to be nice.” Her reminded her with a smile in her direction.

Rey scoffed. “Nice? Since when does being nice mean handing over a month’s worth of tips in one transaction?”

He shrugged, as if the money didn’t matter to him. She supposed it didn’t. He had enough to spare. He could afford to give Rose a hundred dollars for two beverages costing a little more than six dollars.

“She’s your friend and she provided us good service. She earned it.”

Rey tried not to think too hard on the way he said ‘us’ when he answered her. She was already trying to make sense of his mood swings this morning, she didn’t need to go down the rabbit hole about what her feelings for him meant. Right now, she was only focused on being open with him, earning his trust. She couldn’t think beyond that, at least not right now.

“Thank you.”

“Why are you thanking me?”

“You took care of me all day yesterday and now you’re taking care of my friends.”

“I only tipped her.”

“That tip will help feed her and Jess all month.”

“Jess?”

“Her roommate.” Rey explained. “She works at Alliance.”

“I imagine she would appreciate the tip then,” he smirked.
Rey swatted at him. “Hey! Don’t be rude.”

“Hey!” He yelled back. “I’m driving.”

Rey crossed her arms over her chest, noting how he didn’t seem at all mad. If anything, his tone was playful instead of scornful. She liked this side of him, the side which challenged her but not in the usual verbal spat or physical altercation way. This side of him was mischievous and a bit snarky. It was part Ben Solo, part Kylo Ren — all the best parts with none of the bad. It was her favorite ‘Ben’ because it felt the most genuine, the most real.

“Driving doesn’t give you a get out of jail free card, you know.”

“No, just putting up with you and my uncle for the next five and a half months.”

“Putting up with?” Rey’s smile fell away.

She knew he was court ordered to teach at the academy. He had made it quite clear he didn’t appreciate the sentence or his uncle, however, Rey had thought he was beginning to open up to her. The way he had been acting yesterday, paired with how he was teasing her just seconds earlier had made her think she was seeing him, the real him. Apparently, she had assumed too much.

Like her parents and Plutt, Ben Solo didn’t care about her. She was only fooling herself. All he cared about was finishing up his hours and getting back in the ring.

Kylo pulled into his normal spot aside of Rey’s Triumph in front of the studio. She had become rather quiet on the ride back and it was beginning to worry him. They had been talking and joking when the subject of his punishment came up. The joy had left her eyes and suddenly she turned away from him to look out the window. Neither of them had uttered a word the remainder of the drive.

When she slammed the door of the car, hurrying inside the academy without a word to him, he got the distinct impression something was wrong. He assumed she had been reminded of how he ended up at Ahch-To. It wasn’t pleasant. The media had made a point to highlight his temper and some had
even compiled a timeline of all his transgressions since he had been ranked isn’t he league. To a normal person, it was off-putting. To someone like Rey, someone who had seen violence in her home, he couldn’t imagine how horrifying it was.

Once again, he reminded himself why he wasn’t doing her any favors by trying to make things work between them. As much as he wanted to be her friend or more than friends, he couldn’t permit himself to go that far with her. Rey deserved a better person in her life, someone who hadn’t been in court numerous times or had never had a serious relationship in his life. He was trying to be better — God, was he trying — but at the end of the day, he was still damaged and broken. Kylo wasn’t a good man, but he wanted Rey and Rey deserved a good man.

Grabbing his bag, he locked the car and followed her inside.

“Rey?” He called, stopping at the doorway to the dojo to peer in. She wasn’t there. The lights weren’t even on yet. He flicked them on, before trying the office.

“Good morning.” His uncle was seated at his desk, the chair angled toward the doorway, as if he had been expecting Kylo to barge in.

Kylo scanned the room, ignoring his uncle, and the smaller studio from where he stood. There was no sign of Rey.

“Looking for something?”

“Have you seen Rey?”

“She ran upstairs to her apartment. What do you need?”

Though his uncle didn’t mean for it to be, the question had multiple meanings for Kylo. First and foremost, he needed to know Rey was alright. He needed to know he was making the right choice by staying close to her, which he was fairly certain he wasn’t, but he continued to disregard that fact. He needed to hear her laugh again and see her smile. It all boiled down to one simple thing: he needed Rey.

But he wasn’t about to tell his uncle that.
“Just tell her I can take her back to New Jedha before my first class tonight.”

He moved to leave, when his uncle stopped him.

“Where are you going now?”

“I have something I need to take care of in town.”

Before his uncle could ask any further questions, he left his bag by the teacher’s counter in the main studio and went back outside.

Rey wasn’t the only person who was upset with him this morning. His earlier encounter with Maz Kanata had been abrupt and confusing, though less violent than he had anticipated. Kylo hadn’t been sure how she would receive him when he walked into her establishment. He had not been expected her to act as welcoming as she had. Her actions still baffled him. Still, he knew he had to return and clear the air with his former babysitter.

It was a conversation long overdue.

Chapter End Notes

A few shout-outs:

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Finally, to my constant supporters who have been with this fic since the beginning a HUGE, HUGE THANK YOU. You have been with me through the early chapters and are still along for the ride. I wouldn't still be writing without your love.
Rey was finishing up her first class of the morning, the kickboxing class, which was primarily made up of women. Her attendees had put forth a good effort this morning, most glistening with perspiration from their hard work. Master Luke was standing in the doorway, as the class wrapped
up with some cool-down stretches. He greeted each person, as they passed, before stepping down onto the studio floor.

“Attendance is up,” he remarked, as he came to stand alongside of Rey. “I have you to thank you for that.”

She shrugged. “It’s not hard. They are all good at taking direction and the kids keep me on my toes.”

“Yes, I can tell they are all learning a great deal from you.”

“Thank you.”

“And what are you learning, Rey?”

She quirked an eyebrow at him. In her short time at Ahch-To, she had learned Master Luke tended to speak in riddles or half-truths, but there were times when his questions still caught her off-guard. This one, though seemingly innocent, had a certain hint of double-meaning to it.

“What do you mean?”

Luke gave her a knowing grin. “I noticed you arrived this morning with Ben. How long has that been going on?”

Rey blushed. Why did everyone keep assuming they were together? Ben was attractive, very successful, and had a handsome smile. Once one got around his attitude, he was quite the catch. He had far too many fans and far more admirers from his fights. Rey had seen what some of the women who attended the events looked like. Models, actresses, and even a few pop stars frequented the bigger fight nights. Anyone of those would certainly catch Ben’s eye and would be a better match for him.

She couldn’t hold a candle to those women. She didn’t have the fancy clothes or the mannerisms they possessed. Growing up in the foster system, her table manners left a lot to be desired and her wardrobe consisted mostly of items she had purchased through the Goodwill and thrift shops. Rey had never even gone to her high school prom because she couldn’t afford a gown. She couldn’t imagine what she’d look like if she was done up the way those women were on television. She’d probably be unrecognizable.
It was a word she’d use to describe Ben in the ring. When she had watched clips of his professional matches on YouTube, she had seen him become someone else. Kylo Ren. It was his legal name, but she only saw him as the dark fighter when he was up against an opponent in the league. In those moments, he truly became a monster. It was beautiful, in a strangely seductive way. His body moved without limits or hesitation, perfectly completing each attack as if it was nothing more than another breath for him. Despite all his rage, when he fought in the arena, he was calm, relying on his skills instead of his emotions.

Nothing held him back.

Nothing…which was the answer to her employer’s question.

“Nothing is going on with Ben.” She replied, taking care to keep the emotion out of her voice.

Luke made a face, suggesting he didn’t believe her. Before he could press her further, she delivered on her promise to Finn, albeit later than she had vowed to. “There is something going on though, which is the reason for Ben driving me around. My foster father found me.”


“He threatened me at the club and Ben didn’t want me to be alone in my apartment or commuting by myself, so he took me to stay with my managers last night in New Jedha. My bike is single-rider only, so he’s my temporary chauffeur.”

“Why didn’t you bring this to my attention sooner?”

She thought on her promise and how she had avoided talking to Luke because she hadn’t wanted Ben to know. Considering how he had found out, her black out was far more humiliating than him hearing it from her in passing. A tiny part of her wondered if she hadn’t fainted, if they would have gotten as close as they had in such a short amount of time. There had been something building between them, but it wasn’t until she had woken up not the dojo floor she had felt that something change. The first barrier had come down yesterday. There were many more to break down, but it had been the start of change for them. She couldn’t be too upset with how it had all worked out.
“I was embarrassed.” She admitted to Luke. It was a half-truth. She knew if she explained the whole story, Luke would read into it, the same way Maz had misinterpreted how she and Ben had arrived together at the cafe this morning.

“Rey,” Luke placed a hand over hers on the counter top, “I know several members of the local police department. We will make sure you are protected.”

“They are aware. My managers called when he approached me in New Jedha. The officers who responded to the call took my statement and alerted all the neighboring departments.”

Luke opened his mouth to say something else, then closed it and shook his head. After a moment’s pause, he asked her. “Was Ben there at Rogue One when it happened?”

“No.”

“Thank God.”

Rey saw relief flood Master Luke’s features. She didn’t understand why it mattered, but he seemed so concerned, she decided it was best to explain Ben’s level of involvement.

“He knows everything that happened. I told him yesterday.”

Luke’s face grew stern. When he spoke again, he spoke slowly, emphasizing each word, as if he needed to ensure she understood the severity of the situation. She didn’t.

“Rey, does Ben know where your foster father lives?”

“No that I’m aware of. Why?”

“Ben has always had anger issues.” Luke told her, as if he was giving her new information. She was well aware of Ben’s anger issues. It was what had brought him into her orbit and she had nearly been on the receiving end of one of his punches.
“He cares for you and I’m concerned what he would do to protect you.”

Rey meant to object. She meant to correct her boss and once again tell him there was nothing going on between her and Ben, even if she wanted there to be. Instead, all she said was, “What do you mean?”

Luke gave her a tight smile. “Ben was bullied often as a child. It caused him to be withdrawn and he often secluded himself from my other students, choosing to train or study extra schoolwork instead of trying to make friends. As he got older, he became more confident in his skills as a fighter and he didn’t hold back when someone attempted to insult him.”

“Is that what got him suspended from the league?”

“I do not know for sure. He hasn’t spoken to me of it.”

“But you think that’s what happened?”

Luke shrugged. “Possibly. What I’m more concerned with is how he will respond to you being pushed around.”

Rey didn’t like the connotations of what her boss was saying. “People don’t push me around.”

“No,” he chuckled, “I imagine they don’t. However, it is one thing to stand up for yourself and quite another to survive against a tormentor, only to be targeted by them once more.”

She froze. Before, she had been able to tell herself she hadn’t spoken of Plutt to Luke because she didn’t want to be embarrassed. Now, Ben knew and her boss did as well, yet she felt even more uncomfortable with sharing.

It had been difficult to talk to Ben about what she’d endured at the hands of her guardian. When she had finished, he hadn’t looked upon her with pity or sadness. He had been angry and protective, immediately asking questions in order to assess whether or not she was safe. He didn’t bother with sentiment. He took action. Finn and Poe had been the same. They had been the first ones she had spoken to after her requests to be transferred out of Unkar Plutt’s care had been denied. After she had
determined her raised concerns were falling on deaf ears, she had given up trying to discuss what happened behind closed doors. The only reason she had opened up to Finn and Poe was because they had constantly asked her about it and finally she had relented. Ben would have behaved the same way.

Master Luke, on the other hand, was quieter, more of a thinker than a doer. Rey wasn’t ready to share details with him. It didn’t make sense, considering how quick she had been to trust him when he allowed her to begin working at the studio and move into the apartment.

Her past had always been her darkest secret. As painful as it was to know her parents had abandoned her, it wasn’t the worst she had ever felt. That title belonged to how worthless Unkar Plutt had made her feel day in and day out while under his care. The power he had over her was in her head. It was something she had willed herself to break away from daily, yet it managed to still reach her on days when she was particularly low. She was ashamed of it.

Finn and Poe had often told her to not let it overwhelm her, convinced the more time she spent away from her awful guardian, the stronger she’d feel. It had worked, until Saturday night, when she had seen him in Rogue One. Any illusion she had held about being safe, being independent had shattered the moment he had appeared. She was still a bit raw from having shared the affect it had had on her with Ben. She wasn’t ready to relive the experience again so soon, even if Luke’s intentions were for the best.

“I don’t want to talk about this.”

He held up his hands, signaling he wouldn’t push her on the subject. “Just keep an eye out on Ben, please. He has never been good about concealing his emotions and I fear what he may do if something were to happen to you, Rey.” He pushed off the counter, where he had been leaning, and walked back towards the office.

But we aren’t together! Rey shouted. The words never left her mouth.

She didn’t try to understand why.

The drive back into town was lonely without Rey to chat with him. He could smell the scent of her lingering in the car. She always smelled warm — if that was possible — and fresh, like the first day of spring or a fresh summer’s breeze. It was an odd thing to sense, but the scent was unmistakably
Rey. He found himself taking slow, deep breaths to savor the reminder she had just been here with him.

Kanata Kaffeine’s morning rush had ended by the time Kylo pulled up. Rose was milling around, wiping down the table tops and collecting trash. A few customers were still enjoying their brews — one reading a newspaper in the back corner while the other two looked to be having a business discussion by the window. No one looked up when he entered, the previous announcement of his entrance long forgotten.

He slipped past Rose, not giving her a chance to notice him, and went directly to the main counter where the owner was. She was banging around with the espresso machine, muttering under her breath.

“Maz?”

She swiveled around so fast, Kylo wondered how she didn’t give herself whiplash.

“Ben.”

There was no note of surprise in her voice. Like his uncle, and at times his mother, Maz always seemed to know things before they occurred. When he had been a boy, she had had a sixth sense about any trouble he considered getting into, long before he actually did it. In retrospect, he could see why such a gift made her a great caretaker, but as a child he had loathed her ability. The way she was watching him from behind her glasses now confirmed his reappearance in her cafe had been expected.

“Back so soon?”

“It’s time we talked.”

“Indeed.” She came around the front of the counter, her fight with the espresso machine forgotten. “Let’s get to it then.”

She led him into her office, off to the side of the main cafe area, where she gestured for him to take a seat at her desk. She sat opposite him, leaning forward, staring at him over her spectacles, as if she was staring into his very soul.
Kylo waited for Maz to speak. The old woman was sure to want the first and last word with him, so patiently, which was a struggle for him, he waited.

Maz continued to stare at him for a time. When she spoke, there was no trace of anger or a long-held grudge in her tone. “What are you doing?”

“I’m here to talk to you.”

“No, Ben. What are you doing with your life?”

“My life?”

“Yes,” she raised her voice, slightly. “You didn’t want to be a Skywalker or a Solo, so you left. You could have gone off and done anything, moved anywhere, yet you choose to go into the same line of work which made your grandfather famous, the same line of work which destroyed his life and his family.”

“My grandfather didn’t-.”

Maz reached across the space between them to swat his hand. Despite her size, he felt a sting where her strike hit his flesh. “Don’t interrupt.”

“Sorry.” He apologized, as he had when he was a boy. It was a learned behavior, brought on by her quick assault when he had spoken out of turn. She had often reprimanded him for it when he was younger. Some things never changed.

“You joined a league and a federation, but they are not the answer you seek.”

“And what do I seek?”

“Belonging.”
Kylo didn’t say anything in return. It was true he had struggled to find connection in his life. After being let down by his parents and later his uncle, he had dismissed the idea of forming long-lasting relationships. It wasn’t until he began spending time with Rey he considered revising his take on relationships. When he was with her, he felt called to her, as if they had been bonded in some unseen way. It was unlike anything he had ever felt before and difficult to describe, but he knew it was special.

Of course, it also made it that much harder for him to do the right thing by her, which would be to leave her alone. He hadn’t been able to follow through on that, even though he had vowed to put her first, instead of his demented fantasies.

As if Maz had read his mind, she asked. “What are you doing with Rey?”

“Excuse me?”

“You heard me.” The old woman peered over the tips of her glasses at him.

“I’m training her. She’s a strong fighter.”

“Most survivors are.” Maz remarked before opening the bottom drawer of her desk. She pulled out an unframed photograph, glancing at it briefly before handing it over to Kylo. “Yours,” she told him. “I’ve been holding onto it all these years. It was meant to be saved for when you had one of your own, but I fear that day may never come.”

“Thanks for the vote of confidence.”

She rewarded his sarcasm with another smack.

“Ow!” He hissed. “You know, that really does hurt.”

“You don’t know what real hurt is,” she shook her head. “I’m giving this to you now to get you back on track.”

Kylo didn’t have a chance to question what she meant by her last statement, as his eyes focused on
the pair in the image.

It was his father, Han Solo, holding him, moments after he was born in Hanna City Memorial Hospital. Han was standing by the window, smiling down at the small bundle in his arms with a rare look about his face. There was happiness there, a proud expression laced with the hint of terrified uncertainty, but ultimately, he looked the part of a joyous father.

Turning the photograph over in his hands, he recognized his mother’s graceful, looping handwriting on the underside.

*Han & Ben, 1988*

Kylo flipped the photo over once more, his eyes focused on the image of his father. In the photograph, Han’s arms were carefully wrapped about his son’s small form. Kylo could make out the tufts of raven hair out of the top of the swaddling blanket. His mother had often talked about how he had been born with a head full of hair. His father would always respond with, “It’s all those good Solo genes.”

A pain, long dormant, resurfaced in Kylo’s chest as he noted how pleased his father appeared to have been at the moment of his birth. Had Han ever looked at him that way again? Kylo couldn’t remember ever seeing such an expression on his father’s face.

“It’s not to late.”

“It is.” Kylo responded. “I nearly killed him, Maz. He has been in recovery the past two years and I never so much as called him.”

“Ben.” She sighed, muttering something in a language he couldn’t place. He stared at her, unsure of the meaning. With another sigh, she ordered. “Go home.”

“Han Solo doesn’t want to see me.”

“You have so much of him in you. Both of you,” she paused, shaking her head, “are far too stubborn. You’re pigheaded, the whole lot of you.”
“It’s the Skywalker curse.”

“Curse? Ha!” She reached over, smacking him across the side of his head. “The only curse your family has consists of your unwillingness to admit when you’re wrong. You are all foolish, jumping in head first without thinking and then when you’ve gone too far you refuse to acknowledge it. Instead, you keep barreling down the same path, no matter how wrong you are.”

“Why are you telling me this?”

“Because you need to hear it.”

Kylo sat back in his chair, humming at her words. “I thought you’d yank my ear and scream into it, like when I was a boy. I didn’t expect you to be so calm.”

“I didn’t expect you to be so lost.”

“I’m not lost. I’m a world champion fighter. I make more money than both my parents combined and I didn’t need either of them to get there. The success I have is completely my own. I haven’t had to use their connections to gain my standing in the league.”

“Just your family name,” Maz pointed out.

Kylo glared at her.

“Tell me I’m wrong then.” He didn’t utter a word. “Snoke knew you were Anakin’s grandson, the nephew of Luke Skywalker. Do you think he would have taken you in otherwise? The man is a leech.”

“Maz.” His tone was a warning, but she didn’t seem bothered by it.

“Your mother never told you he came asking about you when you were born, did she?”

“Who?”
“Snoke.”

Kylo shook his head. Why had the owner of the First Order come to see a baby? Kylo hadn’t even known he wanted to fight until after he had been training with his uncle for a time. Had Snoke seen potential as early as infancy?

“After your mother was permitted visitors, he paid her a visit. I was about to leave when he came into her room. He asked about you, what she had named you, what her plans were for you. He was enraged when she mentioned you were only a day old and you would grow to be whatever you wanted to be. He said she lacked vision. He told her you needed to be trained from as early as you were able to walk so you could be great, even greater than your grandfather. It was then you’re mother asked him to leave.”

“If what you say is true, why wouldn’t he tell me this himself?” Kylo asked, not sure if Maz was making up a story to get him speaking to his parents again or if she was speaking the truth.

“Would you have joined the First Order, if he had?”

He didn’t have an answer for her query. When Snoke had come to him, he had been alone, angry, and adrift. He had been looking for belonging and he found it within the First Order. It answered his call. He had never had a reason to question it.

“Why didn’t my mother ever tell me?”

“She did try. You were always so quick to anger. She recognized the temper from your grandfather. Where Luke saw an opportunity to help you learn control, your mother was still coming to terms with what her father had done. She wasn’t prepared to deal with a child who had the same tendencies. I’m not saying I agree with her approach, but you need to understand how Anakin’s choices hurt her. Your uncle forgave him. She never did.”

“So it’s my fault?”

“It’s all of our faults, Ben. We are all to blame for the fallout, including me.”
Whether it was her words or the way she was regarding him, Kylo couldn’t be sure. Either way, he suddenly felt as if the office’s walls were closing in on him. He felt small, as he had when he was a child, and he felt out of control. Normally, the feeling was heavy and hot, the type to send him spiraling off into a fit of rage. This time, however, it was empty and cold, making him feel as though he was caving in on himself.

He needed to get out of this town and away from the truth Maz had presented him. Maz had never had a reason to lie to him. Despite his desire to not want to believe her words, he knew deep down it was true — all of it. However, by being true, it meant his entire adult life was based on a lie.

Snoke, who he had hailed as his mentor, had lied to him, manipulated him for the First Order’s gain. While Kylo has thought he found someone who cared about him, who saw potential in him, and trusted him to achieve greatness, Snoke had only seen a pay day.

In leaving the academy and devoting himself to the First Order, he had pushed his family further away. He had pushed everyone away except for Snoke. And now he knew it was for not for himself but for his mentor. Had he lost any of his previous fights, or lose in the future, he was sure Snoke would have cast him out as quickly as Luke had.

No one cared really about him. They only cared for what he could do for them.

“I’ve heard enough,” he grumbled, standing up so abruptly, the chair squealed in protest as it skidded back.

“Ben.”

“Thank you for the coffee, Maz.”

“Ben.”

She called again, but Kylo was already hurrying out the cafe door.

Kylo returned to the academy in time to catch Rey in her break between classes. She was practicing
her staff forms when he walked in. For a few minutes, he simply stood by the doorway, watching her. Her movements were precise, yet graceful. Her face was set with determination, but she still looked chipper, the same delightful sunny personality she exuded normally. He found himself grinning as he watched her go through the motions.

*Go home,* Maz had told him.

He knew she had meant for him to return to his parents, to reconcile with Han and Leia before it was too late. She wanted him to go to the city, but he hadn’t seen the city in his mind. The first place he had thought of was Rey’s apartment, recalling the image of her waking up to searching for him and smiling when she did.

Her eyes found him in the mirror and she dropped her staff.

“Don’t stop on my account.”

She bent down to pick up her staff, before glaring at him, accusingly. “How long have you been standing there?”

“Not long.”

“Where did you go?”

“To speak with Maz, as you suggested.”

Rey tucked her staff away, stumbling a bit at his words. When she turned back towards him, her glare was still fixed on him, anger coming off her in waves. “I’m surprised you listened, especially since you can barely put up with me.”

Kylo’s grin fell away from his face. What? Where had that come from? He remembered her leaving the car abruptly, but he had assumed it was because he was at odds with Maz. He figured by clearing the air with his former babysitter, Rey would be happier. She had grown attached to the old woman in her short time in Tatooine. She had said as much last night when she had struck up a conversation via text with him. He understood how important her friends were to her. If he wanted to be a better man, he needed to start being better to the people she cared about. So he had gone back to the cafe.
But she was still upset.

“If anyone is putting up with anyone, it’s you putting up with me,” he said. Her glare faltered for a second. “I don’t have friends, remember? Just my assistant and an unruly manager who is constantly pestering me about going to events to generate good PR.”

“Are you expecting me to feel sorry for you?”

“No,” he answered honestly, stepping down from the doorway onto the matted floor. “I’m making a point. I don’t have friends because I’m not good with people.”

“No kidding.”

He smirked at her, sensing he was beginning to dig himself out of whatever hole he had dropped into. “You’re the only person in a long time,” he paused, sighing as he admitted, “a very long time, that has even tried.”

“You told me you don’t want to be friends.”

“I never said that.”

“You did.” She insisted, taking a step closer to him. “Last night.”

He recalled their text conversation. She had been the first to reach out again, but he had been elated to hear from her so shortly after leaving. Kylo had needed the time during the drive home to think about her and about how to approach his growing attraction to her. Even after the drive, he wasn’t able to develop a plan. In fact, he had been more torn than ever.

Despite his conflicted feelings, he had been looking forward to picking her up in the morning, even knowing he had no right to want her. When his phone had signaled a message from her, he had darted from his bathroom, toothpaste slipping out of his mouth, as his toothbrush nearly fell out in his haste to grab the mobile off his bedside table. He was grateful he lived alone so no one witnessed how he reacted to such a basic communication.
The more they had exchanged texts back and forth, the more he had found himself relaxing, easing into the idea he could have a relationship with Rey. She had told him how Cassian hadn’t been warm to her and how she loved where she lived and what she did now, not because of the work, but because of the people she had surrounded herself with. It had made him remember he had never once asked her what she wanted to do with her engineering degree or without it.

It reminded him that he had spent the last two weeks working to force her into a position at the First Order. He had never asked her about her current jobs not having anything to do with engineering or if she had decided it was no longer the career path she wanted. His self-loathing came back and he had ended the conversation, closing himself off from her warmth and kind words. He didn’t deserve them.

Now, he could see where she would assume he had meant he didn’t want her around, versus the reality. He did want her around. He just didn’t deserve her.

“I said you shouldn’t want to be my friend.”

“Same thing.” She challenged him, moving further into his space.

“No,” he shook his head, stepping forward. They were close now, almost as close as they had been last week when he had considered kissing her. “No, Rey, it’s not. I want you-.”

“Ben.”

_Damn it, Skywalker._

He didn’t break his gaze away from Rey, as he spoke. “Uncle.”

“Can I have a word, please?”

He was still locked on her, unwilling to move. He needed to finish what he had come to say. He needed to be truthful with Rey. He had already confronted Maz. It was time to do the same with Rey. He needed to come clean to her, admit to her what he had been trying to do since he had discovered her ability as a fighter. It was the right thing to do. It gave her the choice to decide
whether or not she should continue to trust him.

So why couldn’t he say it?

“In a minute.”

“Now.” There was an underlying tone of warning in his uncle’s voice. Kylo ignored it.


“Ben.”

“It’s fine,” Rey spoke to him, sliding her hand into his. She gave it a little squeeze. Her anger was gone. “We can talk later. You’re taking me to the club for work, right?” Her eyes were suddenly so hopeful, as she stared up at him. She could have been asking him anything and he would have responded the same, no matter what the ask.

“Of course.”

She gave his hand another little squeeze, then dropped away, heading over to one of the kickboxing bags to work on her uppercuts. Kylo struggled to tear himself away from the sight of her punching the bag. He could feel his uncle’s eyes on him. Inwardly groaning, he pivoted around on his heel and followed him out of the studio to the office.

“Close the door behind you, Ben.”

“What is this about?” He asked, as he took a seat across the desk from his uncle He had the distinct impression he was about to have a talking to, as if he was back in school and the principal was reprimanding him.

“Rey.”

Kylo felt his entire body go tense. Had something happened while he had been at Kanata Kaffeine?
Had Plutt found Rey? Had Plutt confronted Rey? Had Kylo not been careful enough by keeping her away from the academy? Should he call the police to provide new information on the search? He gripped the arm rests far too tightly. No, he told himself. No, if Plutt had come, Rey wouldn’t be so calm. She would have called him, right?

He had to believe she would have called him.

“What about her?”

“She explained her situation.”

The way Luke referred to Plutt coming after her at the club, did not sound like a situation. To Kylo, it sounded like harassment, a threat made against Rey, which did not sit well with him. It wasn’t a situation, it was an incident. The same word the media used when Kylo had another raging outburst, which usually ended up at the top of MMA blogs and the front cover of the local paper. He had never liked the word, but given the circumstances, it fit better than ‘situation’.

When Kylo didn’t respond, Luke continued. “Have you...done anything?”

“Done anything?”

“Did you go after him?”

He knew he could lie. It would only delay the inevitable. He couldn’t hide his intentions from Skywalker, no matter how he tried. His uncle would figure it out sooner or later. If he admitted it up front, he could reassure his uncle there was no turning back. Kylo’s mind was made up when it came to Plutt’s fate. He was done with the cretin. The bastard would pay for what he had done to Rey and once Kylo was done with him, he’d never consider coming after her again.

“Not yet.”

“Ben.” Luke stood up, slamming his hands down on the desk top. “You can’t keep doing things like this! You’re on a thin leash with the court already. Beating the man within an inch of his life isn’t going to help matters.”
“Who said I was going to beat him?”

Luke narrowed his eyes at him. Kylo shrugged, leaning back into the chair, crossing his arms over his chest. “I was considering knocking him unconscious and handing him over to the Hutts.”

“Ben, be reasonable.”

“I am!” Kylo snapped, arms falling down as he sprang forward leaning across the desk. “You’re the one acting as if this is normal. It’s not. She is afraid for her life. If I don’t put a stop to him, who will?”

“The proper authorities.”

“The police? Don’t be ridiculous!” Kylo scoffed. “You know how a man like that operates. They are probably all on his payroll.”

“Not outside of Jakku. There are good people here, Ben. They won’t let him hurt her.”

“Won’t they?” Kylo sneered. “What makes her any different from me?”

“So you’re going to make this about you now?”

“It’s not that different.”

“It is.” Luke insisted. Both men were strained, leaning in towards the middle of the desk as they verbally spat back and forth. “You were a child. You were being bullied. It was unfortunate, but it wasn’t life threatening. Rey is a grown woman. She is being targeted. It is an entirely different situation.”

“Situation,” Kylo growled. “It’s not a situation. It’s a crime. He shouldn’t be walking around as a free man after all he’s done to her.”

Luke’s face paled. “What has he done?”
Kylo stilled, realizing his fatal error. He had admitted to knowing more than Rey had shared with him. While she had confided in him about the verbal abuse, she hadn’t gone as far to describe the years of physical abuse she had suffered at the hands of her guardian. Even so, Kylo had memorized the charts, knew where each injury had broken a bone or ripped her skin. When he saw a flash of scared flesh when Rey moved, he could connect it to the exact date and time she had been emitted to the ER for it to be treated. It made his blood boil.

“He abused her for years, under the front of being a foster father. He manipulated her under the guise of being someone she could trust and when she didn’t keep in line, he’d beat her. He doesn’t deserve to live.”

Luke closed his eyes, taking a moment to digest the history Kylo had shared with him. The old man sunk back down into his chair, rubbing at the bridge of his nose, as if it would alleviate the tension hanging in the air between them. Kylo waited for his uncle to decide how to proceed. While their opinions on how to handle certain events differed, he didn’t believe Luke Skywalker would turn his back on domestic violence or an abuse of authoritative power.

“Will Rey testify to those events?”

“Testify?”

“It may be the only way to lock him up permanently.”

The tension in the office eased away as the men both agreed something needed to be done to protect Rey.

Kylo had known a court mandated restraining order and a prison sentencing were the justice system’s way of dealing with problems like Plutt. He hadn’t put a great deal of faith in the system. From Rey’s files and what she had shared with him yesterday, he didn’t believe she would trust the system either. His uncle, however, seemed to believe it was their only option. For the first time in a long time, Kylo considered returning his mother’s calls. Leia Organa was sure to have connections which could help them win a case if they were to fight Plutt in court.

Asking for help was not an option Kylo had ever considered before. Since his emancipation, he limited his communications with his parents. Going back felt too much like admitting he had been wrong to ask for his freedom at fifteen. However, this wasn’t for him. This was for Rey. For her, he would broker a deal with his mother, if it meant she’d be safe.
“I suppose you won’t call her, if I was able to convince Rey to testify?” Kylo sat down in his chair, beginning to consider the option more seriously.

“No,” Luke smirked. “She may be my sister, but she’s your mother and if she’s going to help your girlfriend, the ask should come from you.”

“Rey isn’t-.”

Luke held his hands up, immediately. “I know. I know.” He sighed, shaking his head. “The both of you are so stubborn. Just like Han and Leia. Won’t admit what is right in front of your noses.”

“I am nothing like my father,” Kylo hissed, ignoring everything else his uncle had said.

“You have your father’s heart, whether you are willing to admit it or not.” Luke chuckled. “Han always ran in, guns blazing, without a thought or care for any consequences and it only got worse when he was trying to impress your mother.” Luke glanced in the direction of the studio, as if he could see through the walls separating them from where Rey was practicing.

“Han Solo is a fool.”

“Yes,” Luke nodded. “But he was a fool who fell in love with a great woman and he has spent every day since loving that same woman...for better or worse.” His uncle shot him another knowing look. “There are worse ways to live your life.”

“Indeed.” He sneered.

When had the conversation shifted from protecting Rey to his parents?

“I’ll go talk to her,” he announced, rising up from his seat.

“Tell her I say hello.”
“Not my mother,” Kylo growled. “Rey.”

Luke began shuffling through some of the paperwork on his desk. “Don’t put off the conversation with Leia too long. You’ve already made her wait years, Ben.”

“Then maybe she should have chosen her family over her career.”

“Ben.”

“I’ll talk to her.” He confirmed, standing by the office door. “But not about that. I made my choice a long time ago and so did she.”

His uncle didn’t try to say anything further on the subject, sensing the subject was closed for the time being. He returned his attention to his business, while his nephew walked out.

When Kylo returned to the main studio floor, Rey had stopped her merciless pounding of the bag to take a long drink of water. He wasn’t sure how to broach the subject of Plutt with her. It was sensitive for her and he was afraid if he said the wrong thing, she’d put her walls up, shut him out. For a moment, he considered going back to the office to have Luke start the conversation off.

While he hated to admit it, his uncle was right. Getting the court involved was the best legal action to take. It would document all of Plutt’s past assaults on Rey so he would be considered unfit to foster any future children and would justify Rey obtaining a restraining order from him. Of course, the man would be going to prison for a long time. At his age, by the time he was released, he would pose no threat to anyone, least of all Rey.

It was then, Kylo realized how he had begun to bond with her. Through their skill, they had found an intriguing challenge within each other. He had vowed to teach her and now the lesson was more critical. The techniques she should be focusing on where self-defense, in nature. He decided honing her abilities on forms which were real-life applicable would not only give her mind something to focus on, other than the fact Unkar Plutt still roamed freely, but it would help her rebuild her confidence after his display at the club.

“Rey?”

“Ben.” She smiled over the top of her water bottle at him.
“I was thinking we could train today, since you have a few hours until the afternoon classes.” He sat down on the top step, removing his sneakers carefully, so as not to mess up the mats. He didn’t need her to remind him again.

Her face brightened at the suggestion. “More Sinawali?”

“No. Today I want to show you some wrist locks and other defensive techniques.” Kylo padded over to her, matching the state of her bare feet.

“Defensive techniques?” She repeated, eyeing him suspiciously. He could see her connecting the dots in her heard as she put two and two together. “Any special reason for the change in curriculum?”

“It’s relevant.”

Rey hummed, but didn’t argue with him. “Alright, let’s do it.”

Kylo stood in front of her and held out his arms, baring both of his wrists to her. “Typically when a man grabs a woman, he will grab her by the arm or the wrist. It’s a predictable behavior to show dominance and intimidate the woman into submission. I’m going to demonstrate a few simple techniques to turn the grab against your attacker. We’re going to go through them quickly and keep practicing them so they become part of your muscle memory. I want you to know them inside and out so you can react based on instinct.”

Rey nodded.

“Grab my wrist with one hand.”

She reached forward, wrapping her fingers tightly around his left wrist and squeezing as hard as she could. Her hand barely made it around his wrist. He spread the fingers of his left hand wide, before pulling his arm up towards his chest in a circling fashion to meet his right hand, which she hadn’t noticed he moved. He effortlessly plucked her offending hand off of his wrist, before bending it back and pressing down across her knuckles. Rey winced at the strained position and the pain it caused in her own wrist.
“Tap out when you feel pain. This isn’t a contest of wills. We’re merely practicing,” he explained.

Rey slapped her thigh with her free hand, indicating she could feel the pressure. Kylo released her instantly.

“The bent wrist press is a simple, yet effective method for turning the attack back on your attacker. Now you try.”

With no hesitation, his hand snapped forward, latching onto her wrist in the same manner she had grabbed him previously. Rey mimicked his movements precisely, following the guidance he had provided until she had his wrist bent back at an uncomfortable angle and he was tapping out.

“Good. On to the next one.”

He gestured for her to grab him once more. This time, he showed her how to get out of using the attacker’s own arm against them, by reversing the energy omitted by the opponent to jam the attacker’s elbow back into their own stomach or chest. Rey let out a grunt as Kylo’s elbow connected with her sternum.

“Are you alright?”

“Fine,” she wheezed, her hand coming up to rest on her breast, before she caught her breath.

“Are you sure?”

“Yes,” she gritted out, as she advanced on him.

He responded by snatching her wrist. Within seconds, she had expertly completed the same lock he had used against her only moments before. When she pressed him into the lock, the pain in his joint was enough to send him to his knees. He tapped out, while glancing up at her. There was no longer a smile on her face. It had been replaced with a vengeful snarl. When Rey wanted to be fierce, she was terrifying.

They went back and forth in such a manner for the remainder of the afternoon, until Kylo had
demonstrated all sixteen wrist lock techniques he had in his repertoire. Rey ran through each with
delicate precision and a grace he had never possessed. Where he was raw strength and brute force,
she was lithe flexibility and finesse. He had chosen these particular moves because they were simple
and could be used by anyone regardless of size or strength. The pressure points were the target,
which made the effects of such a technique useful for those normally marked as ‘prey’ in the outside
world. Rey took full advantage of how effective each lock was. Kylo found himself tapping out
quicker and quicker as the afternoon went on, though she took care not to send him to the floor.

“How do you feel?” He asked, when they paused for a water break. It was nearly lunch time and he
wanted to make sure she had sufficient fuel to continue prior to her afternoon classes and her shift at
the club.

“Good. Great.” Her smile was full and wide.

“You picked them up fast,” he commended her. “Let’s end here for today.”

“What?” Rey’s face fell. “Why?”

“Because you need to eat and rest. We can run through them again tomorrow. I’m still driving you,
until this whole mess with Plutt is over and done with,” he promised.

The smile returned, along with her hopeful expression. Suddenly, she threw her hand out before him.
He stared at her, unsure if she was testing him on the wrist locks, or if this was something else. “I’ll
make you a deal.”

“Deal?”

“Yeah,” she laughed. “We can keep up with this new routine, but only if you join me for lunch each
day. You need to eat too.”

Kylo started to protest. He had seen the limited contents of her kitchen He would not be the one to
drain her cupboards and fridge. He was a large man and he could eat, when he paused long enough
to actually consume a meal. He didn’t want her worrying about him or the amount he could put
away.

“Rey-.”
She withdrew her hand, quickly. “Yes or no, Ben?”

He leveled his eyes with hers. “Rey.”

The deeper tone of his voice did nothing to her. Normally he could intimidate others into following what he wanted them to do — not Rey — she was unflinching. She stood there, stubborn and unwilling to relent. He was positive having lunch with her on a daily basis would not help matters. He was already struggling to remain neutral towards her. Kylo was drawn into her and with each laugh or smile she gifted his way, he fell deeper and deeper into his affection for her, despite his belief he wasn’t good enough for her.

“Going once.”

“Rey.”

“Going twice.”

“Rey!”

“Going-.”

“Fine. Yes. Lunch it is.”

She flashed him a brilliant smile, grabbing her water bottle, then grabbing his hand. In the next minute, she was dragging him out of the studio, towards her apartment. She didn’t seem at all concerned about bursting into his uncle’s office or Luke’s amused expression when he saw her hand clasped around Kylo’s hand. Thankfully, his uncle remained silent, only given them a brief nod in greeting, as they passed to ascend the staircase to her home.

Rey had left the door unlocked this time. Normally he would have questioned her about her lax attitude in safety precautions, but he knew both she and his uncle had been at the studio all morning. There was no way anyone could have gotten past either of them and up to her apartment.
Kylo was about to ask her when she had had time to procure food, but stopped when he recalled the amount of provisions Maz had sent over the day prior. There was plenty for both of them. She was already sticking herself in the fridge to pull out all the options, while he awkwardly stood by her kitchen table, where they had eaten the previous night, unsure if he should take a seat or offer to help her.

“Sit down,” she pointed to one of two empty chairs in her kitchen.

He did as she instructed, not thinking on how he hadn’t hesitate before heeding her command. As he sat in the same spot he had been in mere hours previously, he was reminded of how she had confided in him. Rey had started to trust him enough to divulge information about her past willingly. It was more than he could have hoped for and now she was once again opening herself up to him, permitting him inside her home to share her food with him. It was almost too much.

Almost.

Kylo had been kidding himself if he had thought he could turn down the opportunity to spend alone time with her. Each minute he got to spend with her was beautiful torment. While part of him basked in the pleasure of her company, the other part screamed out in anguish, reminding him he could never truly be with her because of what he had done, because of the monster he was at his core. It was a tumultuous ping-pong effect for his emotions and mental state, yet he refused to remove himself from it or Rey.

Laying out the leftovers from Rose’s delivery, Rey took the seat opposite him. She grabbed a sandwich, before tearing into it, obviously not shy about eating in front of him. It was another one of her defining qualities. Unlike other women he had spent time around within the league on and on the PR circuit, Rey had no issue with eating. If her manners were anything to be considered, she ought to have cared a bit more, but he found no reason to correct her, as he continued to devour her lunch.

He picked up another sandwich, unfolding the wrapper to reveal Maz’s signature Italian hoagie — another one of his favorites. He didn’t allow himself the time to ponder over whether or not Maz had foreseen him sharing multiple meals with Rey. The woman’s affinity for foreseeing the future was far too astounding. He ate in companionable silence with his host, not thinking too long on any subject which crossed into his thoughts.

“It’s been a while since I had lunch with someone.” Rey admitted. “This is nice.” She said to him with a grin.

“It is,” he replied, mirroring her expression.
And he meant it.

Chapter End Notes

A HUGE thank you to everyone for supporting this story. Over 500 comments and almost 850 kudos! When I started out writing this story, I never expected this kind of response. It started as an idea I had while rewatching TFA in anticipation of TLJ and from there it just wrote itself. Having each one of you reach out about what you like best and what you think will happen in the future has been so much fun. I appreciate each note I get.

To those who have followed me on tumblr. I hit 1k followers over the weekend. Feel free to reach out an say hi! I've met so many wonderful people in this fandom.

Major kudos to my beta AbyssalSpark for continuing to provide guidance and feedback as I send her chapter after chapter. You're amazing!
Chapter Summary

In which Rey confronts her feelings for Ben and Kylo confronts the fact that he IS the jealous type...

Chapter Notes

Thank you to my wonderful beta, AbyssalSpark. This chapter is dedicated to her. Not only is this girl constantly giving me feedback and helping me perfect my chapters, but she's an all-around badass and a genuinely beautiful person IRL. Go out to her tumblr and give this gal some love!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Rey woke up to her alarm going off for the second time that day. The chimes echoed through her apartment and she yawned before rubbing the sleep from her eyes. Though it had only been a couple of hours, she felt she had gotten more rest in one nap than she had the entire week prior.

As she rose from the couch, she almost knocked into Ben’s head. She hid a giggle behind her hand at the state of him. He was propped up against the front of her sofa, his head bent forward in an uncomfortable looking position. He had obviously not meant to fall asleep.

She ran her hand over his scalp, carding her fingers through his raven locks. The hair was silky smooth, as if he had conditioned it this morning when he had showered. A mental projection of Ben naked, covered in water and surrounded by steam popped into her head. Rey automatically blushed.
She retracted her hand instantly for fear of being caught touching him without his permission, while daydreaming about him in an inappropriate way.

*Is there a way to daydream appropriately?*

Ben hadn’t stirred at all throughout the exchange. He remained sitting, slanted against the couch with his head hanging down, chin resting against his chest. Rey shook her head. Carefully swinging her legs to the far side of the sofa, she moved around the side of him. She knelt there, one of the throw pillows in her hand, and the other hand gently gripping his hand. She gave it a squeeze, but he remained unresponsive. She tried again, this time also calling his name. The reaction was the same.

From the angle of his head, she was sure he’d come to with a stiff neck, but there was no waking him. Rey placed the pillow on the floor. She nudged him over, until he slumped down the side, where her arms were waiting to catch him and guide him down. Lowering him gently, she brought his head to rest on the pillow. Then, she plucked up the afghan from the top of the couch, before draping it over his body.

Rey admired her work for a minute. In sleep, Ben appeared peaceful and youthful. The harsher frown lines on his face had softened until they nearly disappeared. His hair was hanging in front of his eyes. This time, she couldn’t stop herself from kneeling down aside of him and brushing the tresses out of his face.

She slipped away, quietly, not wanting to wake him. Light on her feet, she crept upstairs to her bathroom. A shower was in order and she had given herself enough time to condition her hair and shave her legs.

While the hot water rained down on her bare skin, she considered the shift in Ben. There was something there, still holding him back, but she could see the difference. She could see how he had already begun to trust her, opening himself up little by little to her. Jyn’s advice was working.

Rey contemplated the words for what seemed to be the thousandth time since her boss had shared them with her. She hadn’t considered the ramifications of having Ben in her apartment. For as much time as they had spent in one another’s presence the day prior, she found herself suddenly nervous at the thought of him sleeping on her living room. No one else had slept over in her apartment before, not even Finn or Poe, who she considered her closest friends.

What did that mean about how she felt towards Ben?
If she was being honest with herself, there was something oddly comforting and domestic about him resting in her home, as if he had done it before. She doubted he had closed his eyes once yesterday. He had kept a constant vigil around her after her black out, always there when she woke.

The first time she had come to, she had searched for him, immediately assuming she had dreamed of his tender care and his insistence she lie down. She believed it was an illusion brought on by her lack of nutrients and sleep deprivation. When she has locked eyes with him, she realized it was real.

Each time she woke, she found him. Each time, he was there, seated in the same position on her red chair, as if he was part of the piece of furniture, a gargoyle guarding its fortress. In his black garb, no comparison could be more fitting, but it also reminded her of Finn’s warning.

*Ren. He’s bad news.*

Rey hadn’t asked Ben about why he had been suspended from the league. Aware of his temper, she wasn’t sure how he would react, but she figured it wouldn’t be well. Plus, she didn’t believe it was her place to question his motives. After how he had taken care of her yesterday, she had to believe there was more to the story than him simply attacking the man.

Turning the water off, she stepped out of the shower, wrapping herself up in a towel. She wiped away the steam from her bathroom mirror, before digging around for her hair dryer and make up bag.

Cosmetics had never been something she was interested in, but both Jyn and Jess had shared with her the importance of looking alluring, especially if she was going to work at the club each night. Though Rey still didn’t love the idea of applying multiple products to her face — it seemed a waste to her — she had to admit her tips had increased a bit and any extra money was a blessing.

Plus, she was interested to see how Ben would react when he got to see her in something other than her typical work out gear.

For the evening, she chose a white criss-cross blouse, black shorts, and a black sleeveless jacket. It was an outfit Jess had lent her with the intention she would wear it when they had their first official girl’s night out. The fabric was smooth against her skin as she got dressed and after taking in her appearance in the mirror, Rey had to admit she actually found herself pretty.

She pulled her hair back, out the finishing touches on her makeup, and then grabbed a pair of black ankle boots to complete the ensemble. Cassian had advised her against wearing any open-toed shoes
at the bar in case of broken glass. Rey didn’t have any choices, and what she did have was meant to last through all seasons, so it wasn’t a concern. The only open-toed option she had was a pair of flip flops.

When she returned to the living room, Ben had rolled onto his side, breathing deeply. She hesitated to wake him, knowing he had had less rest than her due to his commute, but she wasn’t about to ride her motorcycle with bare limbs to New Jedha. Besides, he wouldn’t be happy if she went alone.

Kneeling down next to him, she rubbed his shoulder blade. “Ben?”

“Hmm?” He didn’t open his eyes.

“I have to go to work.”

At her statement, his eyes flipped open. It took a moment for them to adjust, then he was reaching out to her face. “Rey?” Before his fingers could skim across her chin, he was pulling back, his normal demeanor returning.

“Sorry.” She apologized quickly. “I didn’t want to wake you, but-.”

“No, no.” He hurriedly hushed her. “I should be the one saying sorry. I didn’t mean to fall asleep on your floor.”

“It’s fine.” She smiled, watching him rush about collecting his wallet and keys from where he had left them on the coffee table, before settling into the red chair to put his shoes on.

“You really do need a mattress.” He remarked, straightening up. She nodded, following him to the door. He paused for a second, as he opened the door. She noticed his face was red. “I mean...I meant for you. So you can rest. It will be better for your muscles and your back. I didn’t mean to insinuate for me or for us or-.”

“Ben.” She put her hand on his arm, keeping her eyes on his. “I know what you meant.” If she thought her words would help, she was wrong. The blush deepened on his face and his gaze flicked to where her hand was on his arm.
“Right.” He exited, heading down to his car while she locked up her apartment.

How could a man who was so thoroughly embarrassed by the idea of sharing a bed be as bad as everyone labeled him to be? He hadn’t been crude or even suggestive when he had made the comment. She almost laughed at his abashed nature.

Almost.

His concern was sincere and all for her. It was nothing to be laughed at. If she had been confused by the change between them before, now she was even more disoriented.

Attraction was there, certainly, but so was the need to know him, truly know and understand the complex man before her. It went beyond physical attraction in a way Rey was unfamiliar with. She had had crushes before. There were several guys in her high school and her college she had been attracted to.

This was different.

This was something else.

The entire Rogue One crew converged around her as soon as she arrived, with the exception of Kaytoo. She wasn’t surprised the surly blonde stayed away, but Ben seemed to take it as a personal offense, moving to a stool at the end of the counter near the bartender. Rey wanted to know what he would say, but she was too busy explaining the situation to Baze and Chirrut.

“Sunshine, you need to be more careful,” Baze was telling her, when she returned her attention to her little ragtag family.

“I know.”

“If your compassion does not include yourself, it is incomplete.” Chirrut quoted. “Self care is essential to manifesting all things in life.”
Rey giggled. “I’ll try to remember that.”

“Make sure you do.” Cassian appeared at her left, enveloping her in a hug, which Jyn joined on her right side.

“Well, I don’t appreciate you bringing a celebrity to our door, but I was worried.”

“He’s not a celebrity,” Cassian grumbled, as they both released Rey.

Jyn rolled her eyes. “You’re jealous.”

“You wish.”

“You can’t talk your way around this one,” she jeered, shoving him lightly on the shoulder. “It’s written all over your face.”

“There’s nothing to be jealous of.”

“No, of course not.” Jyn didn’t try to hide her laughter. “He has five titles under his belt, numerous endorsements, a penthouse in every major city, a luxury car, a great body, and now some arm candy.” She winked at Rey.

Baze and Chirrut joined in laughing, no one noticing the crimson flush on Rey’s face. Was she that transparent? Could her friends see how she felt about him? She hadn’t come to terms with it yet, unable to define what it was she was feeling. Despite that, her co-workers all seemed to be aware.

“I’m going to start setting up,” she announced over the roar of their teasing. Cassian gave her a nod of acknowledgement, before attempting to calm the crew down long enough to start working.

Rey strolled to the storage room in the back. She scanned the contents of the chamber, before grabbing a box of cocktail napkins and a container of straws. Turning to leave, she noticed another box on the top shelf. They did need some new free flow pourers. She set down the other canisters to
reach for the box.

Her fingers ran across the cardboard, inching along to grasp it. The corners were an inch out of her reach. She struggled to push herself higher on her tip toes, leaning against the shelving unit towards her target.

“Allow me.”

Ben’s voice came from behind her, before she saw his hands wrap around the box. He brought it down in front of her, subconsciously trapping her between his chest and his limbs.

She glanced up and over her shoulder at him. “Thanks.”

His hands dropped to his sides, as he regarded her with amusement. “You don’t know when to quit, do you?”

“I don’t like quitters.” She smiled.

“Me either.” He smiled back.

Rey became aware of two facts simultaneously. First, they were alone in the back of a dimly lit club. Second, Ben no longer wore any hints of embarrassment from his earlier misstep. In fact, he looked completely at ease with their position and solitude.

She felt heat rising through her starting in her lower abdomen and soaring up through her chest. It burned through her, red-hot and lightning fast. Her mouth felt dry and her skin rippled against her internal warmth meeting the cool breeze of the A/C vent.

Slowly, she stepped closer, eliminating the few inches of pace between them. Her free hand met his firm chest, before gliding up towards his face. She watched her own motions, unsure where her forwardness had come from and unaware of how Ben was watching her.

When her fingers traced the line of his jaw, he let out a sharp gasp, ending in her name. His hands gripped her waist, startling her. She dropped the box of pourers. Lifting her eyes to his, she realized...
she didn’t know how to proceed. She’d never kissed anyone before and though the idea of feeling his lips on her own was enticing, she had no clue how to go about it.

Ben must have sensed her dilemma. He ducked his head down, his breath puffing against her and causing the tendrils of hair to sway along her face. It wasn’t meant to be arousing, but Rey found herself dizzy and weak in the knees from the sensation.

“Can I?”

His voice was a whisper into her flesh, a desperate plea for permission and acceptance. She knew if she gave it, things between them would change again, but it didn’t frighten her anymore.

“Rey! Come out here. I want to introduce you to someone.” Jyn hollered from somewhere in the club.

Ben backed away instantly, his hands returning to his side. Rey’s hands fell away as a result and she was torn between putting them back on him and listening to her boss. Ben’s expression had her choosing the latter. He looked like a deer caught in headlights.

As she gathered up all the forgotten boxes, she was at war with herself. She had thought he wanted to kiss her. Hadn’t he asked? His gaze had been intense and seductive. Or had it all been in her head? Were her inappropriate day dreams becoming too realistic she wasn’t able to discern reality from fantasy?

God, what was Ben Solo doing to her?

He said nothing as they left the storage room, furthering her doubt. His face was unreadable. Rey felt almost like crying. After everything that had happened over the last forty-eight hours, she wasn’t feeling like the strong survivor she had always been. She was feeling like her old self, the tiny child who had been abandoned in the unforgiving desert, far from home and far from love.

She scarcely heard Jyn, as her manager helped her organize the boxes in their rightful spots behind the bar.

“Sorry, what?”
“I want you to meet an old friend of ours.”

Jyn lead her out from behind the bar to where a bohemian looking guy sat next to Cassian, flanked by Baze and Chirrut. Kaytoo was cleaning glasses, uninterested in the guest.

“Ah! My replacement.” He turned towards Rey, his face brightening into a wide smile. He extended a hand to her. “I’m Bodhi Rook. Nice to meet you.”

“Rey.” She shook his hand, still struggling to focus on anything other than Ben’s dismissal.

“No wonder they are happy I left,” Bodhi chuckled, as her hand dropped away. “You are much nicer to look at.”

He winked at her and Rey stared at him, wondering if this was all a joke orchestrated at her expense. Did this guy know she had very recently been turned down by the only person she had ever had a romantic attachment to?

“Thanks.” She managed to reply, crossing her arms over herself. The urge to cry was creeping up on her again.

“Andor tells me you are an engineer.”

Rey nodded, resisting the urge to wipe at her eyes.

“I used to work at Empire,” he told her. “As a pilot and mechanic, but I took some time off.”

“Yeah, to find himself,” Cassian muttered, while making air quotes.

She felt her unease begin to slip away. Maybe their guest hadn’t been joking. Maybe no one knew what happened in the storage room between her and Ben.
“It was the right thing to do.” Bodhi insisted. “Gave me time to surf and work here,” he added, pointedly.

“Where are you working now?” Rey asked, appreciating the conversation for keeping her busy. She was aware of Ben lingering at the end of the bar, in the same place as earlier, but she dared not look at him.

“Raddus.”

“Do you know Poe Dameron?”

Bodhi’s face brightened once more. “Of course. We were in flight school together. Wait, how do you know him?”

“I went to Cal Poly with him.”

“No way! Small world.” He was still grinning at her, completely ignoring his other friends. “You were in their mechanical engineering program, then?”

“Yes.”

It had been a while since Rey had had someone to talk shop with. Jyn and Cassian were both handy, to a certain extent, but they weren’t used to the finer details — the nitty gritty — where Rey thrived.

“Were you part of Project Stardust?”

Before she was able to stop herself, she had launched into a debate with the him about engineering advancements being used in the creation of weaponry. Empire was a well-known weapons manufacturing company. Several of their inventions had been funded by the DoD, despite being morally ambiguous. Rey was interested to hear what Bodhi would think of her opinion, based on his involvement with the organization.
“In the beginning,” he confessed. “That was about the time I realized what I had signed up for — what was really going on.”

“You made it right by delivering that message,” Jyn stated, drawing Bodhi’s attention away from Rey. He gave her a small, sad smile.

“You!” Rey cried, with astonished recognition. “You’re the defector who reported the illegal arms dealings?”

“Guilty.”

She had heard all about it on the news. It had been the largest upset a corporation of Empire’s size had ever seen. Their stock had plummeted overnight. They lost contracts and development partners until they were forced to file for bankruptcy. In the end, despite all the churn in the media, they had maintainers operations on a limited front and were working to expand once more.

Still, to those with a conscience, it was a huge win. It had given hope to other employees to come forward about immoral practices and shady dealings, sparking a movement which led to several other corporations falling. For suburban communities it had caused a resurgence of supporting local businesses and had revived the local economies. Of course, Jakku had been excluded from the resurgence, but Rey had still been inspired.

“Wow. That’s amazing. I’d love to hear how-.”

“Rey.”

She was interrupted by Ben’s voice behind her. In her excitement discovering Bodhi’s background and their common interests, she had forgotten he was still at Rogue One. She pivoted around. He was still wearing the unreadable expression.

“I’m going to head out.”

“Alright.” She tried to keep the disappointment from her response.
“I can pick you up in the morning to go to Maz’s, if you want.”

“Holy shit!” Bodhi exclaimed. “You’re Kylo Ren, like the Kylo Ren. Man,” he smacked Casssian on the back. “I leave for a couple weeks and you guys go and get a hot new bartender and a celebrity. When did you all get so cool?”

“Right around the time you left,” Kaytoo sneered.

“I miss you too, you snarky bastard,” Bodhi replied, grinning at Kaytoo.

“I did not miss you. You were constantly late for work and have terrible taste in music.”

“I like your mash-ups.” Rey offered.

“Yeah?” Bodhi returned his attention to her, wide smile and all.

“Yeah. They are good for when I go running.” Something tugged at the back of her mind and she glanced over at Ben, who looked like he wished he was anywhere but here. “Do you want me to walk you out?” She asked, keeping her voice down, so only he could hear her.

“Are you worried about me?” He asked, his face somewhere between annoyed and amused.

She shrugged. “Seems only fair. You had your fair share of worrying about me yesterday.” She leaned into him, pushing him lightly with her shoulder blade.

“I still worry about you.”

The sincerity caught her off-guard. She hadn’t expected him to say anything like that in front of her co-workers, especially after he had showed no interest in trying to finish their almost kiss from the storage room. She was considering trying again, figuring a walk to his car would be the perfect opportunity, when Bodhi spoke to Ben.
“Hey man, are you hanging out tonight?”

“I was actually on my way back to the city.”

“Bummer.” Bodhi went back to focusing on Rey. “Well, Gorgeous, I guess you’re going to keep me company all night.”

“Lay off, Rook,” Jyn teased, signaling the group to disband and get back to work.

“What?” Bodhi feigned indignation. “I need to make sure she can handle being a bartender here. She’s my replacement after all.”

“She’s far superior to you,” Kaytoo shot out, earning him a surprised glance from Rey. He had not once uttered a kind word to her. Apparently he disliked Bodhi enough to acknowledge her beyond his normal snide remarks.

“Awww,” Bodhi cooed. “You say the nicest things, Kay. Can’t imagine why you don’t have a girlfriend.”

“I’m asexual,” the blonde countered.

“I’ve got to get back there,” Rey told Ben, moving away from the counter. “See you tomorrow morning?”

“Actually,” he replied, his eyes fixed on Bodhi’s form over top Rey’s head. “I’ve changed my mind. I will hang out.”

Kylo drummed his fingers on the bar counter top, as he watched the agonizing scene play out in front of him. The surfer-wannabe was shamelessly flirting with Rey.

And he couldn’t do a thing about it.
Rey chooses for Rey.

If she wanted to pursue something with the scruffy looking man, who kept flashing smiles at her and eyeing her up and down, it was her right. She didn’t belong to him or Plutt or anyone. But even as he reminded himself of that fact, it made his insides churn. His fingers stopped tapping and his hands clenched into fists.

I should have kissed her.

The chance had been there, after what seemed like a thousand failed attempts, he had finally reached the perfect moment. They had been alone, low-lightning, close enough all he could breathe in was her scent. Everything had been urging him to do it, including Rey, who had drug her hands up his chest. It had made his heart beat increase and his palms sweaty, but he didn’t want her to stop.

Then Jyn had called and immediately he had jumped back, as if he had been burned. It was the worst reaction he could have had. Instead of maintaining an ounce of control, he let his nerves get the best of him.

To make it worse, he had been so busy chiding himself for his reaction, he hadn’t even offered to help her carry her supplies back out. She wasn’t going to want to kiss him after his disastrous behavior.

When he heard the man, Rook, mention his connections to Rey’s friend and his interest in mechanics, he could no longer stand idly by watching how fascinated Rey was by him. He needed to go. It was a small consolation he would be conducting his own classes this evening. It would be a good distraction to keep his thoughts off his unsuccessful attempt.

As he approached Rey to say goodbye, he heard the surfer-wannabe mention he was a defector from Empire. Kylo cringed, inwardly, as he watched Rey’s face brighten at the admission.

If he was going to lose her to this guy, it was with the knowledge at least he was a good man. He had done the moral thing, the right thing, in the face of losing his job and perhaps his career as a whole. Kylo had never taken such a risk. His standing within the First Order was everything to him.

Or at least, it had been, before he had gotten himself tangled up with the sunshine beauty across the room.
Kylo had been prepared to say goodbye, go back to Ahch-To, and then drown his sorrows in whiskey when he got back to his penthouse. Then Rook had to recognize him and make a big deal out of the fact he was a famous fighter. It was annoying, but not nearly as annoying as when he had referred to Rey as ‘Gorgeous’ right in front of Kylo, as if he wasn’t standing right there with her.

Good man or not, Kylo had never backed down from a fight. It was still Rey’s choice. It would always be her choice, but he wasn’t ready to throw his towel in the ring yet. His decision to stay, had him calling his uncle.

“Ben?”

“I need you to cover my classes tonight.”

“Why?” Even over the phone, his uncle’s voice was suspicious.

“There is a guy here. He is watching Rey and I don’t like the looks of it.” It wasn’t a total lie. Kylo kept his true concern from his uncle to ensure he’d cover his classes.

“Until I can talk to Rey and my mother about building a case against Plutt, I don’t want to take any chances.”

“You think he could be scouting her schedule for him?”

No. He’s scouting something else.

“Possibly,” Kylo replied. “Plutt has evaded the authorities before. He may be a slimy cretin, but he’s smart. He’d be careful about being seen in public around Rey again.”

“Agreed. I’ll take your shift tonight. You stay with Rey.”

“Thank you.”
It had been years since they had had a civilized conversation and Kylo quickly disconnected the call before any lingering sentiments came through. He hadn’t forgiven Luke for his mistreatment. He wasn’t sure if he ever would. For now, though, his uncle had given him the night off and the freedom to stay near Rey. It was a start.

He returned to the same seat, at the end of the bar. The club would be opening soon and everyone was getting things ready. Cassian was talking to the night’s DJ, while Jyn and Rey put up new cocktail lists. Kaytoo was avoiding Rook, as he finished stacking clean glasses. The bouncers were by the entrance, preparing to check IDs.

It left Kylo to himself on the corner. He realized this was the first time in years he had ever been out without Hux dragging him or Phasma dictating his presence due to a work related event. He preferred to remain on his own, not out in a crowd where they served over priced liquor. He briefly considered calling his manager to see if Hux would make the drive out to New Jedha, but the urge passed.

He was already contending against Bodhi Rook. He did not need to throw Armitage Hux, pick-up-line-extraordinaire into the mix.

The club was busy, even though it was a weeknight. As soon as the doors opened, people came steaming in, to drink, to dance, or both. Kylo didn’t see a single empty seat in the house. It kept all four bartenders busy, especially Rey, who seemed to know several of the patrons by their first names. For them, she had memorized their preferred drinks and was well compensated for the efforts.

The defector tried to start up a conversation with him, when he noticed Rey was too occupied to flirt with. He asked the typical questions: What’s it like to be famous? Did you really put Tarkin’s prized fighter out of commission? What was the First Order like? What was his favorite fight?

After laying twenty questions with Rook, who was not deterred by Kylo’s one word answers, he ordered a whiskey from Kaytoo.

“Still here, freeloader?” The blonde bartender asked Rook.

“Only so we can have these moments together, buddy.”

Kylo kept his face schooled so his grimace didn’t show. Kaytoo was salty, but he poured him a double without being asked. “It’s on the house,” he informed Kylo once Rook had moved on to a
group of females at the edge of the dance floor. “For taking care of Rey.”

“You don’t even like Rey.”

“I don’t like anybody.”

Kylo chuckled. “Me either. I guess we have that in common.”

“You like Rey,” Kaytoo observed, voice void of any emotion.

He considered denying it. It would have been in vain. Apparently everyone knew he cared about Rey, except (he hoped), Rey herself.

“She’s unique,” Kaytoo remarked in the same emotionless tone. “Like Jyn. I don’t like her either, but both of them are more agreeable than Bodhi.”

“I’m not a fan.”

“Clearly.”

“There’s just something about him I don’t like.”

“His lack of fashion sense, his regard for personal maintenance, or the fact he’s after your girl?”

Kylo chuckled again. This man didn’t hold back anything. He had no filter. “A bit of all three, I suppose.”

Kaytoo nodded, running a disinfecting cloth over the counter top before another wave of customers came by.

“Enjoy the whiskey.”
He went back to filling orders and Kylo went back to being a quite observer.

As the hours passed, the club continued to maintain a steady business. He scanned the crowd often, but he never catch a glimpse of Plutt. He hadn’t expected the man to show. He had been honest with his uncle when he said the scum was smart. If he had been intelligent, he would have never touched Rey, but even men who covered their tracks as well as Plutt were bound to make mistakes. Kylo need only wait until he made another one before he locked onto whatever rock the cretin was hiding under.

Around 1:30am, he spotted Rey making her way over to his corner.

“Hey.” Rey greeted him, a sincere smile on her face, as she leaned onto the counter, facing him.

“Hey yourself.”

“I didn’t realize you could stay up this late.”

“Old men like to have fun too, you know.” He went along with her favorite joke smirking at her over the lip of his whiskey.

“I’m afraid you aren’t having much fun being around me,” she sighed. “What with playing chauffeur and now body guard.”

“I don’t mind.”

He desperately wanted to put his hand over hers, return the gentle squeeze she had given him earlier at the dojo. He wanted to reassure her he was glad to be here, circumstances withstanding, he would have still been happy to have the night off to sit with her.

“Listen,” she started, all the humor leaving her face. “About earlier…”

Kylo’s brain felt as if it was about to short-circuit. He had wanted to be the one to broach the subject
with her. He had planned on bringing it up on their morning drive, once they had both had the night to sleep on it and return refreshed.

“I wanted to say that I’m sorry.” Rey admitted. “If I misinterpreted what you were doing and made you uncomfortable-.”

“Rey.” He stopped her before she could go further. Kylo couldn’t bare to hear her doubt the connection between them. He had hoped she felt it, as he did, and now that he knew she did, he wouldn’t let her discount it.

“Can we-,” he paused, glancing around. The club was in full swing, but the bar wasn’t overrun as it had been after opening. “Is there somewhere we could talk? Alone?”

The nervous little smile she gave him was breath-taking. “Sure. I think I need to get more limes from the walk-in.” She turned to Jyn to tell her where she was going. Kylo didn’t miss the red tint on her cheeks or how the manager shot him a wicked grin from behind Rey’s back.

He followed her through the throng of club goers, past the storage closet to a large metal door, which had an electronic entry code. Patiently, he waited for her to key in the number, before she was ushering him inside.

“You wanted to talk.” She wasted no time in getting to the point, bare arms wrapped around her. While her outfit was appealing, it wasn’t meant for the cold chill of the walk-in. Already her flesh was pimpled and he could see her breath in the air.

“About earlier-.” He stumbled over the words, suddenly forgetting the entire English language as he was confronted by the very real fact he was about to do this. He had a second chance and now he was going to be straight with Rey. He was going to tell her how he felt.

“Yeah?”

Kylo had never been good with his words. He wouldn’t make the same mistake twice. Gently, he reached for her hands, guiding them to his chest, until they sat in the same position on his chest as before. Carefully, he put his own hands on her hips, feeling the bump of her hip bones under each of his thumbs. Rey eyes didn’t break contact with his own, as he leaned down to meet her.
The instant his lips slotted against hers, he felt a jolt of heated pleasure course through him. It spanned his entire body, head to toe, causing him to feel light-headed and intoxicated. He felt as if he was drowning in the sensation.

She gasped, backing up so she was flush against the door. He wasn’t the only one who had experienced it.

“Don’t be afraid. I feel it too.”

It sounded better in his head, not quite as creepy as it had when he said it aloud, but Rey didn’t seem to care. Her fingers raked along his scalp, carding through his hair before she was tugging him down for another kiss. His hands slid across her back, moving to hold her against him. He could feel her rise to her tip-toes, trying to remain on his level. Bending slightly, he slid his hands down to her bare thighs and picked her up.

She let out a little cry of surprise, which had him grinning against her lips. Her shock let way to a smile of her own, as she wrapped her toned legs around him. Her hands slipped free of his hair, instead winding around his neck to keep herself balanced, never once breaking their lip-lock.

Kylo nibbled delicately at her lower lip, until she gave him entrance. He deepened the kiss, stepping forward to use the door as leverage so he could use his hands to run down her lithe body. Rey moaned against him. He felt it more than he heard it and it had him growling in response.

“Ben.”

Hearing her pant his name had the precious hot lightening sensation focused on one particular area of his anatomy. He wanted her and finally having her in his arms in this position was making it grown more apparent.

But he wouldn’t have their first time be here.

“We should stop,” he told her, out of breath. He touched his forehead to hers, before she was nodding in agreement.

Tenderly, he set her down, unable to resist brushing his lips across hers one last time before he backed away. Her mouth was slightly red and a bit swollen. She had never looked more beautiful to
him then in that moment. He ran his fingers down the seam of her black jacket.

“You said we needed to stop.” Rey reminded him, clasping her hand over his. There was a warning in her tone, but mischief in her eyes.

“I know.”

“So earlier...” Her special smile was gleaming back at him.

“There was no misinterpretation,” he returned. “Do I need to clarify again?”

She hummed, slipping past him to grab a bucket of limes. “I should get back out there. Maybe later?”

“Then I’ll wait all night,” he promised.

What he really meant to say was, ‘You’re worth waiting for.’

But Kylo Ren had never been good with words.

Chapter End Notes

The response is still overwhelming. Thank you EVERYONE for your constant support of this story. For those who wanted Kylo/Kaytoo bonding. I hope you enjoyed :) As a special treat, when we hit 1,000 kudos, I have a special surprise for you all. *hint* PandaCappucino *hint* The countdown is ON....
Losing You

Chapter Summary

In which Rey goes mattress shopping with Jess, Rose, and Ben...with varying results.

Chapter Notes

We hit 1k in kudos since the last chapter posted, so you know what that means!!!! I have commissioned artwork for the kiss by the amazing Panda Cappuccino. I've seen the line art and it's stellar. Can't wait to share it with you all.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
In the days following Plutt's appearance, Ben remained with Rey. Day in and day out, he escorted her back and forth between Tatooine and New Jedha without a single complaint. At the urging of her managers, Rey continued to spend her nights at their apartment, which was the only time she was parted from Ben's supervision. However, it didn't keep him from texting her to confirm she was safe and taking care of herself.

He was diligent in his newfound role of protector, often pulling Jyn aside to make sure Rey had been eating enough and she was sleeping through the night. Regardless of the times Rey told him these things, he always looked to her boss to confirm her story. At first, it had bothered Rey. She didn't understand why he couldn't trust her, especially after Monday night's kiss, but after a week had gone by with no signs of him letting up his new routine, she realized he was still scared.

It wasn't outwardly apparent, at first. It was little glances here or there, brief check-ins. She noticed how he would scan her up and down when he thought she wasn't paying attention. There was nothing predatory about his gaze or unseemly. It was methodical, almost clinical, the same way she
surveyed a new junkar when it had been brought into the shop. Only Finn and Poe had ever watched over her with such dedication before. To have someone like Ben — someone she had kissed, someone she was attracted to — watch her in such a way, did things to her.

Rey began to be more aware the concern in his eyes, the fear he attempted to keep hidden from her. It was obvious he was worried she'd have another episode. Her irritation at his antics diminished and she continued being more open with him. Despite what occurred between them at the club, Ben hadn't attempted to kiss her again. He did find various reasons to touch her, usually during their training sessions, but there were moments when they weren't barefoot and sweaty when he'd take her hand or run his fingers down her arm. Each time, it sent a pleasant shock through her system.

Their new system now consisted of him picking her up at Cassian and Jyn's apartment, taking her to Maz's, then to Ahch-To. After her classes or work she needed to complete in the office for Luke, they would train together. Unlike the first day, Ben remained with her, silently observing her teaching methods, or keeping her company in the office while she worked. He never interrupted her, but he was always there, a comforting presence. When it was time to train, the comfort would remain, but it was second to the protective nature of his instruction.

After moving on from joint locks — which Rey had picked up rather quickly — Ben had begun to show her basic weapons defense. They had started with knives and moved onto gun defense. He explained the statistics, which Rey appreciated but tried not to let discourage her. The chances of surviving such an altercation were low. Still, she was not the type to stand by idly, when she could take action against an assailant. In her eyes, even a failed attempt was better than waiting to get shot.

Around lunch time in their new routine, they would break. Rey would fix them lunch, an act which took a great deal of convincing on her part. The only way Ben would allow her to do it was if she let him buy the ingredients. She tried to pay him once. It resulted in a screaming match and ultimately in them returning to the dojo to spar, until they had reached a compromise. Ben would buy the food and Rey would cook it and let him rest there instead of wasting the gas on a trip back to Coreilla before he returned to take her back to New Jedha. It wasn't really a compromise in Rey's mind, however, Ben's company was worth it.

He had been slowly opening up to her during the course of the week, though he showered at his uncle's place. He refused to use her bathroom, insisting on giving her privacy to clean-up before she cooked. It seemed silly to her, considering they were both adults, until she had recalled how they had both been pawing at one another in the walk-in. Perhaps Ben had a point about staying apart for showers.

Once showers were done, they would eat together in her kitchen. One day the weather was so nice, she suggested they take their meals out onto her balcony. It had been her favorite day of the week. Rey loving the warmth of the hot summer sun against her skin, while it dried her damp hair. The sensation had cocooned around her, helping her fall back into a sense of safety. Of course, having Ben wrap his arms around her, letting her lean back against his chest as they sat there taking in the fresh air, helped more.

She had started to doze off that day, slumping against him as she drifted into subconscious. Ben had scooped her up, taking her upstairs to where her sleeping back was situated. For the first time all week, he hadn't made a comment about her sleeping arrangement. His lack of fight was probably more due to her half-awake state than anything else, but it had also prompted her, to grab his hand when he moved to leave her.

"Where are you going?"

"The couch."
"You won't fit. Stay here with me."

"I won't fit in the sleeping bag."

She had unzipped the entire thing, laying it down, before grabbing an extra large blanket from her shelves. Gesturing to him to lie down, she had been pleased when he didn't argue. Instead, he had shucked off his shoes and done as she had suggested. When she laid down next down next to him, he had immediately curled around her, keeping her smaller form tucked within his own.

It had been the best sleep Rey had had all week.

It wouldn't repeat.

The next day, Ben refused to let her sleep on the ground again. They had gotten into another verbal sparring match, prompting him to cancel their training session for Sunday to take her mattress shopping. Once again, Rey convinced him to compromise.

She had had finally earned enough in tips to buy a decent mattress and had been planning on going with Jess and Rose. Since Ben insisted on going, she told him she'd go in lieu of training, if he took the three of them, which was how Rey found herself waiting for Ben and his Vanquish to roll up on Sunday morning.

Cassian had offered her coffee again, but after how it had churned her stomach the last time, she decided against it. Instead, she opted to hold out for her usual green tea. Ben arrived right at 11am.

He greeted her manager with his usual polite but brief exchange, before gracing Jyn with a small smile, when Cassian’s other half appeared sleepily in the hallway.

"You both look so energetic and fresh. Oh, to be young again," she lamented, while yawning.

"If you're old, then I'm ancient," Cassian teased, before ruffling her hair, as he passed her with two mugs of coffee. He glanced at her over his shoulder before he disappeared back into their bedroom.

"Have fun, kids," Jyn smiled at them. Then with a wink, her smile turned into a devious grin. "I know I will."

"Aaand that's our cue to leave," Rey announced, embarrassed by how quickly her manager and friend had gone from sleepy, doe-eyed innocent to pure sex-kitten. She grabbed Ben's hand and practically ran out of the apartment.

"That was...interesting," Ben remarked, as they made their way down to his car.

Rey giggled, noticing his blush. Apparently, she wasn't the only one who had been embarrassed.

Mortification aside, it was hard not to be jealous of how deeply in love Jyn and Cassian were. There were TV dramas where the couples pledged themselves to each other. Usually the characters had cheesy lines like, "I'd die for her." It was all built up fluff and pointless, considering in the next episode, they were on to the next love interest, but in regards to her managers, Rey was positive Cassian would actually die for Jyn and vice versa.

The two were inseparable in a way so few people were. Their reality was much more appealing than the over-dramatized TV shows Rose had queued up on her Netflix account. Rey found herself hoping one day she would have such a love.

It had never been a concept she spent a lot of time on. Between earning enough to get by, trying to
leave Plutt, and then trying not to become a burden to her friends, Rey's sole focus has been survival for as long as she could remember.

She had never had time to focus on romance or finding 'the one.' Even thinking about such things made her slightly uncomfortable. Letting her guard down was one thing, opening herself up to new friends was another, but giving someone else full access to her heart, body, and mind? — that was a concept she couldn't quite grasp. Besides, who would want a lowly, scavenging orphan like her?

Her own parents hadn't thought she was worthy of love, why would anyone else? Why would anyone want to build a future with her? Why should they? She couldn't even escape her past long enough to make a new future. Plutt has proven that much.

Still, the idea of having a person — one person — who she could share with, talk about anything, fight about anything, just be herself with felt like the perfect fantasy. It was scary and thrilling all at the same time. If her managers were any indication of what it could be if all the stars aligned, she could consider the dream worth having.

Just because she hadn't thought a lot about love, didn't mean she didn't want what Jyn and Cassian had. They had had hard lives too. They had equally tortured pasts. They deserved happiness and if they had found it together, then what could be more romantic?

Together, plus one house guest, she thought guiltily.

"I feel like I'm overstaying my welcome." She confessed, as they drove to Maz's.

"You're only there at night."

"Yeah, but Jyn and Cassian deserve their privacy."

"If it bothers you that much, you could always come stay with me." Ben commented, as if he was suggesting something as simple as trying a new take-out restaurant or a different starting position for their forms.

Before she could respond to his offer — if that's what it was — he turned off the car and she realized they were at the cafe.

Ben turned towards her as he undid his seat belt and the scent of his aftershave wafted across the car to her. She was reminded of how he had held her after she blacked out, how he had picked her up when they kissed, and how he had cuddled her when they had slept together in her apartment.

Suddenly the idea of finding someone to share her life with wasn't so difficult to envision.

It wasn't difficult to imagine spending nights together teaching at the academy, taking a long weekend trip to Naboo for his birthday, eating dinner at a fancy restaurant in Coreilla with her friends — the ideas popped up, one right after the other. In each one he was with her, next to her, holding her hand, kissing her, running his hands through her hair.

A silky soft sensation smoothed over her, like a slow wave rising with the tide, covering her with a blissful feeling as she sank deeper and deeper into her imagination.

Then one of her ideas took a turn. She watched them, in her mind's eye, kissing in the dark, hands wandering all over. Rey could feel the heat bloom through her, as they stripped one another of their layers of clothing, before running hands over bared skin, before his mouth was on her, trailing kisses down her neck, past her collarbone, between her breasts, along her stomach down to her-
"Rey?" His voice called her snapped her out of her reverie.

"Yeah?"

"Are you coming in or do you want me to bring the tea out to you?"

"No!" She scrambled to get out of the car, quickly coming back to herself. "No, I'm coming."

Rey's vision swam, as she pushed her fantasy aside to focus on the day's plan. She needed a mattress. It better be large enough for two and sturdy, her blasphemous mind supplied. She nearly groaned.

She couldn't look at Ben for fear he'd know what she had been thinking, if he hadn't already pieces it together.

She clumsily stumbled over the lip of the curb, in her attempt to reach the entrance before him.

"Careful." He grabbed her elbow, steadying her with a light chuckle. "What's the rush? We have all day."

Her cheeks were scarlet at his words, automatically thinking of the double-meaning there, even if it was only her that recognized it. She was thankful her back was to him so he couldn't see her face.

"Rey! Over here!" Jess waved from a table over to the side.

Her greeting was the perfect distraction. Rey walked over, pausing only to wave at Rose, who was already coming over with a carrier of drinks for them.

"Going to introduce me?" Jess asked, when Rey sat down at the table, Ben sinking into the seat alongside her.

Rey smiled, the blush gone from her cheeks. "Jess, this is Ben. Ben. Jess."

"The Alliance worker." He greeted. Rey couldn't believe he tempered her telling him that. "Nice to meet you."

"I've heard all about you," Jess rolled her eyes. For a moment, Rey worried her friend would let spill the conversations they had during their thrift shop adventure. "Maz has been telling stories about you as a kid and complains you don't visit enough, unless this one," here, she gestured to Rey, "drags you in."

"Morning!" Rose cheerily interrupted, as she began handing out orders for each of them. Rey thanked her, before taking a long sip of the soothing, warm liquid inside. Rose always managed to add the perfect amount of honey.

"How long are you in Tatooine for?" Jess asked Ben.

"Today? As long as it takes to get this one," he mimicked Jess's earlier gesture towards Rey, "a suitable mattress. She can't sleep on the floor forever."

"You're sleeping on the floor!" Jess shrieked.

Rose glared at her, before reaching to put a hand on her roommate's arm, but Jess waved her off. "I could have loaned you our futon."

"It's fine," Rey assured her. "It will all be fixed after today."

"Mattress shopping isn't as fun as clothing shopping."
"Jess." Rose rolled her eyes, then to Ben she said, "It's nice of you to come with us."

Rose had taken a liking to Ben, despite his lasting first impression on her. Rey assumed the exorbitant tips helped in that regard. Then again, Rose was a people person and she believed in second (and sometimes third) chances for people. She strove to see the best in everyone. Rey admired the quality her friend possessed.

Jess, on the other hand, was interested in a suspicious sort of way. It was to be expected. After all, Rey had remained skeptical of Ben's offer to teach her. She had heard the warnings and his own outburst about her not being a part of Ahch-To. The time they had spent together since had changed her mind. She hoped it would do the same for Jess.

If the scrutinizing states and continuing list of questions bothered him, Ben Solo barely reacted. He sat at their table in Kanata Kaffeine with a comfortable air about him, as if he came here as frequently as they did, which Rey realized, due to their new routine was actually sort of true.

Ben hadn't spoken to her about what happened when he talked to Maz. She hadn't wanted to pry. If he wanted to tell her, he would. She wouldn't force him to share information he didn't want to. She had to trust he'd let her into his world in his own time. In any case, whatever had gone on between the two had eased the tension he had worn during the prior visit. She even saw Ben wave at Maz with a genuine smile as she passed by.

The cafe was bustling with patrons who had either just woken up, like Rey, or were looking to score a quick treat as they went about their errands for the day. The predictable rush of people back and forth was calming in a homey, small-town kind of way. She filtered out Jess's queries while she observed. New sounds came and went with the ebb and flow of foot traffic, lulling Rey into a sense of calm she had been struggling to maintain since Plutt's reappearance.

Until Jess's next question broke her out of the lull.

"Why did you get suspended from the league?"

"Jess." Rey shot her friend a 'don't-go-there' state.

"What?" Jess shrugged, not one to hold back. "You two are hanging out all the time. I only want to make sure you're safe."

"I would never let anything happen to Rey." Ben responded, without missing a beat. "I want that scum apprehended, as much as anyone else."

"Still no word from the police, huh?" Rose asked, warily, watching Rey from where she sat with both hands wrapped around her steaming mug.

"No," Rey replied. "Sergeant Mon Mothma promised to alert me as soon as they found him or if anything of importance came up."

"I'm so sorry," Rose removed one of her hands from her cup to place it on Rey's arm. It was still warm from the mug. Rey gave her friend a tight smile.

She had told her friends what was happening, providing them with the same details she had given Luke. She hadn't gone into detail with them the way she had with Ben. She wasn't ready. The fact she and Ben had started off in a verbal and literal sparring match was ironic, considering how much closer she felt with him as opposed to the women sitting with her.

Part of her assumed it was because her first real friends had been males. Poe and Finn had been the
older brothers she never knew she wanted. Ben had a protective streak which could rival both of theirs combined. Another part of her wondered if it was because she was attracted to him, in a way she hadn't been attracted to anyone before. It made her slightly reckless and more willing to be open with him.

"You didn't answer my question." Jess reminded, pointedly.

"It's a long story," Ben uttered.

"That's ominous."

"Jess," Rose shook her head again. "He doesn't have to tell us, if he doesn't want to."

"At least give us the highlights," Jess pleaded.

"The short version? Nines Acord made a comment. I advised him not to do it again. He didn't listen."

Rey knew who David "Nines" Acord was, because of the research she had done on Ben's career. When she had watched various fights and a couple of behind-the-scenes training YouTube videos, she had noticed the red-haired, blue eyed man. He wasn't built like Ben, but he had a nasty look about him. He was disciplined and driven by orders, usually barked in the background by the trainer he was working with.

She wondered what the man could have said to upset Ben to the point of rendering him unconscious. His temper had tampered off considerably since she had met him. Rey reminded herself the man she had seen in the videos was not the same man she was seated next to. Kylo Ren flared up at the tiniest infractions. Ben Solo kept his inner demons locked away. Neither was necessarily healthy.

Pent up feelings and emotions had a way of getting out all at once, like a volcano erupting. If Kylo Ren's outbursts were a metric to measure against, Ben Solo's eventual outburst would be in the same category as Mount St. Helens 1980 eruption. Rey wasn't sure she wanted to be around him when that day came. And it would...sooner or later.

"Nines sounds like a douche," Jess remarked. "Hope you made him regret his decision."

"I'm sure I did."

"Do you regret it?"

"I did, until recently."

"Why's that?"

"Short version. I wouldn't be here right now."

"If you're done playing twenty questions with him, can we go?" Rey asked Jess, before her friend could find a new issue to press. There was a defensive note to her voice, she normally didn't use.

Ben's hand found its way to her thigh, where it had wrapped around hers, hidden from her friends. It was a silent show of affection and it made her entire body scream with delight. As if he could tell, he gave her hand a little squeeze. A fleeting glance at him, revealed he was smiling too, though he was attempted to cover it up by downing the remainder of his black coffee.

Don't be afraid. I feel it too.

His words from the other night echoed in her head, as if answering her unspoken questions. Rey
wanted to reach over and kiss him for his subtle admission. Recalling what had followed her words that evening, she felt like doing something not so subtle. She wanted to force him to put the coffee down, so she could feel his lips against hers again. Once he had kissed her, it had sparked something inside, awakening a need she had never felt before.

Desire was an unfamiliar need for Rey. One second she was confident, ready to take action and pull Ben towards her. The next, she felt awkward and silly for even considering such an act. The fear stemmed from being on new ground with Ben and her uncertainty over what came next.

She remained sitting there, finishing her tea, while her friends moved onto the topic of their day's adventure.

Once they had a game plan, they bid Maz goodbye and headed out to Jess's truck. While Rey's deal with Ben had been for him to take them all, the Vanquish hadn't been designed to hold more than two people. Since Rose didn't have a car and Rey only had the Triumph, it left Jess as their only option.

"Thanks for driving, Jess," Rey told her friend, as she pressed the passenger seat forward so she could sneak in the back. She was saving the front for Ben and his extremely long legs. The man was too tall for his own good. Plopping down, she held the other seat forward for Rose to climb in, when Ben moved past the petite girl to join her.

"What are you? Rey's bodyguard?" Jess asked, as she watched him squeeze his abnormally large form into the back of the cab.

It took some maneuvering, but he was able to climb in, occupying all of the available space next to Rey. She nearly laughed along with her friends, catching herself when she noticed the blush on his face. The red tint rose all the way through him up to the tops of his ears.

"Something like that."

There was no mistaking the sincerity in his voice. He seemed content to cram himself in, as long as it meant he would be seated next to her. It was comical, given his stature, but it was also touching. Rey slipped her hand over his, lacing her fingers through his and giving him a light squeeze. He brought her hand up to his lips, planting the briefest of kiss across her knuckles. It was enough to make her blush in return and she was thankful her friends were too busy getting buckled in to notice the exchange.

Neither her nor Ben had spoken about her first day back at the academy, when Master Luke had interrupted Ben's talk with her. They had never finished that conversation, the one where he had said, "No, Rey. It's not. I want you." He had meant to say more, but at that precise moment, his uncle had interrupted, leaving the remainder of his statement unsaid. It had left Rey teetering between the options of what his words truly meant, until he had kissed her in the walk-in.

Yet, it didn't answer the questions which had plagued her all week. What now? Where did they go from here? What did Ben consider them? Did Ben consider them anything?

There was something between them. She had known for a while they were connected beyond instructor and student or mere coworkers. Coworkers asked how you were doing when you came across a problem in your life. Coworkers didn't uproot their own agendas to play "Driving Miss Daisy" for you, so you wouldn't be left alone. Coworkers didn't take care of you all day when you were sick and tip delivery in hundred dollar bills. Coworkers certainly didn't kiss you while you were on the job in the back of a dark club. (At least, she didn't think so.)
The unspoken bond had become more apparent as they grew more and more comfortable with their new routine this past week. It also had become more noticeable to outsiders, if today's comments from her manager and her friends were any indication. But the longer her questions went unanswered, the more she doubted what had transpired.

The drive to the furniture store provided Rey with a few precious moments to enjoy Ben's proximity. Even if he didn't think of her in the context of something more than the strange limbo they were currently in, she could take advantage of having him near for the time being.

He kept his fingers interlaced with hers the entire trip, content to hold her hand and stare out the window in a rare occasion where he wasn't the one driving her around. Rey used the opportunity to watch him.

Ben appeared relaxed and youthful, much like how he looked when he was asleep. His eyes, dark chocolate brown and so deep, were focused on the scenery, while his lips were slacken. He didn't wear his normal tight expression, as if he was passing judgement on the entire world. The angular contour of his face begged her own eyes to trace over it. She was too busy admiring his physical traits to notice when the truck stopped.

It wasn't until Ben released her hand, she registered they had arrived.

The store wasn't as fascinating as Echo Base. Jessika was correct. Shopping for a mattress wasn't going to be as thrilling as shopping for clothes, but for Rey this was a rite of passage. Her first purchase as a homeowner and subsequently her first step as a truly independent adult. To her, this was the finish line, the gold medal — the rush of a victory all her own.

Jess and Rose gave her space to peruse, while Ben hovered close by. If she hadn't known his profession, she would have guessed he had served as a bodyguard previously, as Jess had suggested.

Rey reminded herself not to look at the price tags. She didn't want to make any premature decisions. She had the day to test out the proper feel before she chose which one she wanted. The knowledge of having the choice, as basic as it was, gave her a boost. To most people it meant very little but to Rey, this was an opportunity she had never been offered before. It felt like a gold medal to her.

The mattress section was in the back, behind scores of set-up rooms ranging from kitchens to living rooms, to bedrooms and even laundry rooms. When she took in the dozens of white, plastic-lining options, she beamed.

She expected Ben to tease her or at make a comment about how it was about time she got a mattress. He didn't. He remained at her side, quietly watching her as she gently sat, then laid down on the mattresses, one by one.

Rey had done research on her phone throughout the week to determine what made an acceptable mattress and what features were most important to her. The first few did not inspire her to take them home. Slightly discouraged, she moved down to the next row.

By the time she made it to the third and final row, she was worried she and set the bar too high. Ben had stepped away to give her space, telling her he'd be back when she reached a decision. Rey figured he was bored of watching her struggle to make her choice.

The struggle ended the instant she sunk into a memory and response foam queen. It confirmed to her body, enveloping her in its soft material. Rey let out a sigh of pleasure, allowing herself a brief moment to close her eyes and enjoy the feeling.
"I take it we have a winner?" Rose quipped, as she and Jess appeared on Rey's left side.

"Absolutely," she grinned, rolling off the bed to take a look at the tag. If she was to hazard a guess, she assumed it was more than she wanted to spend, but it would be worth every penny.

"Aren't you going to let Ben lay on it?" Jess asked.

Rey raised an eyebrow at her. "Why?"

Her friend rolled her eyes, then glanced over her shoulder to make sure the subject of their conversation was otherwise occupied. Rey noticed he had wandered off to look at an obnoxiously large TV stand.

"That man is clearly into you, Rey," Jess stated matter-of-factly. "And you are into him, so what's the deal?"

"Nothing." Rey replied, hastily.

Jess latched onto her quick answer, yanking Rose over to join in the discussion. "Nothing, huh? Sure doesn't look like nothing."

"So a guy can't be my friend and come along with my girl friends to help me out?"

"That's not it and you know it," Jess argued. "You don't look at him like a friend and he certainly doesn't look at you like a friend."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Rey," Rose stepped in. "The way Ben takes care of you… he's very attentive and that's a good thing. There's nothing wrong with how well he's treated you, especially given the circumstances, but I agree with Jess. His feelings for you go beyond friendship."

Having her friends share their opinions on the matter only furthered her frustration with not bowing where she stood with Ben. If he cared as much as they suspected, why hadn't he said anything? Why hadn't he kissed her again? He had had plenty of chances. The entire week had gone by, providing him with endless opportunities, but he hadn't taken a single one.

"We kissed." She finally admitted, aloud.

Rose made an 'awww' sound, while Jess's pupils were blown. "That's it though. Nothing else has happened. It's almost been a week." Her last statement came out a bit pathetic, which had her cringing.

She shot a glance in Ben's direction once more to ensure he hadn't a word. He was busy looking at the price tag of the same TV unit, completely ignorant of their conversation.

"Why not?"

Rey shrugged. "I thought he would have tried again or said something, but he hasn't. Not once all week."

"Wait, wait," Jess held her hands up. "This happened a week ago and you are only telling us now?"

"Shhhh!" Rey hushed her friend, worried her increasing volume would draw unnecessary attention to them.
"And why didn't you do anything?" Jess continued, disregarding Rey's caution.

"What was I supposed to do? He probably regrets it."

"I doubt that," Rose interjected, eyeing Ben from across the room.

"You are supposed to make another move," Jess replied, simultaneously. "Not wait a week over analyzing the situation."

"I'm not-.

"You are," both her friends chorused.

Rey glared at them. She opened her mouth to disagree once more when a sales associate interrupted.

"Can I help you ladies with anything?"

Ben somehow ended up next to her a split second later, causing the male associate to take a step back.

"Would your boyfriend care to test it out?" The associate turned to Rey.

"Yeah, Rey," Jess snickered at the store worker's repeat of her earlier question. "Would he?"

The double meaning to her friend's tease had her blushing. She couldn't bring herself to look at Ben in that moment.

"Whatever she wants," Ben responded, evenly.

The salesman ran through his spiel about the mattress and the manufacturer. Jess and Rose took it as their cue to pretend to be interested in some kitchen cabinet units, while Ben remained aside of her. Rey expected him to put his arm around her or hold her again. He did neither.

When the associate stepped away to grab the required paperwork for Rey to fill out, she didn't know what to say to Ben. Jess and Rose had made it sound as if it was a done deal. She wanted to believe that. She wanted to know more about Ben and continue spending time with him, regardless of the Plutt situation. Oddly enough, Plutt had been the catalyst for sending them into each other's arms. Rey didn't know what to make of that, only that she didn't want it to end when her former guardian was taken into custody.

"I'm glad you found one you like." Ben offered.

"Guess this will get you off my back about having a decent place to sleep now, huh?" Rey nudged him, playfully. As she said the words, she thought of how comforting it had felt to have her back against his chest when they had fallen asleep under the blankets in her apartment. She wondered if having a real bed would change anything about their routine?

"You will thank me later," he replied. "When your muscles aren't sore and your body isn't constantly tired from not getting adequate rest."

"Ok, old man."

"Don't start." He pushed her back, grinning down at her.

"What are you going to do about it?" She poked him with her pointer finger, trying not to get distracted by how firm the muscles in his arm were. She thought of how those arms had picked her
up when they were at Rogue One. Her cheeks erupted in a fresh flush.

"Wouldn't you like to know?" He taunted, nudging her again, this time with more force.

Rey felt the familiar fire flicker to life within her as she watched him watching her. All it would take to kiss him now would be to rise up and fist his shirt to pull him down a bit to her level. It would surely raise a few eyebrows, but at the moment she didn't care. All she could think about was being back in his arms with his mouth pressed firmly against her own.

"Ma'am, if you're ready, we can do the paperwork over here."

She all but screamed in aggravation at the reappearance of the sales associate. Burying her longing, she stepped away from Ben, to talk to the associate about delivery and the warranty. Rey followed the man across the showroom to the counter. He mentioned he was pleased she had come to a decision so soon and began going over the forms needed to fill out. Rey nodded, scanning each of the documents as he presented them. Deliveries happened daily and they could set up the mattress in her apartment tomorrow. All of the rest of the contract was cut and dry, until she reached the end.

When she moved to the last sheet, she noticed the pricing at the bottom where the balance was listed as $0.00.

"Excuse me?"

"Yes?"

"I think this printed out wrong. It says there is a zero dollar balance for the mattress."

"That's correct." The associate smiled at her, collecting all the sheets and stapling them together. "Your boyfriend already paid the amount in full."

Rey's earlier desire burned away at the response. She hadn't seen Ben approach the sales counter or any associates. When had he managed to do that? And more importantly, why?

Ben had taught her to be aware at all times. It was a priority for self-defense. The more aware she was of her surroundings, the more aware she became of him. First, it was how he watched her and the tiny intricacies of his body language, such as how his lips trembled before he said something he was embarrassed about or unsure of. Then she started to become aware of other traits, like how he smelled when he got close or how warm he felt when she touched him. The more aware she let herself become, the more grateful she was he left her alone with Cassian and Jyn at night. Her dreams were exceedingly tempting, causing her to wake up drenched in sweat and with an unattainable need.

In that moment, however, she was not thinking of her carnal needs, but of how she was needed to kick Ben Solo's ass for going behind her back. Her lustful passion transformed into another passion: anger. She had been saving since she started at Rogue One and purchasing the mattress for herself was a milestone she had been looking forward to. She didn't want him constantly buying her things, even if he had good intentions. She needed her independence. It was the driving factor around how she had survived — her motivation for breaking away.

And Ben had snatched it away from her.

Not wanting to cause a scene, she signed the paperwork, passing it back to the waiting associate with a tight-lipped smile, before heading back out to Jess's truck with her friends. When the girls asked her if she wanted to have another 'Orange is the New Black' binge-fest at their house over Chinese, Rey declined, feigning a headache. The girls accepted her excuse, though they both seemed to grasp it as
the white-lie it was. No doubt, they assumed she wanted some time alone with Ben. It was true, but not in the way they imagined it to be.

He must have sensed it too. Not once did he make a move towards taking her hand or stealing a kiss, as he had done on the drive to the store. He sat stiffly next to her, his knee bobbing up and down as his foot tapped impatiently during the ride back.

Rey waited until Jess and Rose had driven away from Ahch-To to confront Ben. As they made their way inside and upstairs to her apartment, she heard him sigh. He looked like a child being sent to the principal's office, but she couldn't find it in herself to feel bad about it. He had crossed a line and what made it worse was the fact he knew it.

Once inside her apartment, she let the door slam, before facing him, arms crossed over her chest.

"You're mad?" He asked, clearly confused by her reaction.

"Yes, I'm mad!"

"Why?"

"Do you have any idea how important this was to me?"

"The mattress?"

"No… yes! You-." She cut herself off, shaking her head, anger radiating off of her. It wasn't the mattress — not really. It was the fact he thought he could choose for her, like how he had nearly taken her to his place the day she had blacked out, because he deemed her furnishings insufficient. His judgement, at such a powerless point in her life, had stung. Somehow, she had managed to convince him it was essential she remain in her home. She would do the same now.

Before she went about persuading him, Rey sought to remind herself they hadn't known one another for long. Regardless of how deep into their connection she had fallen, they had only been in one another's orbit for a matter of weeks. She needed to maintain perspective while exploring the topic with him.

"Ben," she started, calmer than before but still tense. "I have never be able to afford anything new before. Everything I own is either a hand-out, passed down, scavenged from the dumpster, bought at a yard sale or thrift store...I've never had money to actually purchase something for myself, something truly mine."

He stared at her. She couldn't tell what he was thinking or if he was even comprehending what she was trying to convey to him.

"This was the first time in my life I've had the funds to do that. Buying this mattress, well it may seem trivial to you, but to me this is it. This is what I've been working so hard for. I wanted to be able to splurge on myself, but something new that could be mine — just mine. It doesn't really have anything to do with the mattress, per say. It's about me having the ability to buy it on my own without anyone's assistance."

Still he said nothing and if that didn't grate her, she didn't know what did. The annoyance she had felt, at being unable to decipher how he felt towards her, was cast aside in the light of this development. After all she had shared with him, she had expected him to understand. She had opened up old wounds, starting sharing secrets with him about her more vulnerable times. Instead of him carrying the knowledge and recognizing how and why she operated the way she did, he once again tried to buy her.
"And you come in with your whole 'throw money at' it routine, which is the only way you know how to solve problems, apparently."

Ben's face paled, as if it was finally clicking in his head. "Rey, I-.

"No," she held up a hand to stop him. "No, you knew how important this was to me. I told you I didn't want you buying everything."

"I have the money. I can buy it."

"Just because you can, doesn't mean you should."

"Rey, it's only a mattress."

She couldn't contain her rage anymore. It was boiling over.

"No! It was more than a mattress to me. It was my gift to myself for putting myself through college, for surviving at Plutt's, for striking out on my own with no one to help me...and you took that from me!"

"I was only trying to help. I want to take care of you so you don't have to worry about things like money," he confessed.

"I can take care of myself. I've been doing it my whole life."

"That was before me."

Later, Rey would regret saying it. In fact, the moment she shrieked at him, she wished she could take it back. Neither of them were prepared for her words when she lashed out in retaliation.

"You don't get to make my choices for me. You aren't my boyfriend!

The apartment stilled. She didn't even breathe afterwards. The statement hung in the air around them, echoing in their minds in a torturous repeat. If Rey had doubted his feelings prior to this moment, Ben's affection for her was confirmed in his eyes as he took in her expression. She had never seen him look so wounded. It was far worse than when she had socked him in the face during their first sparring session. There was a faint hint of tears, held back and his form contracted, almost as if he was caving in on himself. Rey felt sick at the sight.

Finally, the silence was too much for him to bear and Ben sighed.

"You're right. I'm not," he muttered.

Without saying anything else, he exited her apartment. Rey was howling on the inside, her mind shouting at her to move or speak. She was paralyzed. After waiting all week for an answer, she had found one — at great cost. Her stomach churned in horror at what she had done. Each thundering step Ben took down the stairs, sounded like a nail in the coffin of their relationship.

Minutes felt like hours, until she heard the Vanquish turn over and gravel kick up as he pulled out of the academy's apartment. Rey watched him depart, still frozen in her spot, her throat raw from tears not shed and her chest aching with how empty her home suddenly felt without Ben's presence.

When she could no longer see him, her body unlocked and she sunk to the floor crying.
Don't kill me! We all knew it was not going to be smooth sailing for these two. They both have trust issues, among other things.

Thank you AbyssalSpark for continuing to support me and this story. I may have made her cry with the ending of this chapter - for which I am still sorry!

Thanks to everyone who has taken the time to read, comment, kudo, etc. I had a rough weekend IRL and when I logged in today to post this chapter, reading all the feedback made me feel better.
What It’s Like to be Lonely

Chapter Summary

In which Kylo obtains guidance from an unexpected source and gains perspective after his fall-out with Rey...

Chapter Notes

This chapter is up a bit late, due to some health issues I've been having. Hoping to keep up with my regular posting schedule from here on out.

As an added bonus, please check out the absolutely gorgeous artwork by @PandaCapuccino of the kiss from Chapter 14. PLEASE DO NOT REPOST! This was a commission for the story and I'd appreciate no one stealing this piece of art from myself or the creator, who worked very hard on crafting this piece. Thank you.

See the end of the chapter for more notes
“Penny for your thoughts?”

Kylo Ren blinked several times, his surroundings slowly coming into focus, as he came back to himself. After the showdown at Rey’s apartment, he had barricaded himself in self-loathing and dark thoughts. It was there he was able to cancel out the pain of his mistake. He beat every piece of equipment in his training room, as opposed to combating the rage he had storming inside him. It was a losing battle, regardless of his efforts. What he was fighting was himself. He was always going to lose — just as he had lost her.

His apartment was reminiscent of a war zone. Broken glass, wood, and tile decorated the floors and
countertops from his numerous outbursts. He had cut himself more times than he could count, but refused to report to Mitaka for care.

Phasma had returned from her vacation relaxed and sated. Her refreshed demeanor lasted about thirty seconds before she was fielding calls for Kylo, who had broken his cell and ripped his landline from the wall. He didn’t want to speak to anyone, which resigned her to using more personal tactics, by coming to his pad every morning.

Normally, her presence would have shaken him out of his stupor, if not for her get-it-done attitude, then for the mere decency of having her only see him at his best, since he was her superior. Kylo couldn’t find it in himself to care. Appearances meant nothing. Phasma knew what a disaster he was.

And now Rey did too.

He hadn’t even been able to keep her a week, bursting the little bubble they had been operating within for a precious few days. It had been the first time in years he had felt truly happy, so, of course, it couldn’t last.

*Monsters don’t get happy endings,* he thought bitterly.

Kylo had gone through the motions all week, his body on autopilot. He only drove to Ahch-To for his classes, barely speaking to his uncle and avoiding any conversation involving the other instructor. Rey must have been avoiding him too. He hadn’t seen her once all week. Each time he arrived, her Triumph was in the gravel parking lot, but she was missing from the building. Her absence could be felt, as if the structure itself could sense the change in their relationship.

He tried not to think on it too much. In his weaker moments he worried about her commuting back and forth, while her tormentor was still out there, but she wasn’t his to worry about. She had made that clear.

Nothing hurt worse than her biting retort.

His parents’ absence, his uncle’s dismissal, not even Snoke’s questionable methods for producing a champion had affected him the way Rey’s rejection had. The after effects had him spiraling down a dark hole, reliving every failure and disappointment of his life, over and over again, until he struggled to complete the simplest of tasks.
By the time he found himself in the court appointed psychiatrist’s office, Kylo could hardly concentrate on anything, least of all his doctor’s words.

Per the court’s order, he had been assigned therapy sessions once a week until his six month sentence had been served. The doctor submitted weekly check-in reports with the league on his progress, which he was required to sign as a demonstration of his attendance. It was all by-the-book and terribly inconvenient, when he’d rather be training in the confines of his apartment or drinking down all the whiskey Phasma dared to bring him. She had threatened to withhold it from him if he didn’t get up and go to see the therapist this week, as he was required to.

The main topic of discussion with the doctor was his aggression. Typically the hour long session went by without much notice. She asked him the typical questions about his childhood, his emancipation, and his aggression in and outside the ring. He knew what to say in order to be granted a clean bill of mental health. He chose not to elaborate more than was necessary. In fact, he had rarely uttered more than one word answers to Dr. Kaydel Connix the entire time he had been seeing her.

Until last week.

“Your mood improved considerably last time we spoke,” Dr. Connix remarked, her ballpoint pen dancing across the pad of paper balanced on her knees. With her plain, pantsuit and her hair tightly pulled back, she had a professional and clinically detached persona, perfect for someone in her line of work. “Would you care to explain why you’ve reverted back to your original demeanor this week?”

“Do I have a choice?” Kylo returned, feigning indifference.

“You always have a choice, Ben.”

“That is not my name,” he snapped.

“According to your medical records, it is your birth name.”

“According to my legal records, like the ones tied to the bank account which pays for your services, my name is Kylo.”
“This is why you are here.”

He was aware. He had regularly arrived at her office weekly, taking the earliest morning appointment she had available, knowing he’d be up. He was accustomed to early hours from his years of training with the First Order. More recently, the time had worked in his favor for another reason. Rey was taught the morning classes and his absence wouldn’t affect her. His uncle was there to watch her while Kylo maintained the requirements of his court mandated punishment.

As it was, there had been no further sightings of Unkar Plutt and Rey had returned to her normal, vibrant self. He had tried to broach the topic of going to his mother for legal aid a couple of times. Each time, he had almost proposed it, when she'd ask him a question unrelated to his train of thought and it derailed the best of his efforts. If he was being honest, though, he had been acting selfishly, allowing the unresolved threat to serve as an excuse for his proximity. At the time, she hadn’t acted as though she minded, making a deal with him to stay with her for the majority of her day and cooking meals for them. There was a sense of domesticity to the routine, one which he never thought he wanted, until it was right in front of him.

While taking advantage of Plutt’s threat wasn’t as despicable as his previous plotting, he knew it was wrong. He had begun making progress with Rey over the course of their final week together. When she asked questions, he always gave her an honest answer, even if she asked about his life before the First Order, when he had lived with Luke or even earlier on.

She had done research on his mother in college, so she was familiar with Leia’s political platform and the advancements she had made. What Rey didn’t know was how a hero to the people could forsake her own son. It hadn’t been a pretty discussion. When he had finished detailing the nights without his mother to tuck him in or how Maz had become more of a maternal figure, Rey had nearly been in tears, gripping his hand so tightly he considered tapping out. The joke would have caused her to break her contact with him. He hadn’t wanted to lose her touch, regardless of the pressure her tiny body was capable of producing. Besides, it didn’t hurt as much as the next conversation.

Han Solo had always been an extremely sensitive subject for Kylo. It had stung him to hear Rey’s excitement over his father. She admired him more than Leia, considering him a legend. From scoundrel to hero, he had captured her heart with his adventures, spurred to change because of his love of a young politician. Kylo had cast his reservations aside, reminding himself, that Rey made her own choices. If she wanted to know about Han, the infamous smuggler, he’d share all he could with her, even how he had ended things with the man.

Thankfully, they had never reached that conversation.

The only thing he hadn’t been honest with Rey about yet, were the files in his office. He had deleted all the copies from his laptop and his mobile, but he hadn’t been able to part with it completely. He
chose to keep a printed copy in his apartment, in his top office drawer. It sat there, lurking just out of sight, but not out of his mind. His greatest sin against her and one she, hopefully, would never know about.

The sin he was paying for now was different. Wrath. Dr. Connix made a point to ask him how he was handling it each time he showed up at her door. If he expected to resume fighting, he needed to become better at handling his emotions.

“I appreciate your understanding about last week’s session. My-.” He cut himself off. His what? How did he classify Rey? He hadn’t know how to label her last week. He sure as hell didn’t know what to classify her as now.

“Friend?” The doctor supplied, after his silence went on far longer than was appropriate.

He nodded. It was the simplest explanation, though he hated how it limited all that she was to him. Prior to their falling out, he had considered Rey more than a friend. While he had stayed close to her since her episode, it was her light, her warmth, which had soothed him. Her insistence on sharing her meals and her apartment with him was the most comfort he had been offered in many years. He had always considered home to be a place, but the more hours he spent with Rey and her infectious mood, the more he believed it was a person.

No, Rey hadn’t been his friend. She had started becoming his home.

“Is this the cause of your changed manner?”

Kylo nodded once more.

Dr. Connix’s eyes flashed with genuine interest, but she didn’t press him. Instead, she was content to continue scribbling on her notepad.

“She was…is-.”

“She?” The doctor leaned forward, her attention locked on him. “What is her name?”
“Rey.”

“Rey.” Connix smiled, kindly, as though merely speaking the name aloud brought a picture to mind. Nothing the woman across from him could picture would capture the true essence of Rey. Even if he attempted to describe her, it would fail in comparison.

“She is being targeted by a dangerous man. He came after her and...”

...I wasn’t there to protect her.

The guilt from Plutt’s reappearance was still eating away at him. Even though he hadn’t seen Rey in nearly a week, he felt partially to blame for her episode. It was the stress of the wretched man in her life which had driven her to such a state, rendering her helpless when she was anything but. Having witnessed her at the low point had been a turning point for Kylo. He realized in the instant Rey fainted, he would do whatever he could for her. The possessive nature of his attention morphed into a solicitous intent.

Intentions were what had gotten him involved with her in the first place. It was poetic that his intentions were also his downfall. He had intended to drive her away from the academy, securing it as his own. The objective was not achieved. Kylo had lost his desire to pursue it once he had fallen under Rey’s spell. His intentions became all about keeping her safe and spending as much time as he could with her. Somewhere along the way, the need to keep her safe, developed into a need to take care of her, hence his insistence on buying her the mattress.

“And none of it matters now, because she isn’t speaking to me.”

“Why?”

Kylo narrowed his eyes at the psychiatrist.

“Ben,” Dr. Connix started, “You may have been ordered to attend these sessions, however, I would encourage you to make the most of them. Everything said is confidential, unless you reveal you are a harm to yourself or others.”

I am harmful, he thought, ruefully, his thoughts drifting to the folder of information on Rey. It was searing a hole in his desk and his mind.
“If you two had a disagreement, you should try to resolve it. Obviously, this relationship is important to you, otherwise it would not be affecting you. I suggest reaching out to her. Talk about what happened.”

“I told you,” he snarled. “She isn’t speaking to me.”

“Have you given her a reason to?”

If looks could kill, Kylo was sure the woman across from him would have dissolved into a smattering of dust. How dare she ask such an impertinent question! She had no idea how he felt towards Rey or what he would do for her. She had no right to make assumptions about what he had or had not done.

“That’s what I thought,” she replied, somewhat smugly, taking his silence as the answer she sought. “Tell me this. In terms of your argument, does she consider you in the wrong?”

“I didn’t do anything wrong!”

“Listen closely to what I am asking you.” She paused, leveling her eyes with him. “Does she consider you in the wrong?”

Kylo focused on the glass and rod iron coffee table in between them, adorned with various hand blown glass animal sculptures. He contemplated how Dr. Connix would word her weekly report to the federation if he destroyed her menagerie. Obliterating her possessions wouldn’t get him signed off, so he pushed the temptation from his mind to analyze her query.

As he had numerous times on his drive home from Tatooine, he replayed his fight with Rey. The conversation they had had was seared into his memory, preserving the instant he had lost her. He had berated himself for thinking she would ever choose him. She didn’t want to be with him. He was a means to an end, a friend to hold her hand while she recuperated. She would choose another, someone better suited for her light.

Choose.
You don’t get to make my choices for me!

Shit.

Kylo swallowed the growing lump in his throat. Hadn’t he recited to himself his mantra enough times to recognize when he wasn’t heeding it?

Rey chooses for Rey.

“Well?” Dr. Connix coaxed.

“Yes,” he breathed the word. “She believes it is my fault and she’s right.”

“Is she? Or are you saying she is because you believe it is what I want to hear?”

“No.” Kylo replied with confidence. “I bought her a mattress, something she wanted to buy for herself. I didn’t understand why she was upset. I thought women liked it when men bought them things.”

Dr. Connix pressed the top of her own against her lips with a hum. “Stereotypes are dangerous. These preconceived notions society has are often oversimplified or entirely false. While in some cases, they may be true, every person is unique and no one fits exactly into a perfect mold.”

When Kylo didn’t respond, she continued.

“Your friend sounds like an independent individual.”

Surprising himself and Dr. Connix, Kylo shared with her the highlights of Rey’s background and how she came to live at the studio, while working two jobs to get by.

“Ah,” the psychiatrist nodded. “Then I can understand why this purchase would be significant to her. The item itself is irrelevant. It could have been a pack of chewing gum. In any case, the fact you viewed this as a gallant effort, while she viewed it as an act of dominance, is what sparked the
“Discord.”

“From your perspective, you were envisioning this as a gift, a token of your feelings for her. You were working to nurture the bond you feel with her. To her, however, your actions are an exercise of your control over her. Not only are you taking away her power as an individual, but you are disregarding her effort to achieve this level of financial freedom she has worked towards.”

_Fuck._

There it was, as plain as black and white, in front of him. It had taken him coming to a shrink to figure it out, but now he understood why Rey had gotten so upset. He had done the exact thing he had promised her and himself he would no longer do — try to control her.

Inadvertently, he had forced his decision upon her, setting them back or quite possibly terminating their relationship all together.

“What should I do?” He felt foolish for voicing his question out loud. If Dr. Connix thought it silly, she didn’t let it show.

“You know her better than I do, Ben. What do you think you should do?”

“I don’t know!” He said, brusquely. “If I did, I wouldn’t be here asking you!”

She didn’t respond to his anger. She remained composed and unflinching in his presence. Wherever Hux had found her, he had certainly done his research to make sure she wouldn’t scare easily.

“Fair enough.” She smiled at him. He glared back. “Have you considered doing something to give her back power. Offering to alter the dynamics of your relationship in her favor may make her feel more comfortable with you and change her mind about speaking with you.”

“How exactly do you propose I do that?”

“You need to figure that part out for yourself, Ben. I can’t claim to have all the answers. My role is to guide you to find those answers on your own.”
“And if this doesn’t work?”

“Sometimes relationships fall apart and cannot be mended. This is a fact of life. If, unfortunately, Rey can’t move past what happened, you need to understand and let her go.”

Kylo wasn’t sure what hurt worse — knowing he had caused the issue with Rey or knowing if she chose to never speak to him again, he had to honor her decision.

“If this friend of yours is as important to you as it seems, regardless of the outcome, perhaps you would benefit from additional relationships.”

“Excuse me?”

“During our prior sessions, you have communicated you have few relationships and those you do have are maintained for your career, not out of any personal gratification. Have you considered expanding your network to include others besides, Rey? It could be quite cathartic.”

“No.”

Rey was a special case. She had never been scared of him. It was unwise on her part, but it had intrigued him. Her reactions were never predictable and she remained constantly positive and assertive, never once giving an inch when he pushed. If he managed to beat her during one of their sessions, she was quick to learn and reestablish herself against him the next time they met. She rose to every occasion, gave as good as she got.

It was how she acted with everything and everyone. When she was teaching the padawans, she was eager to explain forms and correct posture to ensure no bad habits formed, yet she still managed to hold their attention and joke with them. With the parents, she never turned away the constant flurry of feedback or questions about the curriculum. She had inserted herself into the academy, already as recognizable as the studio itself.

In town, it was much the same. People recognized her as the young trainer. Those who didn’t attend classes had seen her at Kanata Kaffeine, introducing themselves or at the very least waving. She had such a friendly exterior, people couldn’t help but be drawn towards her and those whom she shared herself with remained just as enraptured.
Her friends, those in the city and those in the area were intensely loyal to her. The ones from the city had driven her belongings an hour away, helping her move in, and bringing her food and music, as if it was a party instead of a chore. The staff at Rogue One treated her like she was their daughter, despite her being only a decade younger than the owners. Her friends in Tatooine welcomed her as a sister, and he could see their feminine influence, as Rey began experimenting with makeup and different outfits, courtesy of her good tips from the club and Jess’s influence.

He had no one like the people Rey surrounded herself with.

Except, he had spent time with her friends. Rose and Jess were...tolerable and Maz had been warmer toward him since he began frequenting her cafe each morning with Rey, though his old babysitter could hardly count as a friend. She was more like a surrogate mother, a better one than his real mother had been. The squad at the club had stopped raising their brows when he brought her in for the start of her shift, and no one batted a lash at him when he returned later in the evening to check on her on his way home after his classes had concluded. Kaytoo had started to keep the stool at the end of the bar open so Kylo had a place to sip his whiskey. The odd man kept an eye on Rey, when Kylo was out, as a favor to him. He also kept an eye on Bodhi Rook.

“Ben?” Dr. Connix's voice reminded him where he was and of her unanswered prompt.

“I’m not a people person,” he stated.

“You managed to develop a connection with Rey.”

“She’s different.”

“How so?”

“People are immediately drawn to her. She’s attractive and bright. Everyone wants to be her friend.”

Or more than friends, he thought, picturing how Bodhi had instantly begun flirting with Rey when he met her. Kylo clenched his fists, his mind immediately wondering if the man had made a move on Rey since his absence. He had no right to be jealous. Bodhi was exactly the type of person Rey should be with, considering how he was full of smiles and light-hearted banter. It made more sense for her to be with someone like Rook than it did for her to be with someone like him, haunted by the darkness of his past and constantly battling inner demons.
“What do you want, Ben?” Dr. Connix observed his behavior, peering at him with an all together different interest in his words.

“What do you mean?”

“You are attracted to her.”

He scoffed, leaning back in his seat away from the psychologist. “Everyone is attracted to her.”

She hummed again. “Maybe, but your compassion goes beyond mere attraction. Have you ever asked her on a date?”

Bristling at her blunt question, he couldn't' stop himself from thinking about what had occurred before Bodhi showed up at Rogue One. Rey had touched him, willingly and not in the context of their training. She had taken his hand on occasion, but when she had touched his chest it had been an all together different kind of touch. It was searching and flirty — not the touch of a friend, but of someone more than a friend.

Or so he had thought.

Before he had tried to kiss her, he had asked for permission. He had no idea where such an inane question came from. The moment had been perfect and he had ruined it. He had opened his mouth and instead of saying something seductive or witty, his nervous fifteen-year-old self asked if it was ok to kiss her, like they were back in middle school playing a game of spin the bottle. He was convinced it had killed the mood and then her boss had summoned her, leaving him with no chance of redeeming himself until later.

But when he had followed her out to the main bar area, took had been there and any chance of trying again disappeared when he saw the wannabe surfer being introduced to Rey. It had been the push he needed to try again and it had been well worth it. The kiss they had shared in the walk-in had been electric. It had rushed through him, lighting his blood on fire, and unearthing a craving he hadn’t known he was harboring.

With sudden icy clarity, he became aware that night’s kiss could be his first and last with Rey, if he didn’t find a way to prove to her he wasn’t trying to control her. Asking her out on a date didn’t seem to be an appropriate course of action. It would be based on his desire to spend time with her,
asking for more time, more of her charming smile. It wasn't based on giving her back her freedom, though, he supposed, it was her choice whether or not she said yes. But he knew Rey and he knew she would have a hard time saying no to him, even if she didn't want to. She would, out of some noble notion. He felt caught between two impossible situations and he turned his frustration on the doctor.

“I thought you were helping me with my anger issues not giving love advice?”

“This is your session. My role is to facilitate dialogue to improve your overall health and wellness. If you choose to lead the discussion down a romantic path, I will guide you, as necessary.”

“I am not talking about this with you!” Kylo snapped.

“Ben, you are more open and responsive today than any prior session, which leads me to believe the relationship you have built with this woman is good for you, healthy even, and it has me considering writing to the court to inform them you are of sound mind and body.” Dr. Kaydel Connix regarded him for a moment, pausing so he could fully digest her words. “Please do not give me a reason to report otherwise.”

Kylo glowered at her, debating between a rude retort or asking for a new doctor. He was convinced Dr. Connix was younger than him, possibly around Rey’s age. What could she know about his struggles? What advice could she provide him he hadn’t heard before? She had barely lived.

“It seems our hour is up,” she announced, before he could respond. “You have a lot to think on before our next session. I suggest you use the time wisely. Until next week, Mr. Ren.”

*Oh, now she uses my name.*

After spending so much time with Rey over the last week, Kylo found his apartment felt emptier than normal. Despite his best efforts, he couldn’t train 24/7. Without the rigorous exercises to keep his attention, his thoughts drifted to her face, dotted with freckles and glowing with smiles. Being parted from her felt painful and alien. There was a void in his heart, mind, and body, which he knew belonged to Rey. First she had gotten under his skin. Then she had burrowed herself so deep she had carved parts of him out to make a place for herself, a place currently unoccupied.
Like his apartment.

He had only been here to sleep, shower, and get fresh clothes. On one hand, it meant the cleaners had had a vacation of sorts. On the other hand, it made his place appear to be uninhabited. The flashing red light on the top of his landline angrily beckoned him into the kitchen area. He made his way to the beacon, listening to the crunch of debris underfoot. The first voicemail was from his manager. As soon as he heard Hux’s nasally voice, he deleted the message. He didn't bother with listening to whatever his manager wanted to waste his time on. He was sure if it was important, Phasma would make him aware of it. The message which followed Hux's, was one he could not delete.

“Kylo, I have identified an extraordinary opportunity for your return to the ring.”

Anthony Snoke’s cold voice filled the apartment without preamble. He spoke as though he was addressing a battalion of soldiers, not his proclaimed prodigy and star fighter. There wasn’t a single hint of emotion in his voice. All that existed for the man was his decrees and orders, all of which, up to this point in his career, Kylo had followed dutifully and without question.

His mentor had not once called to check on him or see how his progress had been with his therapist. Kylo hadn’t thought about it until now. The owner of the First Order apparently could not be bothered to call his prized fighter over such trivial matters. With all the resources at his disposal, Kylo wondered if the man even failed to have one of his assistants attempt to contact him. If they had, their names would not have triggered a response. He had most likely deleted their emails and messages.

“Oddy Muva has announced this is his final year. He has made plans to retire.”

Kylo knew Muva from his start at First Order. The older man was a decent fighter with a few titles under his belt, but he worked hard for each win. He didn't posses the raw, natural talent Kylo had been born with, the talent he had seen in Rey the first time they had sparred.

“I have elected to pit the two of you against one another. It has a bold symmetry to it. Muva was once one of us. Now he will lose to us. It will be his career-ending fight and the start to returning to yours. It will be at Canto Bight Casino on January 1st. Happy New Year to the First Order.”

There was a click, signaling the end of the message. Kylo saw the red light was still flashing, indicating at least one more message was on the machine, but he turned the device off. He had heard enough for one day. Besides, it was probably another call from Hux. He’d only end up deleting it, as he had with the prior one. Leaving the kitchen and the final unplayed message, Kylo treaded towards the back of the apartment to the master bedroom for a shower.
After what Maz had told him about Snoke, Kylo had distanced himself from his employer. It hadn’t been difficult. Snoke was not the type to hover and he had had an attractive distraction. He had willingly turned his focus to Rey. His vow to keep her safe had kept him from delving too deep into the implications Maz had made about his mentor. While he hated to admit it, he believed the old woman.

He had seen Snoke manipulate other young fighters, coax them to join the First Order and then unceremoniously toss them aside when they encountered an injury or slight breach of contract. The end result was always a win for Snoke, regardless if he lost a fighter. His legal team was one if he best and as such had written airtight clauses around the length of the fighter’s responsibilities to the First Order. If they couldn’t uphold their contract, the penalty fees were astronomical. More than one had been forced into bankruptcy, while the First Order flourished, unaffected.

Kylo’s contract was a sore point. Despite his aversion to his family, he had consulted a long-time family friend when it came to signing with the team. The same legal guidance which had assisted him when he had filed for emancipation from his parents — Lor San Tekka.

Tekka had been the most sought after lawyer in the country. He had made an impressive living from his court battles, which were practically all victories. Of the handful of battles the elderly man had lost, his dispute over Kylo joining the First Order was one of them.

Lor had operated under the false pretense that after spending enough time with Luke, Kylo would return to his home, honor his parents by continuing one or both of their legacies. It had disappointed him to see Kylo become a professional fighter, as his grandfather and uncle had.

Despite that, Tekka had provided his guidance when Kylo’s contract had been drawn up. Kylo assumed it was more from Leia’s pleading than his own. In either case, his contract had been built on agreed upon terms instead of solely on Snoke’s whims.

Reflecting on his decision to bring Lor into the fold, he was grateful. Unlike other young fighters Snoke had misguided, Kylo had options. He wasn’t limited to working for the First Order, though he couldn’t imagine where else he would fit. All clubs wanted victors, but few would gamble on someone his age, especially with his recent suspension bringing his anger into consideration. His outburst had once been a draw for the media. However, after his last altercation, he was seen more as a rabid dog than a petulant adolescent.

Kylo stepped into his shower, letting the now scalding water hit his weak body. There were few options for a washed-up fighter. Teaching was one. He couldn’t wrap his mind around limiting himself to an endless cycle of runny-nosed children and selfie requests from the soccer mom crowd.
Another option was working as a stuntman. Kylo had had several offers for commercials, TV spots, and film cameos in the past. The transition into becoming a stunt double wouldn’t be terribly difficult. Unlike the ring, making a mistake on set wouldn’t cost him a fight. It could very well cost him his life. With the growing attraction to bigger special effects involving explosions, flame-throwing pyrotechnics, and death-defying leaps, the risks were quite high. The true deterrent was the fact he wouldn’t be recognized for any of his endeavors. The lead actor would.

Some of his former teammates had gone on to do public speaking, but Kylo hated people and didn’t have the charisma to make a career out of it. That meant becoming an analyst or announcer for future fights was out too. Starting a business, such as a clothing line or brand of workout supplements, sounded ridiculous. It was all a marketing scheme, anyway.

Starring in video games was an interesting option. Phasma had brought it up once. He hadn’t given it much thought then, but now it was at the top of his list. He could do all the work behind the scenes with the developers and still receive a fat paycheck at the end. It would keep his name in the fighting community for a few more years. Plus, he wouldn’t have to relocate. He’d need to travel back and forth a few times for when they needed to map his forms, but there was no need for him to move.

_And we have a winner._

Kylo knew he should feel happy or at least relieved he had a back-up plan. After years of telling himself he’d wait to decide until he was ready for retirement, he had come to a decision. Whether he decided to return to the ring at the turn of the new year or not, he knew what his choices were. The recognition of him having a choice, where others at the First Order didn’t, brought him back to Rey.

He pictured her betrayed expression, when she had confronted him about purchasing the mattress. He struggled to understand how she could view him buying her a bed as an attempt to control her. His initial plan may have hinged on him forcing her out, which had turned into him molding her into his perfect counterpart, but he had never meant to force anything on her. From the instant he saw the fire in her, the true warrior, he had been captivated by her. Diminishing her light was not what he wanted. When he noted the parallels between him and Plutt, it had disgusted him to the point where he had debated being in her life at all.

The ultimate decision to pursue her hadn’t been made lightly. Kylo had teetered back and forth, weighing the words of his uncle, Cassian Andor, and Maz before he allowed himself to fully commit to the idea of having a relationship with her. Though he tried to convince himself otherwise, there really wasn’t a decision to be made. She already had him. Everything about her had drawn him in. All he wanted to do was make sure she was happy and well taken care of.
From what he had derived from other relationships he had seen, that translated to showering her with expensive gifts. Dr. Connix had confirmed otherwise. Rey didn’t want luxury bags or shoes like most women apparently did. If that was the case, he could care less, but he had assumed she’d at least want nice necessities, such as a mattress. Considering her upbringing, or lack thereof, he had only wanted to ensure she had a stable, comfortable home. She deserved to feel safe and secure. What she truly deserved was so much more than that, but at the very least, she needed to have a cozy place to live. She couldn't be angry with him for wanting to give her that.

He had been wrong.

The disappointed expression she had worn, when she tried to explain her reasoning to him, had cut deep. He barely heard a word of what she said because he had been so focused figuring out how he let her down. She looked as though she was on the verge of tears and slapping him all at once. He had been about to pull her to him and kiss her before she could do either.

But then she had tore into him. She yelled at him, saying he wasn’t her boyfriend. It had sliced him to the core, shattering the warm cocoon he had built around himself with every moment they had shared over the last week. Her words hurt more than any hit he had ever taken in the ring. Hearing her tell him there was nothing between them, destroyed him. It was ironic, really, since he had vowed to destroy her the day he met her. Now he knew what his uncle had meant when he had warned him.

*This is not going to go the way you think.*

It hadn’t.

The water ran cold, startling him. He had been standing in the same spot within his shower for far too long. His fingers and toes were pruning.

Exiting the bathroom, which was filled with steam from his prolonged shower, Kylo moved into the bedroom. It had been only time this week he had donned an outfit other than training wear. He had not wanted to give Dr. Connix a reason to provide any negative feedback to the league, which could be detrimental to his return, if he decided he would return.

Standing in front of his wardrobe, he was at a loss. None of his garments appealed to him. There was no reason to dress nice. He had no one to impress, no one whose role was to judge his mental state. He could parade around his apartment in his sweats and wait until tomorrow to go through his intense routine once more.
A brief glance up in the mirror shot the notion out of his mind. There were dark rings under his eyes, making his normal pallor appear even paler. He hadn’t shaved, causing his facial hair to appear more unkempt than alluring. He sighed.

Sulking around his apartment and living the remainder of his days in athletic gear would not give Rey a reason to speak with him. He needed to clear his head, then focus on what Dr. Connix has suggested. Though he didn’t want to admit the youthful doctor knew anything, her point had been made. If he wanted Rey to talk to him again, he needed to take action.

Kylo returned to the bathroom. It took several minutes to clear out the steam and unfog the mirror. After several minutes more, he once again stood before his wardrobe, trimmed and not as shabby.

He put on a pair of dark, designer jeans, a loose fitting black t-shirt. Socks and shoes came next, followed by a Cartier watch. Running a hand through his damp hair, he surveyed his improved reflection. It was a far cry from being perfect, but it was a vast improvement from before.

_All dressed up with no place to go_, he thought sullenly.

It was early enough to still be light out. Kylo decided a walk would get him out of his headspace and his apartment, effectively breaking his cycle of sulking. Grabbing his cell phone, wallet, and keys, he took the elevator down to the ground floor.

The air outside was fresher than the stale recycled air of his building. It had a crispness to it, despite the rising summer heat. Without a destination in mind, he meandered down the street, allowing his thoughts to wander as aimlessly as his body.

His classes had been going well. The older students were mature enough to handle the specialized training he had been providing. His style was stricter than Rey’s or his uncle’s, yet his methods proved to turn out excellent results. Those who participated in his sessions were becoming stronger and more skilled.

Regardless of his thoughts on teaching long-term, he had grown to admire how the students had developed in the short time he had guided them. Of course, not one of them was able to match Rey’s talent or her ability to absorb any technique he taught her.

It didn’t surprise him his thoughts had circled back to her. His fall out with her was the problem he
had wanted clarity on. Finding a resolution was his main goal, as he continued along the sidewalk.

Dr. Connix had told him he needed to show her she still had her freedom and the power to choose. Kylo was struggling with how to demonstrate that, especially given the fact Rey was actively avoiding him. Though, in her defense, he hadn’t reached out or tried to catch her at the academy.

Options came and went. Nothing fit. The sky was beginning to darken and he took it as a sign to return to his building. He was rounding the corner, in the direction of his building, when a familiar voice reached his ears.

“Ben?”
Hmmm...I wonder who that could be? Thanks for not murdering me after the ending of the last chapter. I am a firm believer in HEA, so just be patient please.

Thank you again to AbyssalSpark who caught a part in this chapter where I forgot to transition between scenes. This is what happens when I write on my phone.
Rey deals with her choice to separate from Ben and an awkward dinner with Finn and Poe to celebrate Finn's promotion. Chaos ensues!

Happy Star Wars Day, everyone! May the Fourth (and the Force) be with you always
Following Ben’s departure from her apartment, Rey had merely gone through the motions of her commitments to the academy and Rogue One. She had decided to remain in her apartment above the dojo, thanking Jyn and Cassian for their hospitality, but letting them know she needed to be in her own place, where she wasn’t a burden. After bickering back and forth on it, her managers had relented, with the caveat that one of the Rogue One staff would transport Rey to and from work each evening until Unkar Plutt was behind bars.

Each evening, Rey returned to her apartment, sunk into the mattress which had caused such issues, and cried. During the day, she was able to keep up with her facade. She taught, napped, made drinks, waited on customers, came back home and did it all again the next day. Unless it was a customer or one of her students, she didn’t speak much. She hadn’t even made much of an effort to
socialize with Rose or Jess, often lying in bed until the last possible second before she had to get up
to teach classes. After the third day of her being a no-show at the cafe, Maz walked into Ahch-To.

“You haven’t come by for your usual.” She greeted Rey without preamble, waiting until the young
instructor could step out of her class. Rey moved her headset away, so the students wouldn’t hear
their exchange. They were in the middle of their second rep of push ups.

“I haven’t been feeling well.”

“Ah,” the old woman nodded.

“Fifteen more seconds, ladies.” Rey called, before turning back to Maz.

“I can stop by later to pay you. My wallet is up in the apartment.”

Maz waved a hand at her. “There’s no need, dear child. I was of taking Chewie for a walk anyway.”
She pointed to the dog Rey had seen her walking on the day she arrived at Ahch-To.

He was sitting outside, patiently waiting for his master. His tail began wagging furiously when he
spotted Luke crossing the parking lot. The owner of the academy’s face lit up when he took in the
brown-furred pet. He proceeded to play with the dog and give him a belly rub. It was obvious they
were old friends.

“That’s fifteen, ladies. Take a minute for a sip of water and then let’s do two laps around the room.
Keep that heart rate up.”

Rey switched her headset off once more, taking the tea Maz had brought her with thanks.

“I haven’t seen Ben stop in lately. I take it he’s not feeling well either?”

She couldn’t help her body’s reaction to the news. Upon Maz’s observation, she froze, forgetting her
cue to get her class started on the next round at their bags. The old woman wiggled her eyebrows,
then gestured to the waiting students, who were standing at the ready awaiting their combination.
“Cross, cross, jab, uppercut, hook to the head, and finish with a sidekick. We are going for three minute rounds. Starting...now!”

Rey had been actively avoiding Ben all week. It didn’t surprise her he hadn’t been to Kanata Kaffeine. He seemed to be avoiding her as well. She hadn’t seen him around the studio since their altercation. If Luke had noticed the change in their schedules, he was kind enough not to mention it.

Disappointment was a concept Rey had become acclimated to while growing up in the foster care system. After they had been unable to identify a living relative for her back in England, they had resolved to keep her with Unkar Plutt. She had counted the days, waiting for her parents to come find her, hoping they’d take her back to her home country and away from the desert wasteland.

They never did.

Likewise, when she had come to Ahch-To, she had been content with a home and a job. She had not expected to find new friends or someone to share her life with. In a few short weeks, she had found stability with an expanded network of friends and had found someone who was set apart from all she’d known before. She’d been training with Ben and spending every free moment with him over the last couple of weeks, convinced he was different from anyone else she’d ever even come close to considering, believing he understood her.

He hadn’t. Maybe he never had.

The instant she saw his initials by the payment receipt, she had felt foolish. She recalled how her friends had warned her about him, how Unkar had told her she was worthless, and how Ben had originally yelled at Master Luke about how she didn’t belong at the academy. She had been wrong to think he was different. He didn’t care about her. He only cared about himself.

Still, the expression on his face when she had told him he wasn’t her boyfriend was devastating. There was an intense pain reflected back to her from his eyes, one she couldn’t quite forget. Instead of confronting him about it, she had hidden away, keeping distance between them.

“I wouldn’t know.” Rey finally replied to Maz. “I haven’t seen him.”

“Maybe you should.” Maz patted her hands and took her leave.
She watched the cryptic woman walk out of the studio, pausing outside to grab Chewie from Luke, before continuing on her walk. Rey returned her attention to her kickboxing class, trying not to dwell on those three words too long.

It had been another two days, before anyone approached her about Ben. This time, it was Luke himself. Though not surprising, considering he saw both of them daily, she was shocked he had waited all week to bring the topic up. It was late afternoon and Rey had just finished her last class of the day. After a quick change upstairs, she had come across Luke in the office, as she left her apartment.

“I’ve hardly seen Ben this week, or you, for that matter,” her landlord and boss mentioned.

Rey shrugged, noncommittally. She wasn’t sure what, if anything, Luke knew of their relationship. She was positive he had his theories, but she wasn’t about to confirm any details.

“Did he mention speaking to a lawyer about Plutt?”

His questions caught Rey off-guard. Ben had been unwavering in his lessons to increase her self-defense tactics, yet he had never mentioned a different method for dealing with her ex-guardian. “Excuse me?”

“I suggested to him last week that you should speak with Mon Motha and possibly my sister about obtaining a lawyer to press charges against him for what he has done.”

Rey bristled. She hadn’t disclosed any additional details to Luke regarding her history with Plutt. Everything she had shared with Ben had been in confidence. She hadn’t thought they had a strong relationship. The thought of Ben disclosing her secrets to his uncle and her employer made her more upset. Her stomach pitched at the new level of betrayal and she reached for the doorframe to steady herself. It took her a minute to get her vision to stop swimming, before she was able to respond to him.

“He didn’t mention it.”

Luke seemed to read her body language and cleared his throat. “Well, it was only a suggestion. He may have thought it had no merit. I’m sure it’s an uncomfortable topic for you. I thought you were closer to Ben than you were with me. I was hoping if you shared your experience with him, he could
persuade you to seek out the aid of the law. The officers here are not like the ones in Jakku, Rey. These people are honest and decent.”

While his words quelled the unexpected unease in her heart over thinking Ben had overstepped, the idea of having to share with a broader audience did not appeal to her. Even if it helped put Plutt behind bars, it also meant total strangers would know how she had failed to protect herself, how she had been too weak to get out sooner. She may be a survivor, but she was also a coward. Had she known how to fight back the way she had learned in college and the way she knew now, she would have run away long before she had saved up enough to move out.

As she opened her mouth to ask Luke about what exactly he and Ben had discussed, there was an unfamiliar honking noise. Rey glanced out the office window, startled when she saw a silver Audi parked outside. She didn’t recognize the car as any of her friend’s vehicles. Baze and Chirrut had an old school Hummer. Bodhi had a Volt, and she had already ridden along with Jyn and Cassian. Which left....

“It appears your ride is here.” Luke gestured to the car, right as the driver honked the horn once more, annoyingly long this time.

“See you tomorrow, Master Luke.”

Rey headed out to the waiting car, knowing exactly who would be behind the wheel. Sure enough, as she opened the passenger side door, she noted the blonde hair and unamused gaze of Kaytoo.

“Finally. Do you know how long I’ve been waiting here?”

“Thirty seconds?”

“Try five minutes,” he huffed, not making eye contact with her. She had noticed he tended to never look at her, unless he was exceptionally mad.

“Sorry.”

“You should be.”
Rey tried to not roll her eyes. There was no filter on Kaytoo, hence why most people kept away from him.

“Seems the people I always expect to understand me or be there for me, choose to let me down.”

“I’ll be there for you,” Kaytoo told her, as he waited for her to buckle her seatbelt.

Rey was instantly touched by his words. She had meant the comment rhetorically, not expecting him to even notice. Though she and Kaytoo weren’t close, she had seen how he behaved to those he truly disliked, such as Bodhi. The blonde bartender certainly didn’t treat her so harshly. She started to smile at Kaytoo and opened her mouth to thank him, when he added his reasoning.

“Cassian said I had to.”

Her face immediately fell.

Of course Kaytoo didn’t care. The middle-aged bartender probably didn’t care if she ended up with Bodhi, as long as she arrived for her shift and managed to bring in tips. Over the course of the last week, she had noticed how Ben gravitated towards the end of the bar and how Kaytoo, in turn, gravitated towards him. They had started an odd sort of friendship, which they both seemed surprised yet relieved by. It was foolish of her to assume their week long relationship had extended to her and her feelings.

The remainder of the drive to New Jedha was completed in silence. Kaytoo didn’t listen to the radio. It was an odd habit, but then again, everything about Kaytoo was odd, so it actually made perfect sense to Rey. What didn’t make sense was how the rest of the Rogue One squad was acting when she arrived.

“Who died?” She asked after nearly an hour of them all working in silence. The question had been laced with her smile, indicating it was meant as a joke, but the stricken look on Jyn made her regret asking. Perhaps one of their former friends had actually passed on. Cassian patted her on the back and both Baze and Chirrut gave her hugs.

It was Jyn who finally gave her insight. “Breakups are hard,” she told Rey. “Let us know if you need anything.”
“I’m fine,” Rey told her, eager to end the conversation before it went further. She wasn’t sure if she could hold back her tears if she had to explain what had happened. She knew her friends had been suspicious when she had turned up on Monday without her typical shadow. After she had told them she’d be staying at her apartment alone, it had spiked additional concern. Apparently after his repeated absence, her coworkers had come to a conclusion on what had happened. She couldn’t be mad. They weren’t wrong.

“You could have stayed with us.” Jyn nudged her, gently. “You didn’t have to go back to your apartment by yourself.”

“It’s my own,” Rey insisted, glad for the topic change. “Besides, I’m safe. You are all with me on the way here and the way home and Luke lives right across the parking lot. If anything were to go wrong, he’d hear it.”

Jyn didn’t seem convinced on the last part, but she didn’t push. “The invitation still stands, in case you ever need to get away.”

“Thank you.” The two women hugged and then got back to setting up before the doors officially opened for the evening.

Rey smiled at her manager, as the woman jumped behind the bar to make the first round of drinks. She had great friends. Even if her parents and her...whatever Ben was...had disappointed her, she always had her self-made family network. Between Finn, Poe, Rose, Jess, and the crew at Rogue One, she had an increasingly loving support system. She had never had siblings, at least none that she knew of. Each of her friends was an unofficial brother or sister, making Maz her surrogate mother and Luke her...well not father, exactly, more like a weird uncle.

The instant her mind branded Luke as her uncle, she felt the familiar stabbing pain of loss. Luke was Ben’s real uncle. Regardless of how their relationship was, Luke would always belong to Ben. It didn’t matter how hard Rey worked at Ahch-To or how many customers she brought in, the academy was a family run establishment. For now, she had a job there, but in time, there would be no place for her at the dojo.

There was no place for her in the Skywalker story.

The next day, Rey woke from her mid-day nap to the sound of her cell going off. There were only
two people who she permitted to allow calls from when she was trying to sleep. Groggily, she answered.

“Hey Peanut!”

“Hey,” she greeted Finn, holding the phone away as she cleared her throat. Her voice was a bit hoarse from sleep. “How are you?”

“Great. Better than great actually. I got it. I got the promotion, Rey.”

She knew she should be happy for her friend. Finn had worked tirelessly for this. He and Poe deserved good news, especially after they had helped her so much. Yet she couldn’t find it in herself to smile. She was glad they were on the phone. He couldn’t see her face. With her best fake cheer, she congratulated him.

“You deserve it, Finn. I’m sure no one else even came close. When do you start?”

“Monday.”

“So soon?”

“They want to get me to up to speed before South Africa.”

“South Africa?”

“Yeah, part of the promotion comes with travel. There is a convention going on in a few weeks and they want me to be there. I’m actually leaving work early today to get my vaccinations.”

Rey didn’t know much about food, but she knew being sent international for a job meant big things. Finn’s promotion was more than an increase in pay and responsibility. He was going to make good on his nickname. He was going to become a big deal.

“Wow. That’s so exciting! How long will you be gone for?”
“Two weeks.”

“That’s a long time. Is Poe going to be ok, or do I need to check in on him?”

Finn’s voice changed. “Actually, Peanut, he’s coming with me. He’s taking time off to join me over there. We haven’t had a vacation together before, so we’re going to take advantage of the paid for room.”

A stabbing jealous burn erupted through Rey. She knew it was wrong to covet what her best friends had, but she couldn’t help the dark thoughts swirling in her brain at Finn’s announcement. Why couldn’t she have found a job where she could travel and spend time with someone and just enjoy having a romantic relationship, away from all the cares of her every day life?

Travel had never been on Rey’s radar. It was an expense she couldn’t afford to daydream about, so she hadn’t. Hearing her friends were running off, half-way across the world made her wonder if she’d ever be able to afford an adventure outside of the country.

She knew Ben had experience with international travel from his career as a fighter. He had told her Naboo was his favorite place in the world. She had nothing to compare it to, having never even left the state. Would her answer have changed if she had had the opportunity to travel the way he had?

“Peanut? You still there?”

“Yes, yes,” Rey quickly replied. “I was getting ready for my shift and hit the mute button.”

It was a white lie, but Rey would rather tell a white lie to her best friend than admit she was jealous of the loving relationship he had with Poe. Even if there was a chance Ben Solo genuinely cared for her, she had ended things before they could begin. She would never get to experience the type of companionship her friends had together.

“I wanted to see if you could meet us in the city to celebrate.”

Rey inwardly groaned at his request. The one thing worse than lying to her friend over the phone about how happy she was for him was having to lie to him in person, while attempting to celebrate
the event. “I have to work tonight and tomorrow, Finn. It’s too late notice for me to ask for off. Weekends are our busiest nights.”

“We could go to dinner on Sunday,” he suggested. “That way we are all off work and it gives you time to sleep in before driving into Corellia.”

There was no good way to excuse herself, though Rey wished there was. She had been sulking all week and the thought of having to join the real world was not one she wanted to embrace. All she wanted to do was spend Sunday alone, on her couch, eating a tub of ice cream and binge watching silly YouTube videos to try to cheer herself up. She didn’t want to get out of her pajamas to dress up for the city or make the long drive there on her motorcycle.

“Poe and I could pick you up, if that helps,” Finn offered when she didn’t agree right away.

“Sure,” Rey relented. “What time?”

The time between her phone call with Finn and when he showed up at her apartment seemed to go by instantly. Before she knew it, her best friends were in Tatooine, excited to see her and be out for the evening. It was the first time she and seen Finn or Poe since she had moved in. She should have been overjoyed when they enveloped her in warm hugs and picked her off the ground. Instead, all she could do was notice how brotherly their affection was in comparison to Ben’s. Her reaction must have shown, because Finn asked her what was going on.

“Nothing,” Rey immediately responded.

She had replied too briskly. Both him and Poe cornered her, while she finished getting ready. “Rey. What is going on with you?”

“Yeah. There are dishes everywhere,” Finn gestured to her kitchen area, “and you look like you haven’t done laundry all week. Have you shaved?”

“Finn!”
“It’s a valid question, Peanut,” Poe told her, as he wrapped an arm around her.

“Seriously, you two! I have showered and even if I hadn’t, it’s none of your bus-.”

Finn held out his hand, silencing her. “Either you tell us what’s up right now, or we are going to continue asking you about your personal hygiene. Your choice, Peanut.”

With a low growl, Rey gave them the highlights. She had started seeing someone. They had gotten into a fight and she hadn’t heard from him since. Typical early relationship faux pas stuff. She figured her explanation would sate them, so they could get on with their Sunday night plans.

It only made matters worse.

First, the boys insisted on cleaning up her apartment, while she took an extra long shower and shaved everything. Poe’s exact words were, “You need to be as bare as the day you were born, darling.” Rey would never be able to un-hear her gay friend tell her that. Next, they proceeded to select an outfit for her to wear, deciding they needed a better dinner out than their usual cheap eats and boxed wine to celebrate Finn’s promotion and her getting over the jerk who had broken her heart. However, nothing she owned lived up to Poe’s ridiculous fashion standards. On their drive to Corellia, he decided she needed a makeover, because it would cheer her up. Finn supported his idea, leaving Rey with no choice, as she had lost the majority vote — two to one.

By the time they arrived at Poe and Finn’s apartment, they had already outlined a plan of attack. They trio started off in Utapau, the shopping district of the city. It had high-end shops and boutiques with one of a kind outfits. Rey nearly fainted at the first store when she flipped over the small white price tag attached to a sundress that caught her eye. Poe was too busy charming the store manager to notice, but Finn had agreed with Rey and the three booked it out of the shop.

They had more luck on one of the side streets, where a warehouse sale was happening. With input from both her friends, Rey managed to snag a cocktail dress by Naberrie. It hugged what little curves she had with its geometric patterns to highlight areas with the bold red accents on the black. The main strap wrapped around her neck like a halter top, while an additional strap on each side draped over her shoulders and down, revealing a decent portion of her back. It was far more risqué than any item of clothing she owned, including her limited collection of lingerie, which was mostly sensible white cotton. Poe and Finn cheered, elated she had listened to their advice.

It was then, as Poe stood, motioning her to twirl that he noticed a pair of Sabe heels which matched her dress. The black heels had a red-underside, an accent akin to the ones on her dress. If Rey had thought it was luck she found a dress in her size, it was pure kismet to have found a pair of shoes to
match also in her size. Though the entire outfit was marked down, it was still more than Rey had ever expected to spend on an outfit, including a wedding ensemble, had she ever had the opportunity to pick one. If it wasn’t for the constant urging of her two best friends, she wouldn’t have purchased the items.

With the first part of Poe and Finn’s plan complete, the trio returned to the boys’ apartment. Rey had brought all the makeup she had with her. With YouTube up on their phones, the boys continued executing their plan, by doing her hair and makeup. They had her dampen her hair in their shower, before blow drying it out so it would have a full body. Then they moved onto her makeup. Poe insisted on her having a red lip to match the red accents on her outfit.

Finally, after what seemed like hours in their cramped bathroom, her friends deemed her ready to go out. They changed quickly, donning nicer shirts and pants, and met her in the living room.

“We need to pre-game!”

“Poe, this isn’t college.” Rey reminded him.

“How would you know? You never came out with us in college.”

“I couldn’t afford to. You know that.”

“Exactly!” Finn grinned. “Which is why we need to make up for lost time now. Let’s go down to the corner market and grab a bottle of Corellian whiskey. We can take a few swigs while we walk to the restaurant.”

“Yes,” Poe clapped his hands together. “I like where your head is at, buddy. Rey?”

“Alright,” she agreed, reluctantly. She didn’t want to damper their mood by reminding them they needed to take her home at some point tonight. She still had to teach classes in the morning. Glancing at her discarded outfit on the boys’ bathroom floor, she retrieved her wallet, phone, and keys.

“Where am I going to put all this?”

“Here, Peanut,” Finn held out his hands. “I’ll slip it in my pockets.”
“Thanks.”

“No problem.”

“Can’t have you buying such a sexy outfit and then covering it up with a jacket,” Poe told her, as he shooed them out of the apartment.

Her friends had the best of intentions. Dressing up was something Rey had no experience with. The opportunity had never presented itself and when it had, the importance of saving money to leave her current situation always outweighed the need for one frivolous night of fun. She had always struggled with the idea of spending an exorbitant amount of money on a single evening. Even if it was as a treat or as a celebration, she had never been financially sound enough to permit herself to consider it.

Things were different now. She had two stable jobs with a steady flow of income. She had her own place and a growing support structure. Going along with her friends this once, seemed doable, especially since the dress and shoes were on sale. Plus, all the money she had been saving for a mattress was still in her bank account. She did admit she liked feeling pretty. She appreciated the work her friends had put into her appearance, which she had been able to admire in the mirror. It had made her feel truly beautiful.

Until, they went outside of the apartment. Once they exited the confines of her former home, she felt strange. Even with the dress covering most of her body, her arms, shoulders, and back were bare. She knew it was part of the outfit’s appeal and most women wore far more revealing garb, yet she felt off. Despite her friends’ earlier compliments on how well put together she looked, she felt naked.

As they entered the corner store, she was acutely aware of how those in the shop locked onto her. Ignoring the butterflies in her stomach, she silently followed her friends around, as they tried to find a small enough bottle to walk with that was still large enough to get all three of them buzzed before they reached the restaurant several blocks away.

To their credit, though, her friends had done an excellent job of taking her mind off of things. During their makeover, she hadn’t thought of Ben once. She allowed herself to enjoy being pampered for a change. She trusted Finn and Poe. She was comfortable with letting her guard down in their presence and in the safety of their apartment, a home she had briefly shared. However, like her appreciation of her own beauty, the result was fleeting. Her thoughts drifted back to Ben.

They should have had a lesson today in the studio. It seemed a shame to Rey that they had only met once as scheduled before their plans were derailed, first by Plutt and then by their fight. Even though
Ben had taken the time to teach her additional skills during the week, she had looked forward to Sundays when they had the entire day together without having to part for work. Now she feared she’d never get another Sunday alone with him. It had tears welling up in her eyes all over again.

Wiping at her eyelids, she turned away from her friends to make sure they wouldn’t see. She didn’t want them to think their makeover hadn’t helped her, because it had. Rey dabbed at her eyes lightly with her finger tips, the way she had seen actresses do on TV or in movies. It helped enough so that after a couple blinks of her eyes, the tears vanished and she could once again act as though she wasn’t still upset over the fall out.

She had contemplated texting Ben. It had been her first impulse after she had finished crying last Sunday, but she hadn’t. As much as Rey missed him, she wasn’t about to act as though what he had done was ok. It wasn’t. He had gone against her wishes and made a decision for her. She didn’t want anyone making choices for her. She was capable of making her own. She had a right to. Despite her feelings on the subject, she missed him.

So when she saw the object of her misery strolling down the sidewalk in the middle of Corellia, she thought it had to be one of two things — a cruel joke or fate.

Before her brain could catch up with her body, she was darting out of the market, out onto the street. She hadn’t stopped to find her friends. Her first instinct had been to go to him.

“Ben?”

He glanced over his shoulder, before turning around fully to take her in. The way he stared at her, she could tell he was trying to determine if she was really there or not. “Rey?”

“Hi.”

It was such a inconsequential word and hardly covered all she wanted to say to him. However, it worked to break the ice. Some of the tension left his form, as he stepped to the side to keep from blocking the foot traffic on the sidewalk.

“How are you?”

“Good,” she lied. “You?”
“Fine.”

“Good. That’s good.”

Staring at him now on the sidewalk, Rey didn’t see the man who had disappointed her in the mattress store. She saw the same broken look she was sure was mirrored in her own glance. It was the shattered gaze he had given her after her outburst, the one which was prominent in her mind, the one which made her cry each evening until her eyes were red and puffy.

As bad as she felt, he looked good. Sharply dressed and recently showered, he was clean and fresh, as if he had just stepped off a photo shoot. Even after the makeover her best friends had given her, she didn’t feel worthy of being so close to him. The familiar self-conscious fear leaked into her body. It was no surprise he looked so good. He was a celebrity. He had access to the finer things, a fact he had made known when he had begun at Ahch-To. At the time, it hadn’t interested her. She thought him shallow, but now, it affected her differently. She second-guessed her decision to wear the dress Poe had shoved her into and come out for the evening.

“I decided to go for a walk.” He stated, interrupting the silence, which had stretched on far too long between them.

“I’m out with my friends to celebrate. Finn got a-.”

“Rey!” She whipped around to find Finn and Poe exiting the corner market. Neither had a bottle in their hands. “Hey, Peanut. I didn’t know you left the store. We were wandering around in circles searching for you.”

“Sorry,” she replied.

Finn noticed Ben standing with her. He eyed him up, frowning for a moment before it clicked.

“Kylo Ren?”

“Nice to meet you.” Rey watched, as Ben offered his hand to her best friend, giving him a firm shake, before repeating the gesture with Poe.
“You two know each other?” Poe surmised.

“We work together at the academy,” Rey offered. She left out the details of how Ben had been training her or how he had taken care of her prior to their fall out.

Poe seemed to suspect she wasn’t providing them the whole story. Crossing his arms over his chest, he surveyed them, eyes glistening with a curious expression. “Since when?”

“Since as long as I’ve been there,” Rey admitted.

“What?” Finn cried, incredulously.

“What?” Rey sighed, attempting to pass it off as if it wasn’t important.

“You have been working alongside MMA royalty and you didn’t tell your best friends?”

“I didn’t think you’d care to know.”

“Lame, Rey.” Poe told her. Then to Kylo he said, “We were about to grab dinner at Atollon, the new Chop House on 54th and Phoenix. You’ve probably already been there. Hell, you probably each there all the time, but all the same you’re welcome to join us. I promise we have better manners than Rey.”

“Hey!” She shoved Poe, glaring at him for his comment on how she ate. It wasn’t her fault she had never been raised with a proper family like Poe’s.

“I wouldn’t want to intrude on your night out.”

“I wouldn’t call it a night out,” Poe chuckled. “We have to drive Rey home at the end of it. She doesn’t want to crash with us overnight.”
“Some of us have jobs in the morning, Poe.”

“Yeah and some of us need to be more forthcoming with their friends when they have connections to a celebrity.”

Ben looked uncomfortable at the statement, nearly as uncomfortable as Rey was starting to feel, given how quickly Poe had invited Ben to join them. She hadn’t had time to speak with him about their last conversation. She had no interest in skirting around the issue at a fancy restaurant under the watchful eyes of her best friends.

“He’s probably busy, Poe,” Finn commented. He didn’t appear uncomfortable. He seemed downright furious. His jaw was set so tight, Rey was concerned he may not be able to enjoy dinner, given the fact he didn’t appear able to move it.

“What do you say, Ren? Can I call you Ren?”

“Kylo is fine.”

“Join us?”

Ben’s eyes flitted to Rey’s face, silently seeking her approval if this was ok. She gave a slight nod.

“Alright.”

“Great!” Poe cheered, swinging an arm around his boyfriend’s shoulders, using his other to shove Rey. “Now you don’t have to play third wheel, Peanut.”

It took everything in her power not to slug her friend right then and there on the sidewalk. She stared at her shoes, wondering if the ground would open up and swallow her whole before she was resigned to what was sure to be the most awkward dinner of her life.

Ben suggested they go to Blue Wall, an upscale bar and grille located along Cantonica. Like Atollon,
it was a rather new establishment and highly rated, though unlike Atollon, the food was priced at a much higher value. The change in venue increased Rey’s level of unease and seemed to further the tight set of Finn’s jawline. Poe, oblivious to his boyfriend’s body language, spoke animatedly to Ben the entire walk to the restaurant, forcing her to keep an awkward distance behind all three men.

When they arrived at Blue Wall, Ben held the door open for all of them, following them in, and making a beeline for the hostess stand.

“Good evening, Mr. Ren. Welcome back.” The maitre d didn’t spare Rey or her friends a second glance. His attention immediately went to Ben. “I must have missed your name on our reservation list for tonight.”

“I don’t have a reservation. Impromptu celebration.”

“Of course. Not to worry,” the man assured him. “I will have the staff prepare our best table for you. Please excuse me for a brief moment.”

“Thank you.”

Once the maitre d headed off, Poe let out a whistle, glancing around the grille. “Not bad, Kylo. Not bad.”

“Must be nice to have people prepared to alter everything based on your whims”, Finn grumbled next to Rey.

His mood had darkened significantly since they had run into Ben. At first, she had suspected it was because she hadn’t told him she knew the professional fighter. Seeing how his eyes flitted between Poe’s excited face and Ben’s indifferent one, she changed her mind. Her best friend was jealous. It was hard not to be impressed by the dark wood and gold accents of the venue. There was a reason it was in the top five best rated restaurants in Corellia and Ben had been the one to bring them here.

“He’s straight, you know. You don’t have anything to worry about. Besides, Poe would never cheat on you.”

“How do you know?”
Rey stepped back, surprised Finn would ask such a question. “Poe loves you. He would never—.”

“No,” he cut her off. “How do you know Kylo is straight?” He gave her a pointed look.

She felt herself squirm slightly under his scrutiny. She had been incorrect in her assumption Finn was jealous. Either that, or his concern had suddenly shifted away from protecting Poe to protecting her. She hugged her arms around herself with a shrug. She did not want to discuss the depth to which she knew Ben in front of the subject of their conversation.

“Rey?” Finn raised an eyebrow. When her cheeks flushed in betrayal of her refusal to answer, his eyes widened. “No.”

Yes.

“Finn.” Rey reached one hand out to touch his arm. He stared at her in disbelief. “I—.”

“He’s the one you’ve been moping around for? Him! Kylo Ren! Why?”

She had no answer and a dozen all at once. She didn’t have a right to be upset. Ben had left after she told him he wasn’t her boyfriend. On the other hand, she wished he would have stayed. He could be kind. He had been generous to Rose more than once, merely for the fact Rose was special to her. He was a good teacher. He hadn’t told her he would take care of Plutt. He had spent time giving her the skills and proper techniques to deal with her former guardian herself. He made her feel safe. The days he had stayed at the apartment with her, she had felt at home and secure. With his proximity, she had been able to get rest.

There were multiple reasons why Kylo Ren — Ben Solo — was who she missed, who she was (as Finn said) moping around over. If she had time to explain, she would have. As it was, the maitre d returned to escort them to their table. She dropped her hand from Finn’s arm, though he didn’t drop the questioning gaze he was shooting her. Poe dragged him away, leaving her standing alone in the lobby with Ben.

“After you.” He nodded at her, gesturing for her to trail along after her friends. As she stepped past him, she felt his broad hand settle on her lower back, just above her waist. She froze at the sensation of his palm’s warmth through the sheer fabric of her dress. Ben leaned down, whispering against her ear. “I miss you.”
Before she had an opportunity to respond, he cleared his throat and gave her a gentle nudge forward. She spotted the maitre d eyeing her, obviously waiting on her to continue leading them through the restaurant. Somehow, she found a way to move her feet.

“Here we are,” the man announced, as he waved a hand out to show them their seats. “Is this acceptable for you and your guests, Mr. Ren?”

“Yes, thank you.”

Rey watched him slip a folded bill to the man, who muttered his thanks before departing. She wondered if it was a hundred dollars, like what Ben had given Rose. Considering the personalized service they had received, she expected it was at least a hundred, if not more.

Poe sat down, patting the seat next to him for Finn to take. Rey saw her friend hesitate, glancing at her before he sat beside his boyfriend. Ben moved to take the chair across from Poe, pausing to pull out the one across from Finn. All three men watched her, as he waited for her to take it. Wordlessly, she sat down, not missing the glare her best friend was sending it the man next to her. Ben, however, missed it completely, as did Poe, who busied himself with perusing the wine list.

The table they had been given was located in the back of the restaurant, away from the front doors and the noise of the main room. While it wasn’t in an entirely separate room, it was located behind a server’s station, providing them with a quieter corner, difficult to see from the entrance. Rey figured it was due to Ben’s status as a celebrity. The restaurant wanted to keep him happy, so he’d be caught as a return customer for them. Rey was sure it would annoy Ben, or anyone, to have their photo snapped while attempting to eat.

“So Kylo,” Poe grinned over the menu. “Come here often?”

“No,” Ben replied. “This is only my second time. I don’t eat out often.”

“Probably have to watch what you eat,” Poe commented with a nod. “With your career and all. Still, you must have eaten last time. What’s good?”

“I was here for opening night. We had the chef’s tasting menu. I sampled so many different dishes, I couldn’t honestly tell you. It was all good.”
“You like wine?” Poe asked, not reacting to Ben’s indecisive comment on the menu selection. Rey tried not to groan. What was it with her friends and asking Ben twenty questions? Jess had been asking him about his career and his intentions. Poe was driven by his stomach and grilling him about the available selections.

“I prefer something stronger.”

“Gin?”

“Whiskey.”

Poe nodded again, returning his attention to the wine list. With him occupied, his focus finally turned away from Ben, Rey almost expected Ben to reach over for her hand the way he had at Kanata Kaffeine. He didn’t. Given his earlier whispering, she was tempted to reach over herself, but Finn was watching them like a hawk. She tried not to let herself get swept up by his words. Just because he missed her, didn't mean he was sorry.

“Rey mentioned you were celebrating,” Ben said.

“Finn got a promotion,” she explained. “He is leaving for South Africa in a few weeks.”

Ben offered his congratulations, which Finn barely registered. “And we had to get Peanut out of her apartment,” he added. She stilled, unsure where he was going with his current train of thought. She had a feeling wherever it was, it wasn’t going to be good. Due to her own unease, she missed the way Ben flinched at the nickname Finn had given her back in college. “Some jerk she was seeing hurt her and she needed some perspective.”

If Ben had been unaware of Finn’s animosity before, he could not ignore it now. The anger came off her friend in waves. Rey felt her unease growing. Similarity, Ben looked as if he wanted to swallow his tongue. Even the server, who had picked then as the unfortunate time to stop at the end of the table and pour them a round of water, appeared uncomfortable. The only one at the table who had been unaffected by the exchange was Poe, who was too preoccupied with identifying a suitable wine to pair with his meal to bother paying attention.

“You wouldn’t know anything about that, would you Ren?”
“Finn.” Rey matched his low tone, warning him off.

He ignored her, never taking his eyes off of Ben’s face. “You two are friends. You probably know who I’m talking about.”

“We are friends,” Ben replied, flatly. “I don’t make a habit of violating my friend’s trust.”

“No?” Finn questioned. “You would disappoint a friend or harm them in any way? Maybe lose your temper? You do have a bad reputation in the league.”

“Finn.” Rey tried again. She was all but tearing the cloth napkin in her lap to shreds, nervously tugging and twisting it to keep herself from reaching across the table and smacking him.

“May I get you all something else to drink this evening?” The waiter asked, still appearing uncomfortable, but trying to brave the rising tension.

“How is your house cab?” Poe asked, still blissfully ignorant.

“Excellent, sir,” the waiter replied, dutifully. “Allow me to bring a sample round for the table.”

“None for me, thank you.” Ben told the server.

“You aren’t going to toast with us?” Poe whined.

“I’ll have two fingers of your Chandrilla Reserve, please.”

“Right away, Mr. Ren.” The server darted off to fill their drink orders.

The table fell into silence. Rey didn’t want Finn to start up again and she had grown increasingly uncomfortable sitting next to Ben after her friend’s wrongful allegations. It was bringing up bad memories. The butterflies which had started at the corner store had turned into a rollercoaster,
somersaulting through her stomach. She wasn’t sure she could make it through this awkward dinner.

“Excuse me.”

Before anyone could utter a word, she hurried to the ladies’ room, glad to have some distance from the terrible tension. Inside the restroom, she was greeted with chilled air and sterile granite counters. She marched herself over to the sink basin, staring at her reflection in the mirror. Her face was flushed, due to her discomfort, and her hair appeared to have fallen flat since she had blown it out at the boys’ apartment. With a groan, she ran her fingers through her tresses, attempting to fluff it back up. She was already feeling miserable. The last thing she needed was for her expensive look to also go wrong. After a couple more minutes of straightening her dress, checking her makeup, and basically killing time, she left.

When she exited the restroom, Ben was standing in the corridor. She took a moment to take in his appearance. He had shaved and was dressed much the same as he had been when she had first met in — fancy designer label clothes made to look natural. Where his appearance exuded confidence, his posture stated awkward unease. He was leaning against the wall, hands in his pockets, staring down at his feet. In that moment, he was entirely Ben Solo. There wasn’t a single trace of Kylo Ren in him.

“Ben?”

At the sound of her voice, he jumped off the wall, startled from his thoughts. “Are you alright?”

“Yes. Fine.” He stared at her.

She bit back her bottom lip, waiting for him to offer up an explanation for why he was standing outside the ladies’ room. When he didn’t, she questioned him. “Did you need me for something?”

“I...,” He stopped himself, clearly unsure what to say or how to say it. “Your friend mentioned you were hurt.”

Damn it, Finn.

“It’s over. I don’t want to talk about it right now.” She stepped past him, intending to return to her seat and kick her best friend under the table for being so uncouth.
Ben’s hand on her arm, stopped her from leaving the alcove. “I’m sorry, Rey.” She glanced at him over her shoulder. He had the wounded look in his eyes. All prior pretense gone and he stood before her as a man apologizing. “I’ve never had a girlfriend before. I thought you’d want me to buy you gifts and take care of you. That’s how the guys at my club act for their significant others and when my father messed up, he always got my mother a huge present. I thought it was what you expected from me. I thought it was what I was supposed to do. I only wanted to make sure you were cared for. I never meant to take away your independence.”

The tears she had pushed down before came back with vengeance at the sincerity in his voice. Slowly, she turned back towards him.

“You were right when you told me I am not your boyfriend. I’m not. I shouldn’t have assumed it was what you wanted. I’m sorry.”

“Ben.” Her voice cracked as she tried to respond. Hearing him apologize and seeing how torn up he was about the entire ordeal broke down all her barriers. She couldn’t hold back the water works anymore. One tear slipped free, running down her cheek, then another. “I’m sorry too. I shouldn’t have said that. I didn’t mean it. I didn’t know what we were doing. I wanted answers. I was starting to doubt how you felt about me.”

He stepped forward, moving his hand to cradle her head, while the other arm wrapped around her waist and pulled her close. He was staring down at her, eyes unblinking when he spoke next. “You’re the most important person in my life, Rey. I’ve felt connected to you since you punched me.” She let out a teary-eyed chuckle at his confession. He ran the pad of his thumb across the bottom of her cheek, wiping away some of the tears. “Please tell me you feel it too.”

“I’ve missed you,” she sighed against him. “And I...I wanted — want you to be m...” She trailed off, once again letting her doubt get the best of her. He was right here, right in front of her and still she struggled to get the words out, but she didn’t want to. She didn’t want to struggle anymore. She wanted to let herself go. She wanted to let herself tumble forward into the unknown and let him catch her.

He ducked his head, not having to lean down as far as normal due to her added height. “Say it.” She could feel herself trembling in his hold. They were about to cross into something. Rey could feel the weight of it pressing against her mind — something magnificent and life-altering. “I need to hear you say it, Rey.”

She let herself fall into it.
“I want you to be my boyfriend...my person...whatever we decide to call it...just mine.”

Ben didn’t wait another second. He caught her lips with his own, enveloping her fully in his arms as he did. “I’m yours.” He promised, breaking the kiss only to tell her what she needed to hear. “And you’re mine.” She nodded, tilting her face up to steal another kiss. He held her off.

“Say it.”

“Yours.”

When they returned to the table several minutes later, she didn’t mind the fact her makeup was a mess, her dress was scrunched up, or that her hair was flat. Rey was too busy smiling to pay any attention to such trivial details. Apparently, Ben shared her state of euphoria, because neither of them noticed the red lipstick marks she had left on him, until Poe snorted and Finn glared at them.

“You two have something to tell us?”

**Special Note:** Thank you to Sufon for using this story as inspiration for her piece in the ReyloComicAnthology Volume 2 issue. Check out Pages 43-55 for a favorite Hit Me With Your Best Shot scene!

Chapter End Notes

Thank you to my loyal and oh so kind beta, AbyssalSpark, who without her caring assistance this story wouldn't be half as good as it is.
Chapter Summary

In which Finn tells Rey how he really feels, Kylo tells Rey how he really feels, and Rey tells Ben how she really feels... in short, there are a lot of feelings!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

“How long has this been going on?” Rey’s friend asked them — the one who wasn’t staring at Kylo as if he was going to lunge across the table and murder him. Kylo had noticed the man wasn’t partial
to him. He wasn’t sure what he had done to earn such an unwelcoming vibe, but he didn’t let it bother him. Rey had chosen and she had chosen him.

“Officially? About five minutes.” She replied, still smiling her radiant, beaming smile as they held hands under the table. If hearing her say it once was glorious, hearing her confirm it to her friends, made his heart flutter in his chest.

“And unofficially?”

“Quite a bit longer than that,” Kylo answered, giving her hand a squeeze.

She squeezed his hand back. He could hardly believe this was happening. As unprepared as he had been to meet her when happenstance brought them together in Tatooine, he had been even less prepared to see her on the street in Corellia. He wondered if he would have been brave enough to go after her, if she hadn’t found him. He wondered if he would have been lucky enough to have her as he did now.

All he had been able to think about when he turned around and saw her was how beautiful she looked. He had longed to see her in First Order colors and then there she was — standing before him in a mixture of black and red, too perfect to be real. It was cruel irony to have her appear to him in such a fashion. It was a mockery of how he had desired to have her, a fabrication of Rey, not the real woman he had started to care for and as lovely as she looked, he knew it was not as gorgeous as she was underneath the expensive fabric and layers of foundation. Rey needed nothing to make her attractive. She was utterly breathtaking just as she was.

Because she was real.

And what was more — this was real too.

“I figured,” her friend, Poe, grinned, knowingly at them, as if he could tell they were holding hands like a couple of smitten teenagers.

“What?” Rey moved her gaze away from Kylo to focus on her friend. “How?”

The other friend snorted, which Rey ignored, but Kylo growled low in his throat.
“Peanut, you aren’t hard to read. I could tell you were upset in the store but when we found you, all of a sudden you were different. You had light back in your eyes.”

Kylo felt a heat blossom in his chest. He had done that. He had been the one to cause a change in Rey and it was for the better. He may have hurt her when he went against her wishes to buy the mattress, but from the sound of things, she had been just as distraught as he had been all week. He couldn’t be without her again.

He would make good on his goal to be better. Rey needed to always have light in her eyes and a smile on her face. Kylo swore he would do whatever he had to in order to keep her happy from here on out. He couldn’t be parted from her again. He couldn’t lose her.

“Why didn’t you tell us, you were dating Kylo Ren?”

“There was nothing to tell. We weren’t dating.”

“No?” Her friend didn’t appear to buy it. He looked at Kylo, cocking his head to the side. “Man to man, were you two dating or not?”

Kylo took care with how he answered, recalling Dr. Connix’s advice. “We weren’t. Like Rey said, there was nothing to tell.”

“So why all the grief?” Poe questioned, his face concerned, but not judging.

“We had a misunderstanding,” he explained.

“Over what?” The second friend asked, his gaze less forgiving than his boyfriend’s.

Kylo wasn’t sure how to articulate a response. He didn’t want her friends getting the wrong impression of what Rey was to him. While Poe seemed rather pleased with how he had returned with Rey, Finn was anything but pleased. Kylo didn’t want to give either man a reason for questioning his motives for wanting Rey in his life. They were the closest thing she had to family. He wanted them to be accepting of his newly formed relationship, if only out of concern for her.
“My mattress,” Rey chimed in, completely unaware of how suggestive it sounded. Or maybe she was and didn’t care.

Poe started to laugh, while his boyfriend nearly choked on the wine the server had brought in Kylo and Rey’s absence.

Disregarding their reactions, she continued. “I didn’t want him to pay for it. We were both trying to do the right thing and our definition of right thing conflicted. I said something I wish I could take back, but what’s done is done. We are moving past it.”

“Good for you,” Poe grinned. “I’m glad you-.”

“Rey, I’m sorry. I don’t like this,” Finn interrupted his boyfriend. “He has a reputation. He was suspended for assault. His temper is nasty and known for a reason. He’s dangerous.”

Kylo could not disagree with any of what Rey’s friend had said against him. For all intents and purposes, he was, as the man had deemed him to be: dangerous. While he had been suspended from the MMA due to his action against Nines, he would never raise a hand to Rey. He would never hit her...outside of the context of their training, but he didn’t want to complicate the matter with her friends.

Apparently, Rey didn’t care.

“You don’t know what you’re talking about, Finn. Ben has been taking care of me.” She hadn’t hesitated. She rose to his defense immediately.

“Ben? Who the hell is Ben?”

*Guess things are going to get complicated.*

“My birth name is Ben Organa Solo.”
“You’ve got to be shitting me!” Finn cried, leaning back from the table.

“No way!” Poe smiled, gleefully. “You’re serious?”

He wanted to get the attention away from his immediate family. Kylo wasn’t comfortable with discussing the Skywalker-Organa family with anyone. He had humored Rey because he wanted her to trust him, but it had still been difficult. Her friends were another matter. While Poe seemed willing to give him a chance, it was plain to see his boyfriend was not going to be a fan. Dragging up any dirt on his legacy of a family was out of the question, so he opted to go for a close relation.

“I believe you know my Aunt Amilyn,” Kylo commented, recalling how Rey had told him he was a pilot with Raddus. Rey started giggling next to him. He wasn’t sure what was humorous about it, until he noticed Poe’s face. “Do you not know Amilyn?”

“I believe he calls her Admiral Holdo.” Rey managed to squeak out between giggles.

Poe rubbed the back of his neck sheepishly, a tinge of red entering his cheeks. “We are acquainted,” he admitted.

“Acquainted?” Kylo asked, sensing there was something off about how Rey’s friend had said the word.

“She demoted me.”

“Oh.”

“He tried to have her removed from command and she found out.” Rey filled in the blanks.

“Bad move,” Kylo chuckled.

The only woman who rivaled his mother for fiery spirit and low bullshit tolerance was his aunt. He had seen her send his father running out the door, as well as his uncle Lando. She had never even batted an eyelash. If Poe had aggravated her, he had a slim chance of getting back in her good graces.
“Yeah,” the pilot agreed. “She has me flying tourists now as penance. Any chance you could put in a good word for me?”

“I can try, but to be honest, I’m not in good standing with her myself.”

“You’re not in good standing with anyone in your family, from what I heard.” Finn interjected.

Kylo tensed under the man’s continued scrutiny. He felt Rey shift next to him, but she didn’t pull her hand away from his hold.

“Don’t be rude,” she shot back at her friend.

“Of all the people you could pick to be with, Rey, you want him?”

Perhaps it was the indignation in Finn’s voice or how often Kylo had heard people belittled him while he was growing up — either way, he was surprised to hear the words that came out of Rey’s mouth next.

“Yes, I do.”

Three little words.

It was all it took and Kylo was certain he had three similar, though more meaningful words, coming through on his end. The weight of what he felt towards Rey had surpassed any expectation he may have previously had in regards to their relationship. Her simple declaration had erased it all, leaving him with a singular truth he couldn’t deny, even if he wanted to — which he didn’t.

He was falling for her. And fast.

His heart was so full. He was convinced it had enlarged in his chest because he was consumed by a comforting warmth throughout his entire body. Kylo had felt protective of Rey before and, to a certain extent, possessive, yet none of his previous emotions came close to the overpowering sense of
adoration he was experiencing now.

All he wanted to do was drag her out of the restaurant and kiss her senseless, away from the onlookers at the Blue Wall. He wanted to take her away from the city and Tatooine and all of it and just have time with her, give them an opportunity to be together.

While Kylo’s mind was racing from Rey’s confirmation of her feelings towards him, her friend Finn was experiencing a parallel sensation.

“Rey,” he sputtered after another moment of silence. “He isn’t who you think he is. Whatever you think he is, whatever he’s told you...it’s a lie. He’s not a good person.”

“Finn.” Poe put a hand on his boyfriend’s arm. “You don’t know him. What the media reports isn’t always the truth, buddy. You know that.”

“Don’t.” Finn snapped, yanking away from his significant other. “Don’t act like you’re ok with this. You’re supposed to be on my side.”

“Your side?” Rey growled.

Kylo tried not to let his smirk show. He’d be lying if he said he wasn’t pleased how quickly she rose to defend him. She was beautiful when she was angry. Her eyes held the same defiant glaze they did when she sparred with him, though this defensive air was more akin to a lioness protecting her territory than one defending herself. He liked the idea of Rey being possessive and protective over him the way he had been regarding her.

“Let’s all calm down.” Poe raised his hands up. “We came out to celebrate and we are getting carried away over nothing.”

“It’s not nothing! He’s dangerous, Poe. What happens when he turns on her the way he did his own family? What happens when he deserts her the way her parents did or hits her the way-.”

“Finn.”
The table fell silent. Kylo recognized the line her friend had crossed. He didn’t even had time to be angry with the causal way Finn had suggested he would harm Rey. He was too concerned about the confirmation of what he already knew. He had evidence in his apartment of what Rey had suffered through while she had grown up in the system. He hadn’t know how many in her life were privy to the information. He had suspected not many, though it proved his assumed these two friends were more akin to family than anything she had experienced prior.

At the same time, he felt Rey clinging to his hand with a vice-like grip. Kylo regarded her. Her eyes were hard and her jaw was set firm, but beneath the table, she was trembling. He might not have been able to notice it before. Despite her best attempts, he caught the glistening of unshed tears in her eyes. She was frightening hard to hold it all back.

“Rey, I’m so-.”

“Don’t,” she hissed, her voice wavering. “You’ve already said enough.” She stood up, still holding onto Kylo’s hand. He placed his napkin on the table and rose to his feet. “Ben, could you take me home please? I’m not hungry anymore.”

Kylo gave her hand another squeeze. “Of course.”

He wanted to hug her, lean down and whisper in her ear it would be alright, but considering the tense situation they were in, he refused to take a course of action which would further her pain. He wanted to take care of her and make her happy. She was all that mattered to him. He knew her well enough to understand that while she was upset with her friends now, she wouldn’t always be. They mattered to her. To keep her happy, he needed to be kind to them as well.

“It was a pleasure to meet you both. I apologize for any interference with your celebration. Please stay and enjoy your dinner. Order whatever you like. I’ll have them add it to my tab.” Poe stood up, as did Finn. They looked ready to object to his offer. Rey shot them both an icy glare, then turned her face up towards Kylo’s, giving his hand a light tug. They didn’t bother to refuse.

“Have a nice night.”

As she left, Kylo could tell she didn’t have experience walking in heels, especially the towering ones she was wearing this evening. Regardless, she held her head up tall as she stormed out of the restaurant. If it hadn’t been for the fact her legs were half the length of his own, he would have had to quicken his pace to keep up with her. While they approached the main entrance, his eyes caught the maitre d, who was watching them hurry out.
He tugged Rey back, slightly, causing her to pause by the podium long enough for him to provide payment details to the man. As they stood there together, Kylo wrapped his arm around Rey, noting how her skin had pebbled from the central air. He chided himself for not bringing a jacket, even though the summer weather was stifling. For him the A/C temperature was fine. For Rey, who was much smaller, it was chilly. He tucked her against him, pleased when she wrapped her own arms around his middle, resting her cheek on his chest.

“Thank you, Mr. Ren. I’m sorry you and your lovely guest aren’t feeling well. Our sincerest wishes for a speedy recovery.”

“Thank you. I appreciate your understanding.”

With a final goodbye to the Blue Wall staff, Kylo led Rey out. As they walked down the sidewalk, he made sure to maintain as much contact with her as possible. He wasn’t content to only hold her hand. Knowing the depth of his feelings for her, he wanted to be constantly touching her, constantly feeling her against his own skin. She seemed inclined to do the same, allowing him to lead her down the street, his arm draped over her shoulders, keeping her close.

The first few blocks leading away from the bar and grille were completed in silence. People passing by paid them no attention, assuming them to be an ordinary couple out for a nice evening together. Rey’s dress was far superior to his own wardrobe choice. He caught more than one man checking her out, until their eyes met his and their interest turned to fear. Kylo was rather smug over the knowledge he had Rey under his arm.

Yours. Her declaration repeated in his mind. Instinctively, he hugged her into his side, learning down to brush a chaste kiss against her forehead. Rey smiled up at him, her grin so wide her dimples showed. The tears were done and any lingering unease from the confrontation at the restaurant had diminished.

“So what now?”

“The only places I know around here are the ones I’ve read about online,” she admitted.

“Any you’d be interested in checking out?”

“Not really.”
He caught the embarrassed look in her eyes. “Not really because you actually aren’t interested or not really because you don’t want me buying you things?” Her smiled faltered. “That’s what I thought.” He stopped walking, drawing her to the side to keep them from being run into by the rest of the foot traffic.

“Ben-.”

“I understand why you didn’t want me to buy the mattress. I wasn’t trying to undermine you or buy you, Rey. I would never do that. You were sharing your life with me. It may sound simple, but it is more than anyone else has done for me in a long time. All I wanted was to give something back to you. When you told me what I took from you, I couldn’t see where I had gone wrong. I didn’t get it last week, but I do now. I’m sorry.”

“Thank you” She wrapped both her hands around his free one, bringing it up to her lip to deposit a kiss on his knuckles. “It means a lot to me to hear you say that.”

“I’m not finished.”

“Ok?”

“I understand the mattress, but now...Rey, I want to be able to share things with you too. I won’t force it on you. I don’t want you to be uncomfortable, but it would mean a lot to me if you’d let me take care of things.”

She pulled out of his embrace, crossing her arms over her chest. “Take care of things?”

“I won’t buy you an overpriced handbag or jewelry. I know you don’t care for such extravagant things. However, could we reach a compromise?”

“Maybe.” She seemed skeptical.

“Let me at least take you out. I want to do things properly, as a gentleman.”
Kylo waited, his breath caught in his chest. He didn’t ask for things. He demanded them. If he needed something, he called Phasma or Hux and it’s as his. There wasn’t a reason for him to ask. He had all he could ever want at his disposal. None of it was of any value. All the money he had made, the fame he had generated — it was all pointless. It held no real value to his life. It was an illusion. His entire career had been built upon a fabrication of what was truly important.

Meeting Rey, having her in his life had shown him what was real. If he hadn’t had punched out Nines and been awarded with mandatory community service, he would have never realized how lost he was. Maz had pointed it out when he had finally gotten the courage to seek her out. A part of him had already known, a small, fragile part of him which had never let go of his former self. It was a slight piece, hidden away from the darkness of his Kylo Ren persona. It was the call to the light, a herald to come home.

Home was not a place he associated with his family. Home was now a person. Home was Rey.

The longer he spent with her, the more the concept of her as his home solidified in his mind. He felt more balanced in her presence, more like the man she claimed to like best of all — a balanced version of his Kylo Ren and Ben Solo lives. He only hoped she liked this version of him enough to allow him a real chance to prove he could be the man she needed him to be.

“Ben,” she smiled, as she gave her reply. “You are already a gentleman and a gentle man. Those things Finn said at dinner,” she paused to shake her head, “they weren’t true. You have done things out of anger and fear. I have too. Everyone lashes out when they are in a bad place. It doesn’t make you dangerous. It makes you human.”

Kylo cupped her face in his hands, learning her head back so he could kiss her. He forgot they were outside in the middle of a busy street in downtown Corellia. He forgot they had lost an entire week due to a simple misunderstanding. He forgot he only had five months left at Ahch-To before he wouldn’t have an excuse to see her every day. He forgot neither of them had eaten dinner, as they had intended to or that her friends had made her almost cry. Right then, the only thing on his mind was how delicious her lips tasted against this own.

His body moved on instinct, hands dropping from her face to slide down her bare arms, and resting on her lower back, directly below where the bare skin of her back was free to the night air. Rey stepped into him, running her own hands up his chest, until they rested on his pecs. He could feel the heat of her palms through the thin material of the T-shirt fabric. It made him hungry to feel her against him — skin on skin. The desire flooded through him and he deepened the kiss, one hand slowly making its way south to her rear. Rey moaned against him, a breathy sound, as he gripped her, holding her in place as his hips slotted against hers.

Pulling back just enough to see her lust-laced expression, he dared to ask, “So is that a yes?”
She hummed. “You’re trying to be a typical boyfriend, huh?”

“Boyfriend?” He was startled by her blush. They hadn’t agreed on what they were calling this. It had all happened so fast in the restaurant. The term boyfriend or girlfriend sounded immature to him, though no other option came to mind. Rey seemed unsure about the term as well. When he felt her start to pull away at his tease, he rubbed his thumb against her hip bone. “I like the sound of it.”

“Yeah?” She questioned, timidly and he recognized the need for verification.

“Would you be mad if I said I like saying you’re mine more?”

Her blush deepened, but she smiled, gleefully. “Not as long as I get to call you mine.”

“I like the sound of that even more.”

“Then I guess it would be bad manners to not let my boyfriend take me out.”

“Very bad,” he agreed. “Especially when you’d be giving your boyfriend a reason to get out of his lonely apartment.”

She flashed him a mischievous smile, then quickly planted a kiss at the corner of his mouth. “I don’t want you to be lonely. I think we’ve both had enough of that last week, didn’t we? Besides, you’re a celebrity. I’m sure your PR manager wants people to see you out and about.”

“I only care about seeing you.” He responded, before ducking down to ensnare her in another long kiss. Rey didn’t interrupt this time, permitting him to trap her flush to his body. When his tongue slipped into her mouth, her hands roamed farther up his chest to grab hold of his shoulders.

He lost all ability to think beyond having Rey in his arms. After a week of being separated from her, after his epiphany at the Blue Wall, and after coming to terms with how she had started to change him, he solely belonged to her. As he said, he liked hearing her say he was hers and she was his. It was what he had wanted since the moment they had fought in the studio. As misguided as his initial desire had been, his feelings now were driven by wanting Rey, as she was, not as a First Order partner, but just a partner.
His partner.

While his hands moved across her body, he mapping the gentle curves of her figure, delighting in how easy it was for him to feel her pulse quicken beneath his long fingers and how certain pressure points caused her to shudder under his touch. He rejoiced in the fact she trusted him. She had been completely against the idea he would ever harm her, as Finn had suggested. It meant a great deal to him. He never wanted her to be afraid of him. He wanted to protect her and care for her now and always.

When finally they broke apart, both needed a moment to catch their breath.

“Will you stay with me tonight?” Rey asked, breathily, as she gazed up at him.

Kylo felt himself jolt with the connotation of what she was asking. He had thought about being with Rey numerous times. From the sounds she would make to how he would feel her fingers tangled in his hair, he had considered multiple versions of their coupling.

They had a charged attraction to each other. It was undeniable, yet he had never been with anyone before. He was fairly certain Rey hadn’t either and while he was eager to share such an experience with her, he wanted it to be perfect. He didn’t want either of them to have a reason to regret it in the morning. Considering how they had recently gotten over their first fight and how they had left things with her friends at dinner, he was wary of taking such a large step in their newly formed relationship.

As if she could read his mind, she quickly added. “I mean to sleep. I didn’t mean...I haven’t slept well since you left the other day. I was hoping you’d stay over.”

He breathed a sigh of relief, glad she was on the same page. “Of course, sweetheart, whatever you need.”

There it was again. He had called her sweetheart a few times already. He hadn’t called her that since she had blacked out. At the time of her episode, it had slipped. This time, it was intentional. There was no term better fitting for Rey. To the world she was a darling, a happy person with a compassion for goodness and to him she was the woman who held his heart, the one who he would give himself wholly to.

“Is that ok?” He asked her,
She nodded. “I’ve never had a pet name before.”

“Now you do.”

He brought his lips down upon hers again.

They decided to grab a slice of pizza from a place on their walk back towards Kylo’s apartment. It was a perfect solution to their walk-out from dinner. Though Rey’s upscale attire did raise a few eyebrows from the other more casual patrons, Kylo was pleased to notice how she leaned into him. She didn’t drift an inch away from his side, unconsciously remaining in his orbit while they chewed on their thin crust together.

It was the least expensive meal he had consumed all week and the best.

He was still smiling when they arrived at his building. Kylo hesitated then, recalling the file he had on Rey still sitting in his desk. As unlikely it was for her to discover it, he didn’t want to tempt fate. They had survived their first fight. He didn’t want to hurry into another so soon.

“Don’t you want to change?” Rey asked, as he led her to the garage.

“I’ve got a bag in my trunk,” he replied. He was grateful he had had Phasma take his laundry out yesterday. A selection of his workout clothes were clean and ready in his car.

“You’re always so prepared.” Rey noted.

“Just a habit from traveling at the drop of a hat. Sometimes my manager calls and tells me I have to be in another city or another country with barely enough time to get to the airport.”

“Wow, really?”
He shrugged, not really interested in discussing it. The last minute schedule changes were another reason he was glad to have a back up plan. Now that he had Rey, he couldn’t imagine picking up and leaving with so little time for a proper goodbye. He suspected he could negotiate with Hux, after the New Year’s fight about adding her to his regular travel expenses. It would allow her to be with him as much as possible when he had to leave Coreilla.

“I couldn’t do it.” Rey commented, as they approached his vehicle. “It was hard enough for me to leave Jakku and I wanted to leave. I can’t imagine having to fly away from Tatooine all the time.”

“You wouldn’t want to travel? See the world?”

“Of course I do,” she smiled, as they climbed in. “But I want to be able to see it on my own terms. I don’t want to be at some corporation’s beck and call.”

Kylo nodded, thoughtfully. He’d need to discuss adding some days to his future itineraries with Phasma. It would give him a well overdue vacation and Rey a chance to experience different places in her own way.

“Why didn’t you kiss me again until now?” Rey asked as they sped back to Tatooine in his Vanquish.

Kylo bit the inside of his cheek, feeling stupid for not having taken advantage of all the chances he had had the week prior to last. After their rendezvous in the walk-in at Rogue One, he had been elated. Simply knowing Rey shared his feelings had been enough for him. At the time, he had been cautious about taking things too fast, concerned about scaring her or being inept due to his lack of experience.

He hadn’t been sure he could control himself around her. Their first kiss had been electric. The sensations and overpowered his body, driving him to take it a step further. It had taken every ounce of his self-control not to — a decision he had never regretted.

Aside of him, Rey waited for his answer, a confused look on her face. Kylo wasn’t sure how to tell her about his insecurities on being with her or how to admit he had thought about being with her. He didn’t want her to think he only wanted her for her body. There was so much more to Rey than her physical self and she deserved the truth.
In the past, he had always been honest with her. He needed to continue being honest, if he wanted to keep her.

“I didn’t want to pressure you.”

“Pressure me?”

“I didn’t want to push you into anything you weren’t ready for.”

Her face relaxed and she let out a little laugh. “From kissing?”

“Rey.” He inwardly groaned. How could she not know what she did to him? Kylo knew he was...well endowed. There was no chance she hadn’t been able to feel his arousal against her when they had been in the fridge.

“I want you. It’s the first time I’ve wanted anything so desperately. I was scared of ruining what we had. I didn’t want to force you into anything you weren’t ready for. I want this,” he reached over, taking her hand, “to last. This isn’t a fling for me or just a flirtation. I was serious when I said you’re the most important thing in my life.” He kissed her hand, briefly catching her eyes before focusing on the road. “This is it for me. You’re it.”

Rey pulled his hand to her, placing a kiss across his knuckles, then setting it down in her lap, where she wrapped her other hand over top of both of theirs. She didn’t respond to his confession, but he was alright with that.

Dr. Connix had encouraged him to give her a choice. There was only one problem with his doctor’s direction. There wasn’t a choice to be made for either of them. Rey had already chosen him. He had already chosen her. Their problem wasn’t over choice. It was over communication.

There was nothing to be gained by asking her if she felt the same. Rey had already told him she wanted him. If her feelings weren’t as deep as his, he could live with that. It would be unfair of him to expect such a level of devotion from her, especially after how he had acted in the past. She had accepted him, as he was — good and bad. If he wanted to be deserving of her, he needed to continue to be good to her and for her.

Kylo took another peek at Rey, grinning when he saw the content smile on her face, as she watched
the scenery go by. He could see the light in her eyes again. He was doing it. He was making it work and he was going to keep making it work.

He was going to keep Rey in his life for a long time.

By the time he pulled into the Ahch-To parking lot, Rey was stifling a yawn. He removed his hand from her grip and turned off the engine. “Come on, sweetheart, let’s get you to bed.”

Rey smiled, timidly over at him before nodding in agreement. They headed inside the studio, locking all the doors until they were safe inside her apartment.

Kylo surveyed it. The place had once been his home, his sanctuary from dealing with his spot as an outcast in society. It had been where he hid away, developing his skills as a martial artist, studying and doing extra credit in school, and drifting further and further away from his connections.

Unlike how he had utilized the apartment, Rey had turned the space into a home. Her handcrafted living room furniture was decorated with brilliant colors. There were photos on her fridge of her with her friends and even one of her with Luke and the students. She had hung a wind chime of sea glass up by the balcony doors to catch any incoming breezes. It was so different from the untouched penthouse he had back in the city.

“Ben?” He glanced over at the staircase, where Rey was paused, her hand reaching out for his. “Are you coming?”

He had to swallow the lump in his throat. Suddenly, he was nervous. He and Rey had slept together before. Their shared afternoon naps had been one of the most pleasant experiences they had shared apart from kissing. However, seeing her standing there, waiting for for him, his body betrayed what his mind had already decided.

Kylo could feel his urge to take her, to share another more pleasurable experience with her. There was a poetic symmetry to the idea of them being together in the bed he had purchased for her. She looked so beautiful, bathed in the moonlight streaking in through the windows. Neither of them had bothered to turn on the lights, both already aware of the layout of the place. It took everything in his power to bury the urge and take her hand.
Her hand was so tiny in his own, but much warmer. As soon as his skin came into contact with her own, he felt the electric buzz of passion. Kylo swallowed again, trying to maintain a level head. He couldn’t be driven by his biology. He was a man, yes, but Rey had called him a gentleman and a gentleman didn’t rush things. He made them special.

“I’m glad you’re here.” Rey informed him as they reached her bedroom.

In the same instant, his eyes fell to her bed. She had done as she had told him, creating a frame out of old coffee crates and pallets. It was a nice design, giving her room to store items under the bed in an organized fashion. Had she not been such a talented martial artist, teacher, and bartender, he’d suggest she go into interior design. As it was, his mind had drifted far away from occupations and onto how he wanted to occupy his time with her.

“I’m going to get changed. These heels are killing me.” She grabbed a pile of clothes from the shelf and flashed him a smile over her shoulder before disappearing into the bathroom.

Kylo flopped down onto the bed with a groan. He ran his hands through his hair, as he laid there, his legs hanging off the side so his shoes wouldn’t be on her clean sheets. This woman was going to kill him. He was going to die an aggravatingly slow death.

Rey popped her head out of the bathroom. “I have an extra toothbrush, if you need one.”

He rose to his feet, taking a minute to regulate his breathing, as he stripped down to his boxers. He needed to get his desire under control and the tight confines of his jeans weren’t helping matters.

In and out. In and out. Deep breaths. He made himself think of unappealing things — Hux and his disgusting tactics with women, seeing one too many of his colleagues in the showers at the gym, possibly seeing Snoke in the shower...

Too much!

His stomach churned and he nearly got sick. It was a surefire cure, though it left him wanting to brush more than his teeth. He wished he could brush the image out of his mind. Still, the thought had rid him of his obvious erection, preparing him to face Rey in the well-lit bathroom.

Until he walked in and saw her in her pajamas.
Rey was standing in front of the sink, carefully brushing her teeth. Barefooted, she was clothed in a cotton set of short shorts and a camisole. It was clear from where he stood in the doorway, she wasn’t wearing any undergarments. With his eyes, he traced the soft curvature of her behind, up the slight slope in her back and around to her front, where her breasts were. Kylo felt his earlier problem come back instantly.

Luckily, Rey didn’t appear to notice, when she smiled at him over the toothbrush in her mouth and handed him a brand new one still in the package. Kylo took it, busying himself with dental hygiene in hopes it would keep his treacherous body from acting out.

As they both moved around the small space, sharing her sink, he noted how easy it was to be here with Rey. There was no awkwardness (besides that of his own making). They moved around each other, as if they had been together for years instead of a matter of hours. There was a flow to it, as though their bodies were conscious of each other on a subconscious level. It was symmetry in motion.

She finished first, slipping past him back out to the bedroom. When it was Kylo’s turn to do the same, he silently thanked whatever had prompted them not to turn on the lights for shielding his hard on from her eyes.

He crawled into bed next to her, stilling when she curled up against him. “Is this ok?”

In the low light, he could see her staring at him, wearing the same expression as she had in the car. Forcing the horrifying image of Snoke into his head, he surprised a shudder, and wrapped an arm around her.

“Of course.”

She sighed, contentedly into him, her cheek resting against his bare chest. She draped one arm over his torso, as she adjusted her position alongside of him.

“Last week was terrible,” she admitted, softly. “I have never felt so alone.”
“You’re not alone.”

“Neither are you.”

Sleeping had been difficult for him over the years. It had become significantly worse last week. But as he listened to Rey’s breathing slow, while she drifted off to sleep, he found himself succumbing just as quickly.

Hours later, Kylo woke to Rey tossing and turning wildly next to him.

“No. No. No!” She was thrashing about, mumbling from being stuck in a nightmare. He recognized the terror on her face from his own sleepless night when he had been plagued by his fears.

“Rey, sweetheart,” he gripped her wrists, holding her still, “You’re alright. You’re safe. I’m right here. I’m here with you.”

Her eyes snapped opened. It took a minute or two for her to focus on him and fully understand where she was before her body relaxed against his.

“Ben.”

He wrapped himself around her, cradling her against his chest. “Shhhh, you’re safe, sweetheart. I’ve got you.”

Rey curled into him, her fingers lacing behind his neck as she held herself close. “Plutt came after me and no one could stop him.”

“I won’t let him take you,” he whispered against her hair. “I won’t let anyone hurt you ever again, Rey. I promise.”

He felt her let out a small sob against his chest and he tightened his hold around her instinctively. “I’m here, sweetheart. I’m right here. You’re safe. I’ve got you.” He ran his hands over her back,
rubbing circles into her bare flesh with the pads of his thumbs. “I’ve got you, Rey.”

“Ben?”

He glanced down at her, catching her tear-rimmed eyes. “I’m glad you’re here.”

“I will be here as long as you want me to be.”

“How about forever?” She let it a teary laugh, as she wiped at her eyes.

“Forever,” he grinned as he kissed the top of her head.

He tried to not let her word choice get to him but it made him feel full nonetheless. He knew she was joking, trying to rid herself of her fears. And yet, the way she was once again resting upon him was a perfect fit, as though the universe had made them for one another. The idea of forever didn’t sound like a joke to him.

Kylo laid there, massaging Rey until her breathing slowed and she fell asleep in his arms. As she slept, he was taking in her scent, listening to her heart beat, and watching her every second.

She was his and he was hers.

Chapter End Notes

As always, I must give major kudos to my beta, @abyssalspark. She’s been a real friend while I’ve continued to battle with health issues IRL. Writing fanfiction is my favorite form of escape right now. So lucky to have her reading and providing feedback on HMWYBS.

Shameless self-promo plug: If you like this story, consider checking out my Canon-verse AU: Same People, Different Eyes. It had a lot of fun Reylo moments and more delicious banter, and agonizingly potent UST.
Wildfire

Chapter Summary

In which Kylo and Rey continue to fight their desire to be with one another...until they don't....

Chapter Notes

Thank you to my beyond exceptional beta @abyssalspark. She just got this chapter and she turned it around in a snap! All for you readers. She deserves a BIG thank you!

See the end of the chapter for more notes
When Rey’s alarm went off the next morning, she didn’t want to move. She was wrapped in a warm cocoon of safety and comfort. It was the best wake up she had ever experienced and she knew exactly whom she owed it to. Even in sleep, she recognized Ben’s presence. He had kept her nightmares at bay for the remainder of the night. Any linger phantoms of the terrors she had faced in her subconscious were distant memories after he had woken her in the middle of the night. After his interference, they hadn’t returned and she was allowed a night of true rest.

Now, he had both his arms around her, still protecting her, though he was fast asleep. His body was curled around hers, his back facing the stairs down to her living room, sheltering her from her apartment’s entry point. It was such a little detail, but to Rey it meant everything. He had taken every precaution to keep her safe, just as he had promised.
Forever.

Rey blushed as she recalled what she had asked of him. At the time, she had been coming back to herself, taking far too long to fight free from the clutches of her night terror. In the present, her mind was clear and as such, she remembered exactly how she had told him she wanted him with her indefinitely. She had never considered herself one of those clingy types, one of those girls who was all over her boyfriend and never wanted him to go anywhere without her. Rey was too independent to act in such a manner. Despite that, she had felt immense relief flood her when Ben had responded, saying he would stay with her.

Raising her eyes to look at him, she scanned his face. He was boyish in sleep, so relaxed and unbothered by anything. Rey reached over, taking his cheeks in her hands. She ran her thumbs across them, allowing herself to feel the smooth skin beneath her own. He had shaved recently, probably not long before he had run into her in Corellia. He didn’t wake, but he leaned into her touch, as if he could sense her in his sleep.

She pressed her lips to his, gently, before backing out of the embrace, to get changed in the bathroom. She had her morning kickboxing class to teach in half an hour and she couldn’t let herself be distracted by the shirtless man in her bed -- which was easier said than done.

Closing the door behind her, Rey settled against it. When she had seen him strip off his clothes the night before, she had felt as though she was overheating. Her entire core was engulfed in flames, rippling up her limbs. She had had to replay his concerned response from the car ride over and over again until she had gotten her reaction under control. Ben wanted to take things slow. He wanted to be careful with her. Jumping him the first night they were together was certainly off the table. She only wished her body understood that.

During training, she had seen flashes of Ben’s lean stomach and the planes of his abdomen, as they led beneath the band of his training pants. It hadn't surprised him he was sporting shredded abs under all those black shirts, but seeing it up close and personal was enough to make her melt. She had nearly lost all her willpower at the sight of him casually entering her bathroom to brush his teeth. It had been uncomplicated. Neither one of them making it out to be anything more than it was. Somehow the sheer domesticity of the routine had calmed Rey, making her feel more relaxed. And then she had gone and focused on his ass as she leaned down to the sink basin to rinse her mouth out and all her calm was shot to hell.

No! Abort! Abort, she chided herself, flushing at the memory.

Thinking along those lines (and about the enticing lines of his body) would only further her
predicament. She was only making it harder on herself. She let out a sigh, annoyed with how weak she was. Since she had never been with anyone before, she wasn’t even sure how to begin, yet her body seemed perfectly capable of guiding her. And that scared her.

As much as she desired Ben, she didn’t want to appear inexperienced or nervous when they came together. He had said he’d never had a girlfriend, but that didn’t mean he had never had sex. The thought of him being with someone else caused a flare of jealousy to race through her. She didn’t revisit the idea again.

Rey tried to distract herself by getting dressed in her athletic wear. She put on a pair of gray shorts and a black tank top. The shorts were longer, to allow for her kicks without revealing anything, though a devilish part of her brain reminded her of her tiny running shorts she could change into later, if Ben suggested going for a jog around town.

And she was back at square one.

Opening the door quietly, she peered out into her bedroom. Ben’s breathing was still low and heavy. Barefooted, she snuck out of the bathroom, around to the opposite side of the bed to grab her water bottle.

“Morning.”

Rey froze in her crouching position, hand hovering over her water bottle. Ben rolled over to face her, smirking when he noticed how she was attempting to be quiet.

“Hey.”

“Where are you going?” He asked, stifling a yawn.

“Downstairs. Class starts in fifteen.”

He groaned, hiding his face in her pillow. She held back a laugh. His fed-up expression was so much like his younger self, when he had been at his mother’s side for her speeches. He had always worn a disgruntled look. It was endearing to see him wear it now. It reminded her of the boy he had once been, before his fall-out with his family.
“Stay here. Go back to sleep.”

“I will,” he replied, as he moved to reach for her, “if you get back in bed.”

Rey didn’t hold back her laugh this time. She playfully swatted his hand away. “I have to teach.”

“Call off sick.”

“Ben Solo!”

“What?”

“I’m not lying to your uncle and my boss.”

“Fine. Hand me my phone. I’ll lie to him.”

“Ben!”

“Rey.”

No adult male should have been able to pull off puppy dog eyes, but the way Ben was staring at her, she was convinced there was nothing else to compare it to. His pout was difficult to ignore. Sensing her hesitation, he lunged out of bed, slinging at arm around her waist and flinging her back onto the mattress. Rey let out a squeal as he tossed her, bouncing on the bed when she hit. He was on her in the next instant, trapping her body between his legs, as he looked over her.

“I paid a lot for this mattress. We should get our money’s worth,” he teased.

His comment did little to help Rey in her current inner battle. Was he trying to drive her mad with want? She caught how his gaze lingered on her midriff, where her tank top had come up, exposing tanned skin. Maybe she wasn’t the only one fighting themselves.
“I didn’t ask you to pay for it.” She reminded him, as she surged up and grabbed his upper arms. Using all her body weight, she managed to flip them, so she was straddling him.

He chuckled. “Well, I did. So what are you going to do about it?”

Rey couldn’t hold back. In the face of his taunt and her growing desire, she leaned down and kissed him. Ben reacted immediately, rising up to lace his fingers through her hair. He was larger than her and his movements changed their position, so she was seated in his lap while their lips met and tongues danced.

She forgot all about being nervous, too consumed by the fire in her belly. Ben’s hips rose off the mattress slightly, pressing his need against her core. Rey moaned into his mouth, sure the heat would burn them both until all that was left was ash.

“Ben.”

He leaned back, just enough to see her face. Brushing her hair away, he focused on her. The nerves came back and Rey bit her bottom lip. She wanted to ask him to keep going. It was on the tip of her tongue. Then the nerves came back full force. How did she ask for something if she wasn’t even sure what it was?

Well…Ben had offered to teach her.

A knock came at her apartment door. They both jumped apart, as though they were teenagers caught in the act, as opposed to two consenting adults.

“Rey?”

Ben cursed under his breath. His uncle’s voice was full of concern and followed by another rapping against the door.

“Coming!”
“Don’t go,” Ben urged, keeping his hands on her. “Just ignore him.”

She gave him a chaste kiss, before detaching herself from him to answer the door. Ben flopped back onto the bed muttering something that sounded an awful lot like, “I’ll kill him.”

Rey had to fight not to laugh, as she hurried downstairs. Before she unlocked her door, she checked her appearance. She did not want to explain herself to her boss, especially this early in the morning. Deeming herself appropriate, she unlatched the locks and swung open the door.


His old blue eyes scanned her, then the apartment behind her. “Are you alright? I saw some students trying to get in but the door was still locked.”

“Sorry,” Rey apologized quickly, pushing herself past him to get him away from her apartment and the fact that his nephew was half-dressed upstairs. “I overslept.”

“You look a little flushed,” he observed. “Are you feeling unwell? Have you been eating enough?

“I’m fine. Just missed my alarm.”

He paused, thinking for a moment before asking. “Did you get enough sleep last night?”

“Yes.”

Thanks you your nephew.

Luke put a hand on her shoulder. “I know this must be a stressful time for you, Rey. The authorities will catch Plutt. Everything will work out.”

“Thank you.”
A part of her filled with guilt at Master Skywalker’s kind words. She didn’t want to deceive him. She wanted to tell everyone in her own time. Five minutes before work didn’t seem like the best time to bring it up.

They made their way down to the main studio, where Rey apologized for her tardiness. Strapping her headset on, she chose a workout playlist and started class.

Kylo let out a puff of air. His entire body was thrumming with need. There was no possible way for him to go back to sleep now. He was up… in more ways than one. It was in his uncle’s favor he couldn’t afford to cause any further incidents to maintain his standing in the league. Kylo was seriously considering manslaughter for his interruption.

He rolled off the bed, padding toward the bathroom. He was in dire need of a cold shower. Well, actually, he was in dire need of release, but he wasn’t about to take care of himself in his girlfriend’s apartment. He already had one dirty secret he was hiding from her. He didn’t need any others.

The cold water, along with the cure he had discovered the night prior, rid him of his erection. Rey had been kind enough to provide him with an extra toothbrush, but he wasn’t as lucky with her bath products. It wasn’t until he was naked and soaked, he realized all he had was floral scented options, each contained in bottles colored in varying shades of pink.

It wouldn’t have been his first choice, still it was hardly consequential. He had stayed overnight with her. The fact she had trusted him in her home, alone for the entire evening spoke volumes in how far they had come. A hand full of feminine scented soap wasn’t about to alter his mood.

Once he was finished and towered off, he changed into his training clothes, opting for shorts, since the August heat had set in. He stuffed his bag in one of the open cubbies along Rey’s wall. He tied up his sneakers then headed down into the kitchen.

Kylo had about an hour to kill before Rey would be done teaching. It gave him time to pick up caffeine for both of them. He figured if he had to go into town, he could grab some things to make lunch. A peek inside her fridge told him she hadn’t gone recently. It was nearly bare.

They hadn’t gotten around to ordering last night at the restaurant. Kylo wished they would have. He could have tried to surprise her with a similar meal today, as an apology since they had missed out on the cuisine at Blue Wall.
Had he been on better terms with her friends, he could have attempted to contact one of them. He hadn’t forgotten the icy stare Finn had thrown at him. Discussing Rey’s favorite meals probably wouldn’t come up in conversation any time soon. Maz or Rose or possibly both would be at Kanata Kaffeine. He would ask them when he stopped in to get Rey her tea.

He could hear music from the sound system below blaring and knew Rey’s class was underway. With her teaching, there was no reason for his uncle to linger. Kylo exited the apartment, thinking Luke wouldn’t be back until the afternoon.

If only.

“Ah, Ben!” His uncle greeted him, as he landed in the office. Luke sat at his desk, scanning a selection of papers in front of him. His attention deferred to Kylo, as the younger of the two circled around to the front of the desk.

Kylo bit his cheek to keep a scathing slew of expletives from slipping out.

“Good morning.”

“Uncle.”

Luke’s eyes went from him, to the stairs of the apartment, and back to him again. Amusement flickered in the blue orbs. “You’re here early. Much too early for afternoon classes.”

“Indeed.”

“Perhaps you didn’t arrive this morning?” He questioned, knowingly.

“Perhaps.”

“I trust you slept well?”

Kylo gritted his teeth. His uncle had no business prying into his personal life. He had hoped to avoid discussing his relationship with Rey. It seemed that would no longer be an option.
“I did.”

“Good. Good.” His uncle nodded, returning to his paperwork. He took it as a sign he could leave, only to have his uncle interrupt him once more. “If you mean to keep Rey from her classes, I’d appreciate twenty-four hours notice. And nothing provocative around the children, please. Let’s keep it professional, shall we?”

Kylo’s grip on the doorknob nearly shattered the ornament. He felt his entire body tense up at the underlying hint. “Yes, of course.”

“That’s all. Off you go.” Skywalker waved him away. Kylo had never been more pleased to leave the office.

He passed a couple of late women on his way out to his vehicle, but his gaze was fixated on Rey. She had her back to the door, bobbing on the toes of her feet as she looked through her phone for the next song. He smiled to himself, seeing her so content, even if it wasn’t upstairs in bed with him as he had originally planned. They had time. He wasn’t going anywhere without her.

Well, except to get her the tea she craved.

The Vanquish turned over effortlessly and he drove into town. Kanata Kaffeine was busy, as usual. He parked down the block in the first available space, then strolled in.

If Kylo had thought he was safe once he pulled away from Ahch-To, he was wrong. His reunion with Maz was no less embarrassing or painful.

Smack.

“That’s for leaving that poor girl on her own all week.”

Another smack.

“That’s for acting like a stubborn Skywalker when I warned you not to!”
And another smack.

“And that’s for not calling your parents, as I told you to!”

Kylo thanked his lucky stars he was built to handle far worse hits than the ones Maz have him. She was still seething when she began making Rey’s tea. As she brought the honey out, she eyed him, waiting for him to fight her on her methods.

He didn’t.

After speaking with Dr. Connix, he had seen things more clearly. He was determined to be better for Rey. Kylo wouldn’t allow his stubborn pride to keep them separated again. He had learned his lesson. One week was torture. Losing her forever would be the end of him.

*Forever.*

Rey had asked him to stay with her forever. Even if she hadn’t been serious, even if she didn’t remember having asked it of him, he was glad she had. It gave him hope. One day she may feel as strongly about him as he did about her.

“Hi, Ben!”

Even if Maz felt the need to reprimand him, he could count on Rose to be her normal cheery self.

“Morning.”

“Haven’t seen you here in a while.”

“I was in the city. I had some things to take care of.”

Behind Rose, Maz made a ‘hmph’ sound, indicating her disbelief. Rose ignored her boss, ringing up Kylo’s order while she hummed to herself.
“Thank you.” He handed over his typical one hundred dollar bill. As always, Rose responded with eyes blown wide and a chorus of ‘thank-you’s’.

Maz handed both drinks over the counter.

“Tell Rey we say hi. I haven’t seen much of her either,” Rose told him. “Maz said she wasn’t feeling well.”

“I think she’s better now,” Maz commented with a grin.

“She’s fine,” he assured Rose at the same, while collecting the drinks.

He hoped he had been quick enough to cover up Maz’s remark. He could tell by the way she was watching he, she was trying to goad him. He would not give up any details he didn’t have to. He had been forced to admit his intentions with his uncle, but he refused to continue until he checked with Rey. Their relationship was brand new. He wouldn’t let them get caught up in some miscommunication again.

Rose was still jabbering away. He had missed most of what she had been going on about, but he caught the last piece as if it was playing in surround sound. “I was hoping she’d be better in time for her birthday.”

*Her birthday?*

His surprise must have shown on his face. Maz took pity on him, moving to help the next customer, while Rose ushered him to the side of the counter. “You don’t know her birthday?”

“It hasn’t come up,” he admitted, suddenly feeling like the worst boyfriend ever.

How could he be a better man if he failed to celebrate such a special occasion. Her birthday should have been one of the first things he had asked. It was then he realized he should have known. After all, he had her file. It had her date of birth, as well as all her other personal information. He had not considered it important at the time, just a useless fact. Now, the file beckoned him so he could remedy this near fail.
“Rey hasn’t said much about it to Jess or I,” Rose told him. “I don’t think she’s ever had a birthday party before. She told us Finn and Poe brought her a pizza and boxed wine last year, but they didn’t go out to celebrate. She couldn’t — what with Plutt and…”

Kylo stopped listening as soon as Rose mentions Rey’s former life. Of course she had never had a proper celebration. That scum parading around like her guardian had denied her common decency and respect. There was no way he’d let her have a day to herself, even if it was her birthday. He wouldn’t ruin another birthday for her. Kylo wouldn’t allow it. He was going to make it the best birthday he could.

The first thing that came to mind was taking her away, possibly to Naboo. She hadn’t traveled before and it was his favorite place. She had asked him about it before. Now he had the perfect opportunity to show her. They could walk through the gardens, swim together in the lake, and sleep in together each morning… among other things.

There was one fundamental flaw in his plan. Naboo was his place of choice — not Rey’s. He thought back to their text conversation. She had said here was her place because she had her support structure — her self-made family. Getting them all together wouldn’t be difficult. Rose and Jess were constantly at the coffee shop, as was Maz. The crew at Rogue One would be around, as long as it was during the day or on a Sunday night. That just left….

Poe and Finn.

Kylo gritted his teeth. Poe wouldn’t be the problem. His boyfriend, on the other hand, didn’t want Rey dating Kylo. He certainly wouldn’t want to go to a party thrown by Kylo for Rey. He needed a way to convince him, a way to show Rey’s best friend how important she was to him, so they could go back to being friends before Rey’s birthday and before the man left for South Africa.

“Ben…Kylo?” Rose asked, uncertain.

“Ben is fine,” he told her, surprising not only himself but both Rose and Maz. Rey was having an effect on more than just his manners.

“Ben,” Rose started again. “It’s this Saturday. Her birthday, I mean.”

Saturday? That didn’t give him much time. He had work to do. There was no time to go grocery
shopping. He had calls to make. He decided he would take Rey to lunch later. It would make up for their disastrous dinner the night before.

Waving goodbye to Rose and Max, he strolled out to his car. Once the drinks were secured, he engaged his Bluetooth. “Call Dr. Connix.”

There were two short rings, then a kind female voice answered. “Dr. Connix’s office, this is Billie speaking. How may we assist you today?”

“Billie, this is Kylo Ren. May I please speak with Dr. Connix? I need to move this week’s appointment up to tomorrow.”

Rey was finishing up her morning session with a couple laps around the room, when she heard the Vanquish pull in. Soon after, Ben entered the studio, tearing the focus of her all female class from their cool-down to her boyfriend. Unaware, he removed his shoes with one hand, before delivering her tea to her.

“For you,” he greeted her, kissing her forehead, lightly, as he handed over her drink.

“Thank you.”

A chorus of ‘awwws’ came from behind them. Rey blushed, noting her students were all captivated by the exchange between the two young instructors. Putting her tea down on the counter, she stepped to the side of Ben.

“Thank you, ladies. Great class today. I’ll see you on Wednesday. Same place, same time.”

Ben stood with her at the front while they waited for the women to put away their bags and depart. After several minutes, they were alone.

“How did you sleep?” Ben asked, reaching over to tuck a strand of wayward hair behind her ear.
“Good,” she smiled, nervously up at him. She was still worried about how she had asked him to stay forever. “How about you?”

“Best sleep I’ve had in years,” he responded. He moved closer to her, lacing his arms around her lower back. “What are you doing now?”

“Now?” She let out a breathy laugh. “Now I’m cleaning up the floors and then I’m free until the padawans come in after school.”

He lowered his face. For a second, she thought Ben was feigning being tired, collapsing against her, but then she felt his lips on her neck, gently sucking on her pulse point. She gripped his arms, feeling the toned muscles beneath her fingers. It only served to make her weak in the knees.

“Ben.” She tried to say his name, but it came out more like a sigh than an actually word.

“Let’s go back to bed,” he said, between the trail of kisses he was leaving down her neck. “I’ll help you clean later.”

Rey let herself consider his tempting offer. After this morning, she was seriously considering why they had bothered to get out of bed at all. As much as she enjoyed teaching, she enjoyed having Ben’s lips on her more. His attention to her bare skin was causing her temperature to rise and a coil to tighten in her abdomen. Then he stepped closer and she could feel his desire against her. All of her reasons for not going back upstairs suddenly didn’t feel so important.

She ran her fingers up his arms, up his neck, to card through his hair. She leveraged her new position to pull his face back up to hers. He caught on to her train of thought and slammed his mouth against hers. His arms tightened around her, then he picked her up, setting her down on the countertop next to her forgotten tea.

She continued massaging his head, feeling the soft strands of hair between her fingers, as her mouth worked against his. If she needed air, she wasn’t aware. All she could focus on was Ben and how right he felt against her. He must have felt the same, his hands on her waist, keeping her leaning forward into him, while his pelvis ground up to meet her core.

Standing between her legs, gave Ben the perfect angle and Rey lost the ability to think coherently. She couldn’t even kiss him back properly. Her entire body was thrumming with need. Nothing else matter. Nothing existed but them.
“Please,” he moaned against her. “I need you, Rey.”

She nodded, placing her forehead against his, as she clutched his shirt in her hands. “Ok.”

It was the only response she was able to articulate, but it was enough for him. He scooped her up easily, keeping her pressed against his chest, and holding her legs around his torso. When he picked her back off the counter, she tensed.

“I’ve got you, sweetheart. Don’t worry. I won’t drop you.”

Rey smiled, hiding her face in the crook of his neck while he carried her out of the studio towards her apartment. He was holding her carefully, so delicately, as if he was afraid he’d break her and yet underneath all his restraint was the same undying desire she had coursing through her veins. She wasn’t sure how he kept it contained.

He kicked the office door open, stepping inside with clear intention. Then he stopped.

Rey picked her head up, out from his shirt, to see the amused twinkling blue eyes of Master Skywalker. In their haste they had both forgotten he was at the academy going through his monthly billing.

“Ben. Rey.”

“Uncle.” Ben’s voice cracked.

“Um… hello,” Rey licked her lips, as she scrambled to get down. Blush stained her entire face and she felt like an ungrateful idiot. How could she have done that in her workplace, in a room where she taught children. She groaned inwardly.

“Glad to see you are both keeping it professional.”

Rey wanted to die. She wanted God to strike her with a bolt of lightning right where she stood and
take her out of her misery. As if being caught climbing his nephew like a tree wasn’t bad enough, she had done it in the main studio, only minutes after her class had ended in full view of anyone who could have walked in.

Any thoughts of continuing their morning wake-up died as quickly as she wanted to be struck down. Living here would surely eliminate her sex drive with Monk Luke Skywalker as her boss and landlord.

Next to her, Ben seemed equally mortified. His face had gone incredibly pale, or at least paler than normal. It only got worse when his uncle spoke again.

“I’m sure you’re mother would be interested to hear you have finally taken the plunge and gotten a girlfriend.”

Ben slammed an open palm down onto the desk. “You will not call my mother.”

“Oh?”

If Rey hadn’t known any better, she would have thought Luke was teasing his nephew. He certainly appeared to be having a good time while he left them to squirm.

“If you tell my mother before I have a chance to, I’ll tell her about the summer Maz and I caught you smoking a bong out back while you searched for your zen.”

Rey had to stifle a laugh at Ben’s use of air quotes for the last word.

Master Skywalker regarded his nephew, cautiously, before he extended his hand over the desk. “Alright, then. I won’t say anything and neither will you.”

“Deal.”

The two men shook hands. Ben straighten up, before taking her hand.
“Come on,” he said to her, leading her back out of the office. “Let’s get this cleaning done.”

It took them over an hour, but Kylo felt accomplished by the time they were done cleaning the studio. The mats were squeaky clean —literally — and the mirrors no longer had scattered fingerprints from his waist down. Rey had a thin layer of sweat across her brow from her rigorous scrubbing. He didn’t care. She still looked beautiful.

“Thanks for helping me with this,” she smiled over at him. “You didn’t have to.”

“I wanted to.”

“So,” she sighed, storing the cleaning supplies under the instructor counter, “What now?”

Kylo still wanted to take her upstairs, but his uncle had not moved from his office. “Let’s see how you’re progressing.” He fell into his starting stance effortlessly, delighted, when she shifted her weight to do the same.

“Hit me with your best shot, Solo.”

He didn’t lunge at her this time. Rey was light on her feet. Her size granted her more agility than him. He would need to be more strategic in his advance. She expected him to use sheer power against her. He needed to change it up and make her think beyond his usual style.

They circled around one another at first, both unwilling to make the first move. Kylo waited. Rey was not patient. She preferred action to being stagnant and after another minute of silence, she charged at him.

Kylo let her get close enough to strike him, before he sidestepped and twisted around so he was facing her. He had told her to not let your opponent get behind you, if possible. She was quick to remedy the situation, spinning on the balls of her feet to attack once more.

This time, she nearly got her right hook into his ribs. She was lightning fast, her punches cutting sharp and straight. Her technique was flawless, which made him proud, but also wary. Rey was still
learning how strong she truly was and she had a hard time estimating the proper amount of force to put behind her hits.

While it may not have seemed to be an issue, any experienced fighter would know how to take her excessive energy and use it against her. He made a mental note to work on it with her in the future, then decided sometimes the best lessons were life experience. So when she advanced on him once more, he caught her punch and used her momentum to flip her.

Rey landed with a thud on her back. He grimaced, hearing the tell-tale ‘whoosh’ of all the air being knocked from her lungs.

“How did that feel?”

“Like I’m going to wipe that arrogant grin off your face,” she told him.

She jumped right back up, coming at him again. If her back was sore from the fall, she didn’t let it hinder her movements. Rey progressed towards him, this time, holding back in her assault. He attempted to give her a false opening. She didn’t fall for it. Instead, she went for the real opening, catching his left shin.

He let out a hiss, from both surprise and pain. She could pack a lot of power behind her. Small or not, Rey was a force to be reckoned with.

She came around, preparing to put him down by targeting his knees next. It was a logical place to attack an opponent who was taller. She had learned more than technique over the last few weeks. Too bad for her he knew how to counter.

When she kicked out, he bent down, catching her leg and tossing her back down on the mat with another resounding thud. He shifted towards her, aiming to finish their sparring with a grappling session.

Rey caught him off-guard, laying still until he was close enough for her to shove him away while she sprung up.

*Still scrappy*, he thought, as he rolled over himself to regain his footing.
Kylo reached out, his finger tips barely grazing against her waist where her black tank top had ridden up. Rey stiffened, her nostrils flaring slightly.

At first, Kylo assumed she was in pain. She had taken two falls, both to her back. Though the floors had thick mats, it was still reasonable to believe she’d have bruises tomorrow. Her muscles had to be sore. The be caught the blush adding an level color to her flushed face.

Realization struck. Her flinch wasn’t out of pain. She was ticklish. His fierce little fighter was ticklish!

Rey’s eyes widened, sensing him putting two and two together. “No!” She put her hands out in front of her, stepping backwards. It was the most afraid he had ever seen her. “No, please.”

Kylo chuckled and lunged for her. “Oh, you’re mine now, sweetheart.” She was fast, but he was faster, grabbing her around her waist and hauling her to the ground. She flailed about, attempting to free herself. It was no use. He used his massive body to pin her down long enough to take his fingers over her. Rey squealed, thrashing under his attention.

“You asked for it,” he growled, playfully, his knees caging her in as she laughed beneath him.

“I yield! I yield!” She cried between fits of giggles. His fingers stopped.

He set back in his heels, staring down at her smugly. “Not so tough now, are you, Niima?”

Rey rolled onto her side, before mirroring his seated position. “I can hold my own.”

“Not against me.”

“We’re not done yet,” she teased. Before he could ask what else she wanted to review, she was crawling over to him, until her face was directly in front of his. He grinned, already knowing what was to come.
Rey leaned forward, pressing her lips gently to his. Kylo let everything else go, as he returned her kiss. She was propping herself up on her palms, so he took the initiative to cup her face and guide her closer. Just as he tilted her face up to deepen the kiss, Rey sat back.

“Wh-.”

“See?” She smiled, triumphantly. “I can hold my own.”

“You little minx!” Kylo made a grab for her, but his girl was too quick. She leapt to her feet and took off for her apartment.

Kylo ran a hand through his hair and groaned, reclining back onto the floor mats. This woman was going to kill him — slowly and surely.

After taking showers separately, because Rey would be damned if she had a repeat of her embarrassing display in front of Master Skywalker, Kylo suggested they drive into town for a quick lunch before their usual afternoon nap.

Rey would have been lying if she said she wasn’t looking forward to cuddling up against him in bed again, though being so close had its drawbacks when they couldn’t do anything about their raging hormones. She felt as if she was a teenager, going through it all for the first time. Technically, she was going through it all the first time, but she was an adult. She felt as though she should be over the driven-by-your-hormones phase. Of course, when she had gone through puberty, it hadn’t been in a safe environment and due to being malnourished she hadn’t often had her period. She had never felt the overwhelming need to be with someone the way she felt now. It was as if all her suppressed desires had suddenly been unleashed and her body was in overdrive.

Kylo was acting similarly inclined. When she had exited the shower, he had been sitting on the edge of her bed, his knee bobbing up and down as he juggled his foot. It was a nervous tic and she nearly laughed at him for it. The only reason she didn’t was because there was actually nothing humorous about their predicament — Not when she wanted him so badly — Which made the ride into town unbearable.

He had thrown on navy blue t-shirt and gray cargo shorts. It was the most casual she had ever seen him. Even in his typical all black athletic wear, he appeared formal. With his hair still drying as they
drove into town, he looked carefree and unrestricted, not the uptight man she had met months before.

Rey smiled, reaching her hand over to his, where it rested on the gear shift. He glanced over, returning her smile, as she rested her hand over his. His smile made her skin flush all over again. She wasn’t sure how she would make it through the day with the way she felt when all he did was look at her. She was already feeling hot, which had nothing to do with the August weather. She needed another cold shower.

“Where would you like to go to eat?”

“Maz’s.”

Ben chuckled, shaking his head. “Twice in one day.”

“Are you surprised?”

“No,” he grinned over at her once more, “not at all.” He wrapped his hand around hers, bringing it up to his mouth to plant a kiss on it. “Whatever you want.”

Rey wanted him to pull the car over and crawl into his lap. Rey wanted to go back to her apartment and strip down together in her bed. Rey wanted to be with him.

*Forever.*

Her traitorous mind supplied the wording she had used the night prior. She shivered. Rey had never been in love before, but she was starting to feel as though her yearning for Ben went beyond mere biology. Even though her body burned with lust, her deepest desire was to remain with him — snuggling in bed, training together, having coffee and tea, going for a run — all of it. She wanted it all with him.

Rey had to acknowledge the fact she was falling in love with Ben Solo. And she was falling hard.

Chapter End Notes
The smut is coming. I am building up the UST for our little virgins. Don't kill me!

Thank you to those who started reading *Same People, Different Eyes*. I appreciate all the support and feedback. A new chapter will be posted shortly.
All In

Chapter Summary

In which Kylo continues to prepare for Rey's birthday, while Rey prepares a surprise of her own...

Chapter Notes

Thank you @shortystarrose for suggesting Matthew West’s songs for Reylo. I started listening to him on my Spotify and when I heard this song, it was perfect for Kylo’s development this chapter.

A HUGE thank you for my constantly there for me beta @abyssalspark. Even though she’s taking summer classes, she took the time to read through and edit this.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Escorting Rey into Rogue One felt almost like bringing a girl back home after a date — if your girl had an angry father and two overprotective uncles. Cassian left the back bar to come over to him, eyes hard while Baze and Chirrut stood, as if waiting for the owner to land a punch to Kylo’s jaw. Had that been Cassian’s intention, Kylo would have allowed it, more for Rey than her boss’s satisfaction. Luckily, assaulting him was not what Andor had in mind.

“Glad you made the right choice,” he told Kylo in a hushed tone, as he patted him on the back. Rey couldn’t hear him, oblivious to the exchange as she joined Jyn to stack clean glasses. Cassian watched, giving Kylo another pat, which reminded Kylo of his own father. Even so, Andor’s pat was rather hard for being a friendly exchange. Kylo felt the wordless threat there. Rey was as much theirs as she was his.

Chirrut and Baze greeted him with a less intimidating tactic — silent nods — and Jyn hugged him, telling him she was glad to have her best customer back. He scoffed at that, knowing he only ever
ordered one drink when he was there. When he was driving Rey, he would never partake in any more than the one. Her safety came before all else.

His sandy-haired friend was polishing the bar when he sat down in his usual seat. “You’re back.” It was more of a monotone statement than a question, but Kylo nodded. “Good.”

It was all Kaytoo bothered to say that evening, but as Kylo left to teach his round of classes, he noticed the bartender watching him closely.

“I’ll be back for you, sweetheart.” Kylo told Rey, leaning down to kiss her.

She wrapped her arms around his neck, keeping him pulled down to her level. “Promise?”

“I promise.” He grinned, before ducking down to steal another kiss. Then he was off.

Luke was no longer in his office when Kylo returned to Ahch-To. *Figures*, he thought, agitatedly. Now that Rey was at work, there was no need for his uncle to stand guard and play the card of virtue.

With a huff, Kylo entered the studio and began stretching. His body had been on edge all day. Even lunch had been a temptation. Rey had been all smiles and cheer, holding his hand, calling him her boyfriend. It was everything he had wanted. He felt terrible for allowing his physical desire overshadow it.

Their afternoon nap was the worst trial. Rey had slunk under the sheets with a yawn, her body used to the routine and recognizing the time of day as an opportunity to power down. Kylo had gone stiff at the sight of her snuggled under the covers, remembering vividly how he had grinned against her that morning and heard her ask him for… actually, he wasn’t sure what she had been about to ask him. He had assumed it was to keep going, but considering the fact they were both new to this, he realized he shouldn’t have assumed anything.

There was a chance Rey had been about to ask him to stop. A chill had run down his spine, as he considered how close they had come twice in one day. What if she felt pressured? Was he making her feel as though she had to have sex with him? It had been those thoughts which had swirled in his mind all afternoon while she slept soundly curled up next to him.

To distract himself, he had rubbed her back and run his fingers through her loose hair. While it kept her in a state of comfort and relaxation, it had done little to quell the unease he had felt at the prospect of him forcing her to make a decision she may or may not be ready for. Hadn’t he been the one to tell her he was afraid of scaring her off?

*Way to go, Ren. You lasted less than twelve hours before you jumped the girl.*

Shaking his head, he stretched out his hamstrings, while he reviewed his playlist on the teacher’s counter. It would be a Breaking Benjamin kind of night. He found the appropriate playlist and started the heavy rock vibe, as his students trickled onto the studio floor.

He didn’t need to instruct them to stretch. At this level they knew how to take care of their bodies before and after training, something he could appreciate. He saw how much time Rey had to waste on the padawans. Usually they were still hyper from their daily outings to calm down for the first five or ten minutes. She had patience. He didn’t.

Kylo paired off the students, glad they had an even number tonight. He hated having to participate. It meant he had to hold back to ensure he didn’t hurt a lesser opponent.
“Let’s start tonight with practicing those chokeholds from last class. Make sure to maintain the correct positioning of your are the attacker. For those being attacked, remember to tap out. We don’t need anyone going unconscious on us tonight.”

There was a round of chuckles from the all male class and then they began.

For a Monday, Rogue One was busy. Rey was hustling to dodge both Cassian and Jyn as she weaved around the taps and top-shelf liquor to get her drink orders in fast enough. It was the final push of summer, people trying to get in their nights out before the fall schedules picked up with extracurriculars for the kids and school obligations. The only consolation was the increasing wealth pooling up in their tip jar.

Rey waved at two of her regulars as they crammed their way into the corner of the bar. Ivano and Mashra Troade were a young couple only a few years older than her. They had introduced themselves one evening about a week ago after seeing her as a cemented bartender at their favorite watering hole. The two were also originally from Jakku, which gave them lots to discuss in between drink orders. Tonight, however, there would be no time for chatting. Rey grabbed a pair of Coronas for them, before giving them an apologetic smile and going to her next customer.

A couple of hours later, the crowd had shifted to the dance floor, the patrons now sufficiently buzzed and enjoying the local DJ. Rey leaned back against the POS counter, taking a moment to catch her breath. Working here had become more of a marathon than a sprint.

“Rough night?”

Her face broke into a happy grin as she heard Ben’s voice. She turned to find him in his usual seat, already accompanied by a glass of whiskey.

“I see Kaytoo got you.” She gestured to the rocks glass. He nodded, as she leaned up to kiss him. “Hey.”

“Hey,” he responded back.

“How were your classes?”

“Jiu-jitsu was fine,” he replied. “The guys are picking up the new grappling work fairly quickly. If they continue at this rate, I’d like to advance them into some head locks before the end of the month.”

“And Hapkido?”

“They are still struggling with new staff combination.” Rey knew which one Ben was referring to. Luke had taught it to her when she had first started. It was a long pass, sixteen counts, but when mastered, it had a beautiful rhythm and flow to it. It was a piece of moving artwork.

“Have you tried setting it to music?” She asked.

Ben paused, clearly thinking on her suggestion. “I have music playing in the background.”

“Heavy metal?” She teased, knowingly.
“What else?”

She shook her head, noticing a new customer off to the side. “Try smooth jazz. The counts are slower until they can pick up their pace.” She could almost feel his grimace as she walked away.

Rey couldn’t imagine him listening to jazz of any kind, but she recognized the soothing quality of the genre would lend itself to the rhythmic counts of the combination he was trying to teach. It was not how he learned or liked to practice, but it would benefit his students. In the end, he’d have to decide what he’d rather be frustrated about — the music selection or their lack of progress. She was hoping he’d chose the former.

Another hour or so went by and Rey kept the bar stocked, running to the back room for extra napkins, limes, and anything else they were running low on. As closing time approached, the crowd returned to the bar to close out their tabs. While she was ringing out one of her last customers, she noticed Cassian and Jyn at the end of the bar talking to Ben.

Cassian’s face was set and, as always, his expression was hard to read. Jyn, on the other hand, was grinning mischievously. Rey continued to stare, her hand hovered over the screen as she watched them. Cassian and Jyn normally did not stop during their shift unless there was something important to discuss, so what was Ben conversing with them about?

“Have you experienced a brain aneurysm?” Rey jumped at the sound of Kaytoo’s voice, startled he had snuck up on her and embarrassed she had been caught staring. “There are still people waiting to pay, you know.”

“Sorry.” She quickly finished her transaction, grabbing the printed recipes, and returning to the opposite end of the bar. While she smiled pleasantly at her customer, her mind was wondering what was going on behind her.

The end of the night rapidly followed once they had finished closing out all the customer tabs. Kaytoo seemed less snarky than usual, which tipped Rey off that something was going on. It led her to pull the blonde bartender aside.

“What’s with you?”

“Excuse me?”

Rey put her hands on her hips and stared at him. “Normally you make me count my register three times before taking it out. You only made me count it twice.”

“Normally you are more inept, so I have to triple check your work.”

“When has my register ever been off?”

“There is a high probability it will be off at some point. I’d rather not lose out on my tips because of your inadequacy.”

Rey rolled his eyes. She had asked for it by pushing Kaytoo’s buttons. Glancing over her shoulder, she saw Ben was still in conversation with both her managers. With the club goers clearing out, Chirrut had pulled up a chair and taken a seat next to her boyfriend.

What was going on?

She started putting away the last of the glasses for the evening, trying to speed up her pace to give her a reason to walk by them. As she grabbed the tray, the four disbanded, almost as if they knew her
intentions.

“Need some help?” Cassian asked, as she lifted the heavy tray.

“Nope.” Rey had hauled heavier cargo before. A few dozens glasses were hardly worth needing assistance.

Sauntering past Ben, she smiled at him. He smiled back and she noticed a twinkle to his eyes. The gaze he sent her went straight to her core, like lightning. She flushed and tried to look away before he noticed. It had her stumbling and nearly dropping the tray.

_Get a hold of yourself!_ She mentally scolded her lack of clarity. That man did things to her brain.

When she returned from the kitchen, he was leaning against the bar, whiskey gone. “Ready to go?”

Rey bid goodnight to everyone, then took his hand as they went out to the car. No sooner than he had slid into the driver's seat, she was interrogating him.

“What were you all chatting about? Looked secretive.”

“Just discussing business.”

“Business?”

“Yeah. They were asking me about some of the clubs I’ve been to while traveling — what makes them successful, why did I choose to go there, would I go back — that kind of thing.”

Even though his body language gave no indication he was lying, something felt off about his response. Rey fidgeted in her seat wondering why he would lie to her. Ben had never lied to her before — at least not that she knew of. What cause did he have for hiding something from her now? And why would Jyn and Cassian help him hide it?

Her stomach churned. They had had such a nice day together. What had happened in the course of the last several hours to make him keep something from her? Was he upset about not being able to have sex? Was he regretting staying at her place because his uncle kept interrupting them?

If that was the issue then why would he be talking to the Rogue One staff about it? She doubted he’d ask them for sex advice, especially Cassian. She couldn’t imagine Ben asking him for anything resembling sex advice. The man was just as intimidating as her boyfriend. So then what was it?

“Are they having financial trouble?” She asked, suddenly concerned about her job.

“No.” He caught her concerned look and reached over to hold one of her hands. He gave it a squeeze. “What’s wrong?”

“I…” Rey paused. She didn’t want to get into another fight with him. If she was wrong and he was telling the truth, she’d be telling him she didn’t trust him. She didn’t want to go back to being alone in her apartment, not after his nice it had been to have him with her most of the day. “It’s nothing. Just tired.”

Ben’s expression told her he didn’t buy her excuse. “Rey?”

“Y-you wouldn’t lie to me, Ben, would you?”

His grip on her hand tightened. He tilted his head in her direction, without taking his eyes off the road. “If it’s a white lie, does it count?”
“Like a good lie?”

“Yeah.”

“I guess not.”

“If it upsets you, I’ll tell you, but I was hoping to wait until I can give you good news.” She stared up into his eyes, finding nothing but fierce adoration for her in them. “Do you want me to tell you?”

“No,” she relented, immediately, squeezing his hand back.

She felt better. The unease which had been gnawing at her gut had slipped back. Whatever he was working on was nothing to worry about. Perhaps he was helping Jyn and Cassian open another location in Corellia, where it would be closer for him. He could certainly provide them insights to get up and running as well as advice on where to open another club. Whatever it was, Ben had said he’d tell her when the time came.

She trusted he would.

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Kylo woke to the vibrations of his phone going off in his pocket. He had set the alarm early so he could sneak out of bed to procure Rey’s tea. He reached down to silence the phone before it woke his girlfriend.

_Girlfriend._ He smiled at the term. He was still getting used to the fact Rey was his.

Opening his eyes, he found her tucked into his side, her back flush against his chest and her arms wrapped around one of his, as she clutched it to her chest in her dreamless sleep. His smile widened at the sight, not caring if his arm was asleep because of the way she had it trapped. He’d gladly deal with the pins and needles, as long as she cared to cling to him.

He placed a kiss to the back of her head, gently, so as not to stir her. It took more effort to dislodge himself from her. With stealth that would have rivaled Indiana Jones’s, he slid it of bed, at the same time sliding his pillow in place of his body, to provide support for her back. Rey murmured something unintelligible, then nestled her head against the mattress before her breathing became shallow once more.

Kylo let out a relieved sigh and quietly made his way downstairs. He had a full agenda this morning and he was already missing being in bed. Regardless, the sooner he finished his errands the sooner he could come back. He wanted to get through it all before lunchtime, so he’d still have his afternoon with Rey.

He got to Kanata Kaffeine in under ten minutes, going right for Rose at the counter. “You’re early this morning,” she remarked by way of greeting him.

“I need your help.” He blurted it out before he could even order Rey’s tea.

Rose’s eyes widened at first, but then she relaxed. “This is about her birthday, isn’t it?”

“Yes. I need you girls to go to the club for the night.”

“The club?”

“Rogue One, where she works,” he confirmed. “I am planning out the entire weekend and I spoke to
her managers last night. They are on board. Rey won’t have to pull her normal shift on Saturday night.”

“Wow. You work fast!”

“I want this to be perfect,” he told her, unsure why he was admitting that. Rose was Rey’s friend. She had always been nice to him, but then again, she was kind to everyone. It didn’t make him special.

“Is there a time we need to be there by?”

“Before midnight,” he replied, thinking over his plan. He wanted to tell Rey about his plans for Sunday before her birthday officially ended, but he wanted it to be a surprise.

“That shouldn’t be difficult,” Rose laughed. “Jess had been dying to go there and she keeps pestering Rey about getting us in for free.”

Kylo waved his hand. “There won’t be a cover charge for any of you,” he promised. “I already took care of it.”

“You’re serious?”

“Of course. You’re the ones doing me the favor.”

Rose cocked a brow at him. “Wait! Why aren’t you taking her?”

“I need to take care of a few things once you get her out of the apartment and to the club, but I’ll see you there.”

“Alright, Casanova.”

“Hardly,” he murmured, suddenly wondering if his status as a virgin would turn Rey off. Would she be disappointed? Maybe she expected him to know what to do since he was older than her. She was going to be in for a real surprise, if that was the case.

“Here.” Rose slid two to-go cups across the counter. “On the house.” She added, pushing his hand away when he attempted to pay. He hadn’t even ordered, but it seemed she had memorized heir orders. Maybe he was special.

“Thank you, Rose.”

“I’m glad you two found each other.”

“Me too.”

It was early when Rey felt Ben get out of bed. She felt him slowly move off her mattress before quietly tiptoeing across the floor. She decided he must be going to the bathroom and fell asleep again.

When she woke up the second time, it was to the smell of green tea and honey. Cracking her eyes open, she was met with Ben’s smiling face staring down at her as he held out a steaming to-go cup
“Good morning, sweetheart.”

“Morning,” she replied, sitting up so she could accept the tea. As Rey shifted back to rest against the wall, she noticed Ben was fully dressed. “How long have you been up?”

“About an hour,” he told her.

Rey panicked, thinking she had overslept. She reached over to grab her cell from the bedside table, sighing with relief when she noticed the time. She hadn’t missed anything.

Ben leaned down and kissed her forehead. “Go back to sleep. I just came by to drop off your tea.”

“Where are you going?” She asked, curious what was so important for him to be up this early.

“I have some things in the city I need to take care of.”

“Now?” She asked, placing her tea down to reach for his hand. “You could come back to bed with me.” She pulled on him for emphasis.

There it was — the same heated gaze he had given her yesterday when they had almost defined the studio. Rey swallowed, no longer interested in her tea or actually sleeping. Ben knelt on the edge of her bed, bringing both his hands down to her face, kissing her.

She returned the kiss, biting on his bottom lip to gain entrance into his mouth. Ben’s right hand gripped at her loose hair, while his left trailed down her back to hold her close.

“You’ll be the death of me,” he sighed against her, before he pulled back.

Rey grinned up at him, trying to look as alluring as possible. Regardless he backed away from the bed. She flipped back down with a groan, already missing his warmth.

“I’ll be back for lunch,” he promised. He made a move to kiss her goodbye again, then thought better of it, and left. Rey watched as he went, a plan forming in her head.

Since she was already up and caffeinated, she figured she’d do some errands of her own. With her tea in one hand and her cell in the other, she checked the store hours for Echo Base, then considering the sizable tips she had collected the night prior, decided to look up the nearest mall. It was a bit of a drive, but by the time she got there, they would be opened.

Mind made up, Rey got changed and went off in search of the perfect way to end Ben Solo.

His first stop was Dr. Connix. As he walked into the office, he was greeted by Billie the receptionist he had spoken to the day prior.

“Good morning, Mr. Ren. How are you today?”

“Fine, thank you. How are you?”

“Wonderful,” she beamed. “Thank you for asking.”
As she responded, he realized he had never acknowledged her before, usually too moody to bother because he was annoyed he had been forced to attend these sessions. He recognized how rude it was to have not greeted her in the past. She seemed nice enough. Rey would be appalled by his manners if she knew. He imagined how her face would comfort and how she’d probably elbow him until he behaved better. Had she really changed him that much in only a couple short weeks?

There was a buzz at Billie’s desk and she smiled over the counter at him. “Dr. Connix will see you now.” He made a point to thank her as he walked by her desk into Kaydel’s office.

“Mr. Solo, you are early this week.” Dr. Connix was seated in her normal chair, her blonde hair twisted high up on the top of her head in a tight bun.

“I needed to speak with you on a matter,” he informed her, taking the chair across from her.

“One of urgency, I assume?”

“Yes. Rey’s birthday is Saturday.”

Dr. Connix smiled, her pen already scratching away across her regular brand of legal pad. “So I take it you two are on speaking terms again?”

“You could say that.” Kylo reminded himself he was over thirty and had no reason to blush, but the red color stemmed through his cheeks to the tips of his ears. Dr. Connix, thankfully, did not notice, too concentrated on her writing.

When she lifted her eyes to him, he had forced his face to return to normal. “I’m glad to hear that, but also confused as to why you would need my assistance when you’ve made such progress on your own.”

“Rey and I decided to pursue a romantic relationship together,” he informed the doctor. “However when we announced it to her friends they didn’t share our…”

“Ah,” Kaydel nodded, “I see the problem. You fear their rejection, since you feel you were rejected by everyone in your past.”

“No, not exactly.” He responded, ignoring his underlying issues. “I don’t care what they think of me.”

“But Rey does?”

“Yes,” he nodded. “And I’d like them there to celebrate her birthday on Saturday, without causing her any more pain.”

“Pain?” Dr. Connix’s eyes flashed with concern. “Did they hurt her?”

“Her best friend said some hurtful things to her,” he admitted, his hands balling into fists as he thought about Plutt, “but he didn’t raise a hand to her. Someone else did.”

Kaydel raised an eyebrow. “She has physical abuse in her past?”

“That isn’t my secret to disclose,” Kylo quickly tried to back track.

He watched the doctor place her pad down on the coffee table between them. “Mr. Solo, let me start by saying that while I appreciate the progress you’ve made, I in no way condone any sort of vigilante or revenge behavior. Violence is a trigger for abuse victims, regardless of the intention.” He started a
rebuttal, but she silenced him with a hand. “I’ve read your files and seen your fighting style, Mr. Solo. I can interpret your moves easily. You want to protect this woman. I can understand feeling as though you have the power to do so, seeing your skill in the ring as well as your increased wealth, however, I caution you to what any attempt on her abuser’s life would do to your own.”

“I don’t care.”

Dr. Connix gave him a sad smile. “You should, because any action you take now will affect not only your life but Rey’s as well.”

Kylo felt the tension in his hands increase. He had failed Rey once. He wasn’t about to fail her again. She had been left alone and unprotected for too many years. He would not allow for that behavior to continue, not as long as he was able to stand by her. No, there was no room for people like Plutt in the world and certainly not in his new world with Rey.

When Plutt came out of hiding — and he would — Kylo would make sure it was the last time the cretin showed his ugly mug. He would put an end to Rey’s suffering by eliminating the garbage who had tortured her. There would be no more reason for her to be afraid, no more nightmares marring her otherwise pleasant sleep. Kylo vowed to put the man into the ground.

“Mr. Solo,” Dr. Connix was staring at him, waiting for him to answer her.

“What?”

“I need you to confirm you will not go after the person who harmed your girlfriend. With your prior record, a conviction would not be difficult for the courts to land on.”

“I don’t care,” he growled again.

Dr. Connix let out a frustrated sigh, the first indication she had ever given him to let him know she found him hard to deal with. Usually, she kept her emotions even, barely registering anything other than positive reinforcement for his actions.

“Ben,” she tried in a softer tone. “Think through what I’m saying. Say you go after this… it’s a man, I assume?”

“A monster.”

“Say you go after this man,” Dr. Connix continued, ignoring his raw emotion. “And you kill him or at the very least incapacitate him, what do you suppose will happen to you?”

“I’ll be back here to complete more mandatory sessions with you.”

“No.”

“No?”

“I am a last chance when the courts are feeling particularly generous. You won’t be back here unless it is of your own choice.” She paused for a moment, her pad still sitting on the table between them. “You will go to jail.”

Her voice left no room for misinterpretation. She was no joking, nor was she threatening him. She was staring a rather plain and true fact. If he attacked Plutt with the numerous outburst already upon his record, he would be earning himself a one-stop ticket to prison.
“And once that happens, what will become of your relationship with Rey?”

Kylo felt a tightness seize his chest. Rey had been abandoned by her parents. He could not abandon her too. If he was pulled away in handcuffs that would be the end of it — the end of them. Even on good behavior, he was sure he’d be put away for at least a year and a full year without Rey would be far more painful than anything he had experienced before. Would she wait for him? Why would she? If he got taken away it would be due to his own actions.

“How do you think she would react to you beating this man?”

The psychiatrist had mentioned Rey may have an aversion to violence. Considering how rapidly she had adapted at Ahch-To, he wasn’t sure if he believed the doctor, but Rey had taken a long time to come out of her nightmare. Plus, there was the week after Plutt had come back into her life when she had waned away, barely recognizable. Perhaps there was more than one side effect from her past.

“I-I just want her to be safe.”

His answer appeared to pacify Kaydel. She picked up her notepad and pen. “I understand. It is normal for us to feel protective of our loved ones. It’s on our nature to want what’s best for them. You should know, Ben, there is more than one way to give the best to your significant other. Protecting her is noble, but you can’t do this alone. You can’t be with her every minute of every day. If you are truly concerned about her well being, I’d suggest going to the authorities.”

“We have.”

She nodded with a hum, as she continued to write. “I believe you have connections to speed along the process, if you were so inclined.”

Did she mean his mother? Obviously she knew who he was related to if she had access to his medical files. Still her blunt recommendation startled him. Dr. Connix seemed to be against him breaking the man’s face but breaking his code of silence with his mother was not out of the question.

“I may be inclined to,” he replied, “if I can get past my current problem.”

“Rey’s friend?”

“Best friend. He’s practically her brother.”

“He?”

“His name is Finn.”

She began scribbling away on her pad. “Go on.”

“His boyfriend seemed alright with me dating Rey, but he has-.”

“Reservations?”

“More like a vendetta,” Kylo clarified. “He thinks I’m dangerous because of the media surrounding my past and my time in the ring.”

“And what do you think?”

“I think he just doesn’t want me around her.”

“And Rey? What does she think?”
“She told him off and we left.”

“Left?”

“The four of us were supposed to have dinner together.”

“I see.” The doctor wrote hastily on her paper, flipping over the top sheet when she ran out of room. “I must say, Ben, this is a huge step for you — both of you.”

“Excuse me?”

“Victims of abuse tend to have a very small but loyal group of friends. If Rey had defended you to her inner circle she must feel quite strongly about you and her decision to propose a romantic relationship with you. You should not take that lightly.”

He hadn’t. As wonderful as the last couple of days had been, the memory of the week prior was still fresh in his mind. He never wanted to be without Rey again. He didn’t want to give her a reason to push him away. Her brashness at dinner had filled him with overwhelming pride and cemented his feelings about her. It had been more than anyone had done for him before.

She had chosen him.

Him.

Ben Solo. Kylo Ren. The mighty fighter and thirty-something virgin. It almost was laughable considering how the media portrayed him. Thanks to Hux dragging him out all the time, he had earned himself a reputation for late nights, which led to people assuming he was well-versed in the bedroom. It couldn’t be further from the truth, but now — now he had a chance to experience all of it with someone he loved, someone he…

Loved?

Kylo turned the word over in his head. He was positive his attraction to Rey had always been leading him down this path, whether he had realized it at first or not, but now the implication of the word was blaring up obvious.

He loved her.

The earlier tightness which had constructed in his chest was gone, replaced by a warming sensation which stretched throughout his entire body. It wasn’t the hot-blooded lust he felt when they had been in bed or in the studio. This was something much purer, more long-lasting.

Love.

A vision of Rey moving in with him came to mind. She could stay with him, where he’d have more alone time with her away from the constant interruptions of his uncle. That train of thought led him to other considerations — proposing to Rey while visiting Naboo, getting married to her, getting to see her in a white dress, flowing around her as effortlessly as she flowed through her fighting moves, seeing her smile go even more brilliant as she gazed up at him.

In that moment, his future had never been clearer. He had known for a while he belonged to Rey, had known he cared deeply for her, but he had never felt so fulfilled, so completely content to believe they could have an entire life together starting now. He smiled, as his mind continued to envision possibilities for them, each one more wonderful than the last.
“Mr. Solo?”

“I’m sorry,” he shook his head, having momentarily forgetting he was still seated in Dr. Connix’s office. “What was the question?”

“Your hour is almost up for the week,” she pointed out. “I have a recommendation, if you’d be open to it.”

“Sure.”

“Talk to Finn. Alone. Sit him down and have a one-on-one conversation with him. It will show him you are serious about Rey and have the commitment to this relationship in the long run. I believe, if he is a reasonable man, he will appreciate the gesture.”

Kylo considered the advice for a moment, before nodding in agreement. “Thank you, Doctor.”

“Anything else, Ben?”

“No. You’ve been more than helpful.”

“Then best of luck.”

After she had arrived at the mall, Rey had immediately navigated herself to Gatalenta Garters and Gifts. The lingerie shop was empty besides one sales associate, not unusual for how early Rey had arrived. The middle-aged woman was paging through a trashy magazine and barely uttered a hello. Being alone in the store, had relieved some of her nerves. She had never done anything like this before, but she was tired of waiting. She wanted to send Ben a sign she was ready, one he couldn’t ignore due to errands. A sexy ensemble seemed to be the best way to go.

There were at least a half dozen types of underwear on display and while she was familiar with the standard cut versus a thong, some of the other styles made her question the purpose of such a design. One was barely a collection of strings. It looked more like dental floss a fashion design student had turned into a wearable pair than actual panties, but perhaps that was the point. She couldn’t tell and she was far too embarrassed to ask.

Feeling slightly ridiculous about being in the store, she started walking towards the back of the shop. She realized she should have waited until she could have come with Rose and Jess before making such a rash decision to do this on her own. She had no idea what to buy or what would look good on her form.

Biting her lip, she wondered if she should leave and come back, but she had already driven out here and spent gas money, so she decided to stay. Grabbing her phone out of her pocket, she dialed Jess.

“Hey!”

“Hey, Jess.”

“What’s up?”

“I need help,” Rey told her, hating how her voice wavered with her unease.
“With what? Are you ok?”

“I’m in Gatalenta Garters,” she cupped her hand over her phone as she whispered.

“What? Where?”

“The lingerie store,” Rey hissed, attempting to his behind a rack of silk kimonos. She was sure the sales associate thought she was insane.

“Why are you in a lingerie store, Rey?” Jess chuckled, sarcastically.

“Because I want Ben to…” She stopped, her face fully flushed now. God, why couldn’t she just say it? She was acting like the inexperienced virgin she was.

“To bang you?” Jess clarified in her blunt, no holding back way.

“Yes.”

“Ahhhhh!” Jess screamed so loudly, Rey had to hold her phone away from her ear. At the front of the store, the sales associate gave Rey a bored look before returning to her magazine.

“Jess!”

“Sorry, but damn, girl, he’s going to wreck you! You better call off work tomorrow. I don’t think you’ll be walking.”

Rey’s flush extended further. “He didn’t seem all that interested this morning.”

“Oh, girl, he is,” Jess promised her. “Believe me, he is.”

“Still, I want to get something for him.”

“Well,” Jess took a deep breath, “if you ask me, you don’t need it. The boy is clearly in love with you, but if you want to have some fun with him, why don’t you go for a cute little baby doll?”

“A what?”

On the other end, Jess let out a groan. “ Seriously, Rey, we need another girl’s night in. You have so much to learn.”

“Ok.”

“There should be a section apart from the bras and panty separates where the sets are. Why don’t you check out some of them and see what you like?”

“Alright. Thanks, Jess.”

“Go get ‘em, tiger.”

Tucking her phone away, Rey located the area Jess had mentioned. She started perusing the options, not sure what would be best and deciding since she had time, to try them all.

Rey had never considered spending the type of money she was about to hand over for the items in her arms. There was an assortment of lace, silk, and satin, as well as an array of colors from classical white and black to a more daring shade of fire red. Before she bought anything, she was going to try them on.
It took nearly an hour, but after a nerve-wrecking and confusing bout in the dressing room, Rey had selected a collared black lace teddy and an off-white baby doll. She took her selections up to the register, trying not to cringe when she saw the total amount flash across the screen. It would be worth it to see the look on Ben’s face when he came back from his errands.

Rey had mentioned Finn worked with food. Kylo had assumed that meant as a waiter or line cook. He was surprised to discover Finn was actually a food scientist. When he walked into D’Qar Discovery he hadn’t been expecting all the white lab coats and researchers who moved with clinical precision about the building.

He greeted the receptionist as politely as he could before asking to see Rey’s friend. “I’m here to see Mr. Finn Storm, please.”

The woman behind the lobby counter gave him a curt nod, before picking up jet phone and dialing an extension. There was a moment of pause before she turned to peer up at him. “Your name, Sir?”

“Kylo Ren.”

She made no fuss over the information and he guessed she was not a fan of MMA matches, though her eyes did hover over his form a bit longer than they should have.

“He will meet you in the lobby, Mr. Ren. It will be about ten minutes.”

“Thank you.”

Kylo spent the time in the lobby checking his messages. While he had been at Rogue One last night, he had followed up on the second part of Rey’s birthday surprise. It had taken some added work on his end. He knew she had a degree in mechanical engineering, but it had been some time since he had been in contact with the man who could make her dream a reality.

He was pleased to see an email in his inbox, offering a personal contact number and available times for a meeting. It was all coming together. He couldn’t help but feel a sense of pride that he was going to be able to pull this off. He could hardly wait to see the look on Rey’s face.

“What are you doing here?”

She was sure to look more pleased than her friend, who was currently glaring down at him as if he was gun on the bottom of his shoe. Kylo rose to his feet, extending a hand to shake, but Finn merely looked at his open palm and crossed his arms over his chest, defensively. Was that where Rey got it from?

“I came to speak with you.”

“At my work? Couldn’t you have waited until after hours?”

“Rey doesn’t know I’m here,” Kylo admitted, as if that explained his reasoning.

“So you’re keeping secrets from her now. Well that’s just great,” he drawled, sarcastically.
“I don’t intend to keep it for very long,” Kylo replies, “just until her birthday. I’m arranging a party for you. I came to ask you in person if you and Poe would please be there.”

Finn continued to glare at him and Kylo could sense what the man was thinking. It was obvious his reservations ran deep. Changing his mind would not be easy. As Dr. Connix had suggested, he didn’t need Finn to alter his opinion of Kylo, only his decision whether or not to be there for his friend.

“It’s not for me. It’s for Rey. I understand you don’t care for me. I can live with that, but Saturday is all about her and I want it to be special. You are her best friend. If you aren’t there, she’ll miss you. It will give you a chance to celebrate since we weren’t able to last weekend.”

The shorter man dropped his arms, his brain working over what Kylo had proposed.

After a pause of uncomfortable silence, he asked, “Why are you doing this?”

“I want Rey to have a real birthday for once.”

“Right,” Finn nodded, “but you have money and connections. You could take her anywhere — do anything — to celebrate. Why insist on me being there?”

“Like I said, it’s not about me. It’s about her and what makes her happy.”

“You care that much about her being happy?”

“Yes.”

“But you barely know her!” Finn insisted, though Kylo could see his frustration was not directed entirely at him.

“I’ve been with her every day for over a month. I know more about her than most. She’s told me about Plutt and what happened before. I was there when she fell. I stayed with her all day. I never once left her.”

There was disappointment in his tone and an unspoken judgement, which Finn clearly picked up on. Kylo let out a breath he hadn’t realized he had been holding. He ran a hand through his hair, telling himself to calm down. He was not there to pick a fight with the man. It would only serve to prove Finn’s point.

“I want what’s best for her. I never want to see her like that again.”

“Me too,” Finn agreed, quietly. “I should have known she’d need me when he came after her. She told me not to come. She knew about the promotion and—.” He stopped speaking, his face changing. “Thank you for being there.”

Kylo hadn’t anticipated an apology, if that’s what this was. He had hardly held onto any hope Finn would agree to his idea for Saturday night. He hadn’t officially, but their conversation had taken an unexpected turn, leaving Kylo more confident about his ask.

“I’d like for you to go to dinner together. I won’t be there, if that makes a difference. I’ve already taken care of the arrangements.”

“Dinner?”

“Rey cares about her friends — you and Poe — and the ones she’s made in Tatooine. I thought
she’d enjoy a night out with all of you.”

“And what about you? You aren’t spending time with her on Saturday?”

“I plan on doing it afterwards. I figured my attendance at dinner would hinder any conversation you may want to have. I won’t spoil it with my presence. This is Rey’s time with you. I want her to make the most of it.”

Finn spoke his head, a bewildered expression on his face. “Why?”

“I love her.”

It was the first time he had said the words out loud. His confession served to startle not only Finn, but himself as well. The answer had just come out. He hadn’t meant to say it to this man, the one person he could see standing between himself and a future with Rey. If he planned on saying it to anyone he wanted to say it to Rey.

“You do, don’t you?” Kylo opened his mouth to respond, but Finn cut him off when he extended his hand. The two men shook hands. “This doesn’t mean we are friends. I still don’t like you,” the dark-skinned man reminded him.

“I can live with that.”

“We’ll be there,” Finn promised, as he took a step back. “Just give us the place and time.”

The two exchanged contact information for the sole purpose of coordinating the evening, before parting ways. Kylo felt victorious. He kept his phone out to update the dinner reservation, as he exited D’Qar.

It was time to go back home.

Chapter End Notes

There will be smut in the next chapter. It's mostly written, so fair warning for those who are concerned about that level of content. A bigger thank you to those who have also begun reading Same People, Different Eyes. I appreciate all the extra kudos and comments.
Dangerous Night (to Fall in Love)

Chapter Summary

In which Rey surprises Ben when he arrives back at her apartment and Kylo continues planning his surprise(s) for Rey...

Chapter Notes

Warning: Lemon in the first section of this chapter and the last section of this chapter. If you don’t want to read, please proceed until after the first cut. Also, fair warning, this is the first time in a VERY long time I’ve written any NSFW content. Please be gentle.

Shout-out to WhatSorceressIsThis for the ‘potato sack’ reference. I liked it so much I wanted Kylo/Ben to say it in this chapter. So he does. Happy reading everyone!

See the end of the chapter for more notes
Rey paced back and forth in her bathroom. Barefoot and bare-legged, she walked around the cool tile floor, attempting to calm her nerves.

After getting back to her apartment, she had immediately done upstairs to change out of her ripped jean shorts and baggy T-shirt and hop in the shower. Once she was fresh and clean, she had laid out her new purchases on her bed as she determined which one to wear. The white was her favorite, flirty and not quite as revealing as the black body suit, but if her intention was to get Ben in bed with her, surely the black one would be more appropriate. In the end she went with it.

She hadn’t been sure what time Ben would be back from his errands. He had said lunch time, but it was a vague notion and left too much time for her to start eroding a line into the tiles of her floor. It had taken her nearly ten full minutes to get into the body suit properly and another five minutes after that to fluff her hair out to look more appealing. Now, she was simply passing the time and attempting to burn off excess energy as she waited.
Maybe this is a bad idea, she thought as she worried her lip. After all, it wasn’t as if she knew what she was doing. Seduction wasn’t exactly her forte. Ben was the only man she had ever been intimate with. Despite her impossibly strong desire for him, she wasn’t exactly sure how to pursue him. She had thought the lingerie would help boost her confidence and empower her to take the plunge. Alone in her apartment, she began to experience buyer’s remorse over her decision to spend so much money in such minimal pieces of fabric.

The women she had seen advertised in the shop had been busty with flat stomachs and stick-thin legs. She was made of lean muscle. Compared to the abundant curves of those women, she was seriously lacking. Though the tie-up suit clung to what she did have, doubts circled her mind. Would Ben like it or would it only highlight how she had a boyish figure?

Rey continued to pace until she heard the familiar roar of the Vanquish’s engine in the parking lot. Her mind immediately began to calculate how quickly she could strip out of the lingerie. It had taken far too long to put the get-up on. She wasn’t confident she’d be able to get out of it any faster. As she was thinking about turning on the shower to buy her extra time, she heard the door knob turn downstairs.

“Sweetheart?”

Ready or not, here he comes.

Burying her anxious thoughts, Rey stepped out of the bathroom and called down to him. “Up here.”

She heard Ben’s heavy steps as he climbed be staircase. “Did you get back to sleep?” He asked as he ascended towards her. “I’m sorry I woke you up earlier. I didn’t want to leave you without telling you where I was-.”

He halted at the top of the steps, his mouth hanging slightly agape as he took in her appearance. Rey tried not to stare at the floor in reaction to his appeasing gaze. She couldn’t read his expression, couldn’t be sure what was going on in his mind, until he moved.

“Rey.”

Her name left his lips as more of a strangled doing than an actual word. Before she could ask him if he liked it, he was crossing the room to her in a few long strides. Then his hands were on her hips, drawing her towards him, as his eyes drifted over her form, lingering on the cutouts in the lace-up portion.

Ben dropped to his knees, before her. He kissed each opening, bottom, left, right, top and so on and so forth, until he had worked his way up from her belly button to her breasts. He ran one finger along the cutout streaming across the top of her chest, then tugged on it. Her head tilted back, back arching slightly from the sensation of it. She never knew she could feel pleasure from such a simple, exploratory touch.

“God, sweetheart, do you have any idea what you’re doing to me?” He groaned, still on his knees before her. Rey felt a surge of relief wash over her. He liked it. She had made the right selection. She sighed, glad for it and for his touch burning across her bare flesh.

His lips traced a path back down through the woven front towards her center. Rey felt weak limbed and her hands grasped onto his silken hair, fingers tangling into the strands. When he kissed over her core, through the fabric of the body suit, she lost all ability to think clearly. She swayed on her feet, nearly falling into him.
“Ben,” she cried, voice hoarse, as if she had been screaming. No doubt she would be soon enough.

He sensed her inability to stand and scooped her up. He walked them both over to the bed, carefully setting her down, his hands still on her, spanning across as much as she as he could. Seeing how broad his hands were, how much of her he could cover made her warmer. She felt the familiar heat of desire fill her, skin flushing all over in response to his attention.

“Ben.” She said once more, quieter and breathy this time. “Please.”

Her nerves were gone, eliminated by her overwhelming need to feel him, to obtain the elusive release she had been driven to claim since he had first kissed her at Rogue One. She grabbed his hands, pushing them down her body until they were on her upper thighs.

Suddenly he stopped, paused between her thighs, kneeling on the floor in front of her, as she lay on the bed. “Rey?” She propped herself up on her elbows, worried about the tremor she heard in his voice. “I…I’ve never done this before. I-I don’t w-want to hurt you.”

“Ben.” She sat up, dipping forward towards him until she was able to cup his face. “You aren’t going to hurt me. I want this. I want you.” Her words must have reassured him, because he closed his eyes, taking a deep breath in and when he opened his eyes again, his resolve had steadied.

“Say it again. Please.”

With a nod, she repeated her earlier assertion. Apparently she wasn’t the only one who had been worried about how this was going to go down. “I want this. I want you.” Then, considering how his hands were trembling on her, she added, “Please, Ben. Please touch me.”

Something snapped within him at her command. The slight shake on his hold stilled and he pulled her by her legs closer to the edge of the bed, until he ducked down to bring them over his shoulders. Rey gasped at the lift, feeling her center positioned before him. When he spoke again, any uncertainty was gone from his voice. He was once again the bold, self-assured man she had met in Kanata Kaffeine.

“I’ve got you, Rey. I’m going to take care of you, sweetheart. I promise.” Ben leaned down, depositing another kiss this time on the inside of her right thigh, dangerously close to the seam of the body suit. He repeated the gesture on her left. Both kisses were gentle and loving, but Rey wanted more. She needed more.

Appreciating her insatiable state, Ben moved one hand off her thigh to run down her belly to her core, dragging his thumb last. While he drew a straight line down her body, he applied a bit of pressure to his final stroke, landing at her slit. Rey keened under his tease. His opposite arm wrapped around her leg, holding her down as she attempted to raise herself off the mattress.

Prying the bottom of the black lingerie away from the juncture of her thighs, he repeated the same gesture across her bare flesh. Rey left out another cry, her entire body rippling with sensations brand new and powerful. She had never expected for this to feel as glorious as it did. Knowing it was Ben who was able to generate this reaction from her, only made her feel more needy and desperate for release. A coil wound tight in her gut, pulsing with each second that ticked by.

Ben pressed his thumb against her core, before dragging it up and down a few times. Her hands, which had been at her sides, began fist ing into the sheets to keep her from writhing around uncontrollably, as waves of heat rolled through her body.

“God, sweetheart, you’re so wet.”
Rey hummed in agreement, not entirely sure what she was agreeing to, but beyond the point of caring. All she knew was that she wanted Ben to continue to touch her and never stop. He pressed another kiss to her inner thigh, this one on her flesh where her leg joined her hip. Rey bucked up against his mouth, loving the sensation.

“So eager,” he breathed against her. She nearly screamed in want when his exhale breezed over her bare lips. Had he been anyone else, anyone other than Ben Solo, she would have thought he said it in a smug fashion, but Ben — her Ben — spoke as if he was in wonder of every reaction she had to his touch, as if every move she made and cry he elicited was a gift.

“Ben. Please.” Rey hated how desperate she sounded. She had never begged for anything before in her life. She had never allowed herself to stoop so low, but if that was the price she had to pay in order to have her boyfriend worship her, she’d gladly do it again and again, especially because he rewarded her almost instantly.

Inserting a single finger into her, both Rey and Ben let out loud moans. She felt her entire body stiffen as her interior walls gripped onto the digit. Unused to the sensation, she let herself shudder.

“A-are you alright?” He asked her, uncertain about her response, and removing the digit.

“Too hot.”

Suddenly the bodysuit felt restrictive and she couldn’t concentrate on anything but getting it off of her person. She angrily clawed at the fastenings, determined to remove it. Thankfully, Ben was far more coherent than she was. He carefully undid the collar at the top of the suit, before loosening the woven front, so she could slip out of the lingerie.

“Better?”

“Yes,” she groaned, reaching for his hand. She pulled on his wrist, directing him back to her center.

The need to be freed from her body suit was rapidly replaced by her need to feel him inside her again. Ben began again with renewed fervor. He sunk in more sanguinely this time. Rey could feel the tip, then the first knuckle as he inserted himself, up until the palm of his hand was cupping her sex. She let out another moan, relishing how full she felt.

When she had been alone in Jakku, the idea of self-pleasure seemed to be a clear recipe for disaster. Considering she was rarely safe in the Plutt’s house, she had never felt comfortable enough to try. Even when she had gotten older and the urges became regular, unlike her menstrual cycle, which was erratic due to her lack of nutrition, she never entertained the idea. Masturbation, while common among her peers, had never been a luxury she could afford, not with the lecherous looks she got from Plutt and his cronies.

Now, however, safe in her own home, those days were far from her mind. Her earlier fear had been replaced by blossoming pleasure, so wonderful it was indescribable. She felt as though she had never truly lived until this moment.

Within her, Ben began to move his finger, pumping slowly in and out of her, as her walls constructed around him, unused to the intrusion. At first, it was awkward, if not interesting, but as he picked up his pace, Rey felt the coil in her abdomen clench. Then he inserted a second finger. Her breathing started to come out in short bursts and her heart threatened to pound out of her chest. Her moans transformed into cries until she was chanting his name over and over again, like it was the only word in her vocabulary.
Glancing up at her between her legs, Ben’s focused shifted from her center to her face. “You’re perfect.” He told her, as he bent his head down to kiss her stomach, his eyes never leaving hers. “So beautiful.” Another kiss. “My girl.”

Rey felt a crescendo of emotions at his praise. Timed with his thrusts and smoothed over with his tender kisses, she lost herself in him. With a wail, she came undone, her legs seizing up and her hands tightening around her sheets, before her body went slack on the bed. Her eyes felt heavy while her body was weightless. For several minutes she drifted in her post-orgasm bliss, too spent to do anything else.

She felt Ben withdraw his fingers. She heard him suck them clean, while he gently let her legs down. Then she felt the bed shift, as he joined her at her side. He brushed hair out of her face, leaning up on one arm to watch her come back to herself.

“How was that?”

“Amazing,” she cooed, somehow finding the strength to roll on her side to face him. Once more she watched his face relax as her words brought him validation. She moved forward, kissing him to reiterate what she had already said. “You’re amazing.”

“I like this,” he commented, his fingers reaching down to the floor to pick up the discard piece of lingerie. “Where did you get it?”

“Gatalenta’s,” she replied with a coy smile. “You said you needed to run errands so I ran some of my own.”

“You certainly did.” He laid down on his back, pulling her into his side so he could run his hand down her bare back.

“Where did you go?” She asked, resting her head against his chest.

“Into the city,” he responded. “I have court mandated sessions with a counselor. I need to go once a week for anger management.”

Rey had known he was teaching at Ahch-To due to his issue with Nines, but Ben hadn’t mentioned his psychiatrist before. She lifted her head up to look at him. “Is it helping?”

“Yes,” he grinned ducking his head to kiss her forehead. “It is, but being with you is far more fun.”

“Well, I’m glad my plan worked.”

He chuckled, nuzzling his face into her neck. “So you planned this, then?” He questioned.

“I couldn’t wait any longer,” she admitted.

“Me either.” He settled back down, resting his head on one of her pillows. She was surprised to hear him say it. Despite his actions only minutes before, she hadn’t been sure how he would react since he had been adamant about taking things slow. “It was killing me not to have you.”

“Glad we’re on the same page.” Rey’s gaze traveled down the length of his body, spotting the tenting in his pants when she zoned in on his pelvis. “Ben?”

“Hmmm?”

“Can I… ” she trailed off, unsure how to ask. It wasn’t as if he hadn’t just touched her in the most
private of places, but suddenly the thought of asking him if she could return the favor scared her.

“Can you what?” He propped himself up to look at her, catching her looking at his erection. “Oh.” His face fell. “Rey, you don’t have to.”

She recognized the nervous doubt in his eyes. It was the same image that had been reflected to her when she had looked in her bathroom mirror before he had arrived. He was scared of disappointment. After how he had taken care of her, she wanted to take care of him. It wasn’t fair she was able to experience overwhelming pleasure and he wasn’t. Besides, she was curious. She wanted to know how to bring him over the edge, the way he had brought her.

“I want to,” she insisted. Placing her hands on either side of his broad form, she lifted herself off his chest and shimmed her way down his body. Once she reached his hips, she sat back on her heels and reached for his zipper. Ben grabbed her wrist just as she made contact.

“Rey, I haven’t done this before.”

She paused for a moment, taking in his expression. His eyes were blown wide and he wasn’t nervous as much as he was… what was that? Shame?

As if reading her mind, he added, “This is the most I’ve ever done before w-with anyone. I’m a-.”

“Virgin?” She offered.

He dropped his head back on the pillow with a groan. It wasn’t like the sounds he had made earlier. This was a groan of pure frustration and humiliation. “I’m sorry”

“What? Ben, why are you apologizing?” Rey scooted back up towards him, so she could see his face from where he was resting on the pillow.

“I thought you’d want someone with more experience — someone who knows what the hell they are doing.”

Rey’s heart almost broke at his confession. He genuinely appeared upset over his status. She had assumed he had been with women before her. At first it had incited jealousy in her, but now that she knew he was a virgin, like her, she felt even more drawn to him. It was as if they had both waited until now to find one another and be together. As irrational as that sounded to her brain, her heart was dancing about her chest, convinced this was a sign they were made for one another.

“Ben,” she called to him, placing one hand on the side of his face. “I’m a virgin too. What we just did — that was my first time ever doing anything like that before…with anyone. I’m glad it was you. I wanted it to be you.”

He blinked and then his eyes focused on her face as she continued.

“If you aren’t ready, we can wait, but I don’t want you thinking I don’t want you because you are a virgin. That’s ridiculous. I want you because you are you. It doesn’t matter to me if you haven’t done this before. I haven’t either. We can learn together. It’s just us now. Nothing else matters. Just you and me. Together.”

He nodded, one of his hands coming over to lay on top of hers as it rested on his cheek. “You’re Ben. You’re my boyfriend. My Ben. I’ll always want you.”

“God,” he sighed, as he sat up enough to bring his lips against hers. “I love you.”
Rey felt her heart skip a beat. “You… you what?”

Ben’s face paled. “I-I-.” He stammered, as if he hadn’t realized what he had said until she questioned it.

She took a moment, turning the words over in her head. Ben loved her. Her. Rey Niima, the nobody from Jakku who had graduated with no job, no home, and no family to speak of. The girl who had had nothing until she had been inexplicably drawn to Tatooine and had met him. The girl who had punched him the first time they had fought and had wound up taking private lessons from him, only to fall in love with the man she had been certain would drive her from her new job.

Love.

Her brain and heart aligned on that last point and she found herself smiling the widest smile she had ever worn as she looked down upon him. “I love you too.”

Ben’s face stayed frozen for a second as he processed what she had told him. Then he was grinning back at her, a grin just as wide and just as vibrant as the one she wore.

“Say it again.”

“I love you,” she repeated.

He wrapped his arms around her, yanking her against his chest and kissing the top of her head. “I love you.”

They both started laughing for no reason other than they were so filled with delight that a simple smile couldn’t contain the buzz of happiness within them. When their laughter died down, Rey, still smiling, gave him a more serious look. “Can I touch you?” She glanced down at his still strained erection.

“Yes,” he breathed, more relaxed now.

He watched, as she moved towards the end of the bed, undoing his zipper and freeing his member from the confines of his pants. It gave a little jump as her hand wrapped around it, still hidden by his boxers. Grasping the sides of his pants, Rey yanked them off, followed by his boxers until Ben was laying naked from the waist down on her bed.

She had seen a penis before in her high school health class and once in college as part of a fraternity’s hazing ritual but by both accounts Ben was far larger. Rey supposed she shouldn’t have been surprised. She had felt him before but it didn’t compare to the sight before her. She sat next to his hips, reaching one tentative hand down to his massive manhood.

Recalling how he had used his thumb on her, she wrapped her hand around the top of his shaft and ran her thumb over the top. There was a sticky, clear substance already coating the top. She ran her thumb through it to coat the tip of his cock in the fluid. Ben’s eyes rolled into the back of his head. Rey continued spreading the liquid down his shaft, before bringing her thumb back to the top to gather up more. When she did, Ben gasped and buckled into her hand.

“Fuck, Rey. If you keep doing that, I won’t last.”

Unsure how to continue, given this information, Rey threaded her fingers of her opposite hand in his. She guided him down to where she was still gripping his member. “Show me then. You promised to be my teacher,” she reminded him with a flirtatious smile. “Teach me how you liked to be touched.”
“You’re going to kill me,” he groaned, but he took her hand and positioned it lower on his shaft. Then he demonstrated how to pump up and down, keeping his hand wrapped around hers, while she was wrapped around him. He gave a few pumps, before he released her, allowing her the chance to do it on her own. Rey followed his example, changing her positioning and the timing of her movements depending on what sounds he made.

As she learned what motions elicited a moan and which ones had him lifting his hips off the mattress, she experimented with twisting her wrist as she pumped him. This was the most efficient way to get Ben to respond, always causing him to cry out either a curse or her name — sometimes both. She was too intoxicated by the power she held over him to notice how he began thrashing uncontrollably about, clawing at the sheets in the same manner she had. All too soon he was panting. She almost missed it when he warned her.

“Rey. Rey, I-I’m go-going to-.”

He spilled over the top of her hand and across her chest and stomach. Rey stared down in awe of the white liquid pouring forth from him. It was nothing like the discussions she had had to sit through in sex education and it was a far cry from the stories she had heard in the girl’s locker room after gym classes. Curious, she brought her hand up to her mouth, licking across her palm. The taste was salty, though not unpleasant. It was entirely Ben, which had her licking the rest off her hand clean, unaware he was watching her the entire time.

“Fuck.” Ben was staring at her through half-lidded eyes. “Come here.” He took hold of her wrist, pulling her to him so she landed against his still clothed chest. He brought her face down, kissing her despite the drying liquid on both of them. “I love you so much.”

“Was it ok?”

“You’re perfect,” he told her, tucking her hair behind her ears.

“And all yours,” she reminded him.

“Mine.”

Kylo felt as though he was living in a dream. After a long shower — prolonged because he found it insanely difficult to keep his hands off Rey and they had decided to share to conserve water — they made a quick lunch of grilled cheese sandwiches. Their tryst had gone on longer than he had thought, leaving them precious little time to rest before Rey’s afternoon classes.

When her alarm went off, he tightened his hold on her, drawing her against his chest as though he could pull her into himself. He didn’t want her to go downstairs. He wanted to continue laying together in bed, basking in their post-love haze.

Hearing Rey tell him she loved him had been the high point of his day. Of course, coming back to the apartment to find her in a sexy one-piece was a very close second. He had never expected to walk in to a scene like the one she had waiting for him when he arrived at Ahch-To. He had wanted to see Rey in all black, and the image had not disappointed.
He was half-hard just thinking about it. Kylo planted another kiss on the nape of her neck. He loved kissing her. It didn’t matter where. Each place was soft and smooth, just like Rey. It was all her and he loved each part equally. He still couldn’t believe she was his.

“I have to get up.” She told him, though from the sound of her voice, it sound as if she was having as much difficulty with their reality as he was.

“No.” Kylo continued to hold onto her, whining like a petulant toddler. Rey laughed, peeling his hands off her before she slipped out of bed.

“You can stay here,” she told him. “Probably easier than having to explain to your uncle why we both are smiling uncontrollably.”

“Let him ask.” He tried to grab for her, hoping he could convince her to stay in bed with him this time. Now that they had crossed the line on physical intimacy, he wanted to continue to explore.

“You don’t mean that.” She was putting on her workout clothes, covering up her perfect body. He closed his eyes, imagining how her beautiful tanned skin had felt under his touch. She was like a goddess, bronze coated and brilliant. He would never tire of her.

“I do,” he argued, blindly reaching for her once more as he heard her walk past the bed to grab her water bottle.

“Ben!” He must have gotten close because she smacked his hand.

“Ow!” His eyes snapped to her and he feigned a grimace.

“You big baby.”

“You hit me!”

“I thought that was why you wanted me?” She taunted he.

“Yeah, but now I have you. You’re supposed to play nice.”

“Oh?” Rey cocked an eyebrow at him. “Are you saying I wasn’t nice earlier?”

“Mmm, I don’t recall,” he said, as he waited for her to get slightly closer.

Once she had, he snatched her and yanked her back into bed with him. He rolled them so she was pinned underneath him. He had never redressed, after their shower, so she was faced with his naked body. He planned on using it to distract her the way she was able to distract him with hers.

“Maybe you should refresh my memory?”

“What you should do is get dressed.” She told him, pushing against his chest. He didn’t budge.

“No.”

“Ben!” She tried again, trying to act mad but failing when she laughed again.

“Rey.”

“Solo. Move.”

“Sweetheart. No.”
“If you move, I’ll give you a surprise later.”

“Oh?” Now it was his turn to raise an eyebrow at her. He tilted his head as he studied her face to see if he could tell if she was lying to get out of his hold or serious. “And what pray tell would that be?”

“If I told you,” she said evenly, “then it wouldn’t be a surprise.”

“Rey.” He stopped propping himself up on his arms and dropped his weight on her. She laughed once more, carding her fingers through his hair as she reached up around his face. He loved the feel of her tiny hands against his scalp. It was so good he was practically purring under her touch. Kylo ground his hips against her, feeling how she melted slightly when he did. “Tell me. I know you want to.”

“All I can tell you is that you’ll like it, but you have to let me go now, before you make me late.”

Kylo considered her offer and decided to push his luck. “I need more incentive.”

Rey’s eyes darkened and a rare smirk graced her lips. “Alright.” The next thing he knew, she had slipped her hand between their bodies to cup his balls. Kylo jerked in surprise, when her other hand grabbed his shoulder to steady him.

“Shhhh, I’ve got you.” She coaxed him back down to kiss him, while she massaged him. He couldn’t contain the guttural moan that escaped passed his lips. The sensation was overwhelmingly good. No one had ever touched him there. He rarely spent any time on that part of his anatomy, but somehow Rey had discovered a pleasure point and knew how to use it.

Needing to feel her, he snaked a hand underneath her shirt and sports bra to fondle her breast. Her smooth skin was warm to the touch. He stroked his thumb over her hardening nipple. She gasped when he pinched one between his thumb and forefinger. He enjoyed watching her mouth open as she panted slightly from her growing arousal.

Her hand continued to stroke him gently, applying only enough pressure to draw out his moans. Her opposite hand directed his chin to keep him aligned with her face, as she nibbled and kissed her way along his jawline, up to his left ear. When she reached it, the tip of her tongue drew a line from his earlobe up to the crown of his ear, then back down the way it had come. The sensation sent him over the edge and he spilled out onto her stomach, soaking through her shirt.

“Sorry,” he panted, rolling to the side to allow her up off the bed.

“I can change,” she reassured him. In under a minute, she had cleaned off her stomach in the bathroom and exchanged her soiled shirt for a different tank top. “I’ll see you after class,” she promised, leaning down over where he was resting to kiss his forehead.

This time, Kylo let her go.

He knew how important her jobs were to her. She took pride in being able to work. Earning a paycheck meant more to her than it did most people. After years of being dependent, she was eager to provide for herself. There was much to be said for her vigor. Young and spirited, Rey was the type of new employee most companies dreamed of hiring. Paired with her drive to do her job and do it well, she was an excellent addition to both the academy and the club, but Kylo knew she wanted more.

It had disappointed her to not graduate with a job in her field. As thankful as she was for her two part-time positions, it wasn’t what she dreamed of doing. Her joy over becoming financially independent would fade over time. He knew she wouldn’t allow it to affect her work ethic, but he
wanted more for her. He wanted her to be happy.

Rey was the type to give as good as she got. He had no doubt she’d continue to excel at the studio as well as the bar. Rey could do anything, which was why he thought it was important for her to have the opportunity to do what she loved — engineering. She could improve the lives of hundreds or thousands of people with her work, if she got employed by the right place. He knew exactly which place to go.

Taking out his phone, he scrolled through his contact list until he came upon a number he hadn’t used in years. In cutting ties with his immediate family, he had separated himself from the individual he wanted to reach out to. The man, his uncle of sorts, was an old family friend, one who had known his father for many years, way back before his father had met his mother — Lando Calrissian.

The line rang a few times, unanswered. Kylo ran a hand through his hair, convinced the man wouldn’t answer the phone. Kylo’s number had changed over the years, yet somehow he figured Lando knew who was calling. He was surprised when the smooth-talker actually picked up.

“How?”

“Lan…Uncle Lando?”

“Who is this?”

“Kyl— Ben. Ben Solo.”

“Benny boy!”

Kylo closed his eyes and clenched his jaw at the childhood nickname. He reminded himself this was for Rey. “Yeah, yeah it’s me.”

“To what do I owe the pleasure?”

“I need a favor.”

“A favor, huh?”

“An act of kindness?” Kylo elaborated, wondering if old age had affected the man’s brain.

“I know what a favor is. I’m just wondering why you’re calling me out of the blue for one. I haven’t heard from you in over a decade.”

“I wouldn’t ask if it wasn’t important.”

“Wouldn’t have anything to do with a girl, now would it?”

How did he know? The way he had asked was like he could see Kylo’s face through the phone. For a second, Kylo checked the screen to ensure he hadn’t accidentally connected his camera to the call. He hadn’t.

“Does it matter?”

Lando chuckled. “You Solo boys are all the same. You get swept up as soon as you catch a pair of pretty eyes.”

Anger flared within him at the notion Rey was merely a pretty face. His uncle had always been a womanizer. He had no idea how wonderful Rey was, how intelligent she was, how caring she was
despite everything. “Never mind. Just forget it,” he hissed. He wasn’t comfortable with taking Rey to Cloud City of his uncle was going to make cracks at her. Rey was worth more than any other engineer on Lando’s payroll.

“Now don’t be like that.”

“You don’t know her. She’s more than that. A lot more.”

“Ok! Ok! Calm down.”

Kylo held the phone away from his face, taking a deep breath. Once more, he reminded himself why he was calling. This was about Rey. It was for her birthday and her future. It had nothing to do with his own misgivings when it came to his family or how he viewed his uncle. This was about her and doing something for her which didn’t hinge on his fortune or fame.

“What can I do for you and your lady friend?”

“I wanted to schedule a private tour of your facility for Sunday afternoon.”

“A tour?” Lando scoffed on the other end. “That’s it?” He chuckled again, seeming to not believe the ask. “I thought you were gunning for my beach house on Socorro.”

“No. She won’t be impressed by that.”

“Every woman is impressed by the Calrissian Cape,” his uncle insisted, a wounded tone to his response.

“Not this woman. She’s different.”

“They all say that. In the end it’s all the same. They want the luxury cars and fancy houses and all the jewelry you can give ‘em.”

“Not this one,” Kylo told him, composing himself. “She’d be happier if I gave her a junker like the Falcon to work on and a set of new tools.”

“Seriously?”

“Yep.”

Lando let out a breath of air. “Where can I get me one of those?” Kylo shook his head, not replying. He was not going to enable his uncle. The man had been married five times already. Kylo had been forced to attend at least half of the weddings. “She doesn’t have a sister, does she?”

“A bit young for you, isn’t she?”

“A bit too good for you, isn’t she, Benny boy?”

“She is,” he agreed. “She really is.”

“Can I ask why Sunday? We’re closed.”

“Saturday is her birthday and I’m surprising her with the visit, but I don’t want her to be overwhelmed, so the fewer people the better.”

“Then it’s done.”
Kylo let out a relieved sigh. He was doing it. He was succeeding in planning the best birthday he could think up for Rey. “Thank you.”

“Anything for my favorite nephew.”

“I’m your only nephew,” Kylo reminded him, “and in name only.”

“Speaking of,” Lando cut him off before he could speak further. “Your dad tells me you’ve changed your name.”

“About fifteen years ago.”

“Why’d you do that?”

He really didn’t want to travel down memory lane with Lando — not now, not ever.

“I have to go. Is two o’clock good for Sunday?”

“Sure, kid, whatever you need.”

“Thanks.”

“It was good to hear from you. I’m looking forward to seeing you and meeting your girl.”


Not giving his uncle a chance to push further, Kylo ended the call.

He sat for several minutes on Rey’s bed, savoring the silence. It took him a while to come down from the influx of emotions speaking with Lando had brought up. There hadn’t been a single milestone in his early life or holiday when his father’s old comrade hadn’t shown up at the Solo- Organa household. Lando Calrissian, for all his dramatic flare, had been a constant in his life, up until the point his own parents had been unable to deal with him, then, like Han and Leia, Lando had become a distant memory.

The man had done well for himself, getting out of the smuggling business and investing in mines. The profits he had turned along with the valuable resources had prompted him to begin developing sustainable energy solutions. He had opened Cloud City in Bespin nearly twenty years ago. The engineering firm specialized in energy technologies. Their advancements were record-breaking at the top of their field. Their main facility was a state of the art, highly secured fortress at the center of the city. Tours were not a common occurrence due to the secretive nature around their developing technologies.

Giving Rey an insider’s view of their operations would be more meaningful to her than a Gucci bag — at least he hoped it would be.

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It had been a slow night for the squad at Rogue One, the first one in over a week. Rey, who was usually exhausted by the close of the bar, was bubbling over with excess energy, to the point where she was jumping up and down in her seat while Ben drove them home.
Even though he still went to his apartment in the city every other day to change out his training bag, he hadn’t slept in Corellia since the night he had brought her home from Finn’s celebration dinner. It was amazing how quickly they had fallen into the routine. Just as they had in her bathroom, when they had been brushing their teeth together, a life with each other seemed effortless. It was all too easy to find the rhythm.

The rhythm of their shared life had sped up since their exploration of one another in her bed. With the extra energy Rey had this evening, she wanted to continue the exploration further. As pleasurable as she found Ben’s touch to be, she had an inkling his mouth would feel even better. The theory prompted her to change into the off-white baby doll she had purchased. She had considered saving it, but if she was going to go through with her idea, she needed it for courage. The confidence she felt when she had worn the black body suit had been wonderful. She wished for the same effect with the baby doll.

When she exited the bathroom, Ben was already waiting for her just outside the door. As if he had guessed her intentions, he was clad in only his boxers. The moment he saw her choice of attire, he stepped back to evaluate the new piece. His gaze wandered from her face down past her collarbone to where her breasts were pressed up from the push-up design, down through the transparent fabric to where the white lace thong hung along her hip line, before it gave way to her bare legs.

He stood still for what seemed to be the longest minute of Rey’s life, before he was kneeling before her. After seeing how confrontational he could be at times, the sight of him bowing in front of her made Rey a bit light headed. She felt powerful, spurred on by the glazed over look in his eyes as he studied her. He regarded her as if she was a priceless gem, worthy and sacred.

Tonight, however, Rey wanted to worship him. He had brought her immense joy and belonging, something she had searched her entire life for.

She was still struggling with how fast they had fallen for one another. It was challenging for her to be so open with him when a dark voice in the back of her head continued to warn her he would leave her, because everyone always left her. Rey struggled daily with her own inner demons. Seeing the progress Ben had made, urged her to continue on. She wouldn’t allow her own insecurities to cost her this and ruin her happiness.

“No,” Rey told him, grabbing onto his shoulders to nudge him away. “Tonight, I want to try something new.”

“This is new.” Ben pointed out, as he trailed a single finger across the lip of her panties. He leaned forward to place a kiss over her belly button. “I want to try this.” He placed another kiss along the seam of her underwear. “And this.” His lips pressed against her thigh. “And this too.”

“Ben,” Rey moaned, trying to maintain her composure. She didn’t want him taking charge — not tonight. Tonight she wanted to have fun with him on her terms. She gave him another shove, stepping away. “Stay.”

He watched her, turning to gaze at her over his shoulder as she took a seat in the middle of the bed. His lips were twisted up on amusement. “Was that an order?”

Rey blushed, feeling entirely out of her element. She had been reading up on positions and different things to try in the bedroom during her break at the bar. She was shocked by all the information available to her and even more shocked by the various ways one could derive pleasure from and for their partner. While her tastes remained rather tame in comparison to some of the flavors she had read up on, she wasn’t sure where on the spectrum Ben fell. His question brought to the light the fact that
she had indeed issued a command. Judging by his face, he wasn’t turned off by it, though she felt ridiculous for having said it.

“Come here,” she told him, patting the mattress next to her and effectively ignoring his ask.

He obliged, laying on his side next to her. His fingers reached up to the satin bow tie at the bottom of her bra cups. “How many of these little surprises did you get for me?”

“This is the last one,” she admitted, honestly. “I wasn’t sure what you’d like.”

“You could wear a potato sack and I’d adore it.”

Rey’s flush deepened. “I wanted it to be special. You’ve done so much for me. I wanted to return the favor.”

“Sweetheart,” Ben reached up to cup her chin in his hand, “I do all of those things because I want to, because I love you. I don’t expect you to do anything back. I only want to see you happy and spend time with you.”

She felt the familiar prick of tears at the corner of her eyes. How could he do that? How could he create such beautiful sentences and say them to her with such ease? She was still processing the fact he loved her and she loved him. How could he be so positive of his feelings, so genuine? It nearly broke her heart. She hadn’t realized until now one’s heart could break from being too full, too happy.

Brushing off the emotional rollercoaster within, she placed a hand on his chest, directing him to lay on his back. The three words she wanted to say in response to him were lodged in her throat. Rey knew if she said them out loud right now, the tears would follow. She didn’t want that. She wanted to break Ben Solo all over again.

He dropped his hold on her, relenting to her gentle push, until he was down on his back, eyes focused on her. Rey positioned herself between his legs, gingerly pulling down his boxers before she sat down. He groaned, attempting to sit up, but she pressed down with the same hand. She held him down while she used her other hand to slowly pump his erection a couple of times. He was already hard beneath her touch, breathing heavy due to her touch.

Remembering what she had read in one of the articles, she had digested during her break at the bar, she brought her head down over his member.

“Fuck.” Be hissed, trying to sit up once more. It was obvious he knew what she meant to do to him. “Rey, you don’t have to do this. Y-yo-.”

His words changed into a strangled groan and his head flopped back down onto the bed as she took him in her mouth. Rey ran her tongue over the tip, eliciting a curse from his lips. She followed the same pattern with her tongue as she had with her fingertips from that afternoon. His hips bucked up onto her mouth, shoving his cock deeper into her cavern. It happened before she could anticipate it. At first, she panicked slightly. This was unfamiliar. Ben was so large in her mouth and it took her a minute or two to adjust. Her hands pressed down on him, returning him to his former position, as she began to suck.

“Fuck, sweetheart,” he breathed, his hands resting on her head to tangle in her hair. “Yes, Just like that. It’s… it’s good — so good.”

Rey ignored his pants, bobbing her head up down a few times before letting him go with an obscene ‘pop.’ Then she was back down on him again, licking from his balls up to the top before enclosing
her mouth over his cock. She took as much as she could in this time. It wasn’t all of him and she had
to fight her gag reflex, but she heard his grateful groan. His fingers tightened in her tresses and his
hips bucked again.

She pulled up, running her lips over the throbbing member, feeling each vein as she moved. Rey slid
back down, keeping her lips over her teeth, careful not to hurt him. Her hands continued to press
down on him, to keep him from throwing her off her rhythm. His flesh was hot. It tasted salty and a
bit sweaty but not horrible — in fact she kind of liked it.

Hearing Ben’s ragged breathing coaxed her on. He untangled his fingers from her hair, desperately
grabbing for her, but when he couldn’t get a good hold on her, he took to gripping the sheets. “I…
ah, God, Rey! I-I’m not g-going to last. I… I’m going to c-.”

Rey continued to suck, using one hand to massage his balls while he writhed beneath her. He lost
control over his body and in the next instant he was spilling into her mouth with a loud curse. She
patiently waited, swallowing down each drop as he emptied himself into her mouth. The hand which
had been on his abdomen traced slow circles and the one on his balls went to his thigh, repeating the
same gesture in an attempt to calm him as he came back down from his achieved high.

Once he was silent, Rey sat up, licking her lips clean. She surveyed her work, noticing how red
Ben’s upper body was. He had thrown one of his arms across his face, leaving the other to lie limply
at his side. His chest rose and fell in deep, short spurts. His cock had fallen back against his stomach,
flushed from her attention. She smiled to herself, rather proud her intention had gone according to
plan.

It took Ben several minutes before he had regained his composure. When he did, he removed his arm
from his face to stare at her. “Smug, aren’t you? You little minx!”

She giggled, still pleased with her success. “Surprise.”

“Come here.” He yanked her by her wrist to his chest, forcing her to lie with him. “I’m beginning to
think you give the best surprises.”

Leaning into him, Rey planted a chaste kiss on his lips. “I try.”

“You don’t even have to.” He told her, brushing her hair out of her face.

She hummed against him. “I wanted to. Was it ok?”

“It was amazing,” he sighed into her neck, kissing over her pulse point. He left a trail of kisses up
along her flesh until he bit down on her earlobe. She yelped at his playful nip and smacked his arm.
He chuckled darkly, but didn’t move away. Instead he removed her top, so her chest was freed from
restraints.

“Your turn,” Ben whispered, hotly against her ear.

Before she could protest, he had pinned her down to the bed, looming over her. He backed down to
the edge of the bed, grazing his fingertips over her stomach. He rolled her panties off of her and
tossed them aside. He let out another groan, when her sex was bare before him.

“God, sweetheart, you are so beautiful… so perfect.”

Rey tilted her head so she could watch him as he brought his face down to her core. He kissed her
gently there. The sensation hit her like a bolt of lightning, coursing electric shocks through her veins.
She was so sensitive to each little motion. He appeared to relish in his power over her, just as she had
enjoyed being in control over him. Ben pressed a finger to her opening, teasing her lightly, as his thumb drew circles on and around her clit.

“Ah!” She let out a cry at his touch, hands fisting the sheets.

“Shhh,” Ben called up to her. She clapped her hands over her mouth, suddenly afraid her cries were loud enough to carry across the parking lot. “I’ve got you, my girl.” He positioned his hands under her, grasping onto her rear, to hold her at the correct angle.

When his tongue licked up her center, Rey keened. Her eyes fluttered close, as her head hit the mattress. She could barely contain herself. She felt as though she would melt into a puddle from his mouth. Perhaps he’d drink her up if she did.

Apparently she hadn’t been the only one doing research. Ben possessed great skill with his tongue. He flicked it across her nub, causing her to lose all cognitive thinking. From there, he gently stroked her core with a finger, before delving in with his tongue. Rey screamed out, her hands barely muffling the cry. He other hand held her down firmly, keeping her in position as he continued his assist on her center.

She had compared herself to a puddle he would drink, but at the time she hadn’t known how true her metaphor was. The intensity with which Ben performed his task was unlike anything she had experienced before. He lapped at her, gulping down her juices as he worked his way deeper and deeper with his mouth and fingers. She began to feel the same coil springing to life in her abdomen as before.

Not yet, she scolded herself. It was too soon. She didn’t want this to end yet. She needed more. She wanted more of his mouth on her, more of his delicious tongue and diligent fingers.

A pathetic cry escaped her lips. Her hands were frantically tearing at her sheets, scrambling for purchase as a way to ground herself to keep herself from careening over the edge.

“Let it happen, Rey.” Ben commanded her. “You’re still holding on. Let go.”

And she did.

The crest of her orgasm hit her harder than any previous one. It turned her entire body into a quivering, shaking mess until she was weak-limbed and motionless upon the bed. Rey couldn’t keep her eyes open, feeling the exhaustion she was accustomed to experiencing after a long shift take over her. Her body relaxed in a way it never had before.

Ben sidled up next to her, wrapping his arms around her and dragging her against him so her back was resting against his chest. He kissed between her shoulder blades. “I love you, Rey.”

She brought her arms up to encircle his, squeezing him back, as if he was a harness. “Love you.”

Naked and sated, they fell asleep.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you to my beta @abyssalspark. She turned this around in less than a day and
reassured me about my smut-writing capabilities. Still, feel like I need a lot of work on it, but hopefully I can do better next time. Fingers crossed.

Hoping to update Same People, Different Eyes next. Thanks Reylo Fam for all the support! Love you all!
With Love

Chapter Summary

In which Rey realizes being sexually active is tiring and Kylo finishes his preparations for her birthday with one final surprise...

Chapter Notes

I apologize for the delay. I was contacted on tumblr regarding some of my choices for this fic and it made me second guess myself and my writing capabilities, especially for this fic. Now that I'm over that, enjoy more reylo goodness.

Fair warning: This chapter was over 15k, so I split it into Part 1 and Part 2 (which will be posted shortly)

See the end of the chapter for more notes
Friday morning came far sooner than Kylo expected. When Rey’s alarm woke them, he had to untangle his limbs from hers. They had been ‘sleeping together’ and actually sleeping together since her lingerie unveiling. Their appetites for one another had only increased over the last few days. Tuesday night would be forever etched in his mind as one of the greatest experiences he had ever had the pleasure to partake in. His beautiful, sweet, kind girl had a fire in her. Her tenacity wasn’t limited to the studio floor. She had quite a skill for the bedroom as well.

Kylo grinned to himself as he replayed the sounds she had made that night (and each night since) when she had allowed herself to experience her own pleasure, unhindered. It had been exquisite to watch. The way her mouth had formed the perfect little ‘o’ and how her form had pulsed from the waves of her orgasm. It had him cumming with her. She was a goddess — one he would gladly
worship until his dying day.

As if she sensed him staring at her, she opened her eyes.

“Morning sweetheart.” He greeted her with a brief kiss.

“Morning,” she greeted him back, a blissed out smile on her perfect pink little lips. “How did you sleep?”

“Excellent,” he replied, before stealing another kiss. He couldn’t contain himself when she was right there for the taking, naked and gorgeous in the morning sunlight. “You?”

“I think you spending the night was the best idea we’ve ever had.”

We’ve ever had.
We.

Her use of them as a combined decision maker sent joy shooting through him. It took all his willpower not to crawl on top of her and eat her for breakfast. He desperately wanted to show how much her words meant to him. He knew if he did however, she wouldn’t be walking downstairs to teach today and if that was the case, what choice did he have but to call off as well to keep her company? It was a dangerous train of thought — and equally seductive.

“Are you going into the city this morning?” She asked.

“Yes.”

He had told her last night when he picked her up from Rogue One that he needed fresh clothes. It was only partially true. He did need new clothes, but he also needed to speak with Phasma and Hux. While working through the remaining details of his plan for her birthday, he had forgotten to pull his colleagues into the loop. He was already dreading how his manager was going to make a big deal about his request. Kylo had been procrastinating the task, unprepared for the redhead’s reaction. He’d save that headache for last. First, he needed to speak to Phasma about the final touch, the metaphoric icing on the cake for Rey’s birthday.
Kylo felt Rey turn, so she was facing him. She cuddled into his chest, as if she could burrow into him. Had it been possible, he would have allowed it. Then he could keep her with him forever, just as she had asked him.

“Will you be back for lunch?”

They had spent almost all their free time together this week. The idea of not sharing lunch with her felt strange, but he wouldn’t make her a promise he couldn’t keep. Like him, Rey had deep trust issues. He knew he needed to be honest with her at all times and only commit to things he could deliver on. He could thank Dr. Connix for such insight. His sessions with her had been rather successful.

“I’m not sure. If I’m not back, eat without me. I’ll be here in time to take you to the club.”

“Are you sure?”

He hated how disappointed she sounded. He reminded himself his absence was necessary in order to complete her birthday preparations.

“Yes.”

“Alright.”

Then, as they laid there, both stalling from getting up and facing the real world, he realized she still had never mentioned her birthday to him. He couldn’t tell if it was because they had been so busy learning one another’s bodies or if it was because her guards were still up. Suddenly he worried she may not be pleased with his efforts to surprise her. Would they fall into a similar argument to the one they had gotten into over the mattress? While planning, he had tried to keep each event low-key so it wouldn’t overwhelm her. Still, he began to doubt himself and the choices he had made.

“Did you want to do anything special this weekend?” He asked, nonchalantly. She tensed up and he feared she suspected what he was plotting. “I can take you out for lunch to make it up to you.” He added and Rey relaxed.

_Nice catch, Solo._
“Are we going to go over gun defense again?”

Kylo held a laugh in. Of course his girl would want to continue her training. She wasn’t the typical girlfriend who wanted a elaborate party or fancy things, the way his uncle had assumed. She was perfectly content with simpler things. He recalled their simple lunch of grilled cheese sandwiches, smiling at the memory. Rey placed value in knowing how to live independently and provide for herself. Nothing would prepare her more than learning adequate levels of self-defense. While he admired that about her, he didn’t want her to feel she had to do everything alone. He was with her now. He could help her, but it was ultimately her choice.

*Rey chooses for Rey.*

“If that is what you want.”

“I need to work on my reaction time,” she responded. She was getting better at picking out her own flaws. He had no doubt she would improve when they ran through the drills again. She was determined to advance her skill set.

“We’ll work on it together,” he promised, purposefully leaving out a timeframe, since he had already made plans for their Sunday.

“I better get dressed before Luke comes up here again.” She tilted her head up to catch his lips, before she was shimmying out of bed and darting into the bathroom. Within minutes, she re-emerged, fully dressed with her hair pulled back, and ready to go. “Love you.” She gave him a quick goodbye kiss and ran down to teach her class.

“Love you.”

Kylo followed her example — getting dressed and heading out for the day. He didn’t stop smiling until he hit the Corellia city limits.

The week had flown by. Rey blamed it on her developing romance with Ben. She had dove head-first into a committed relationship, spending all her free time with him and taking advantage of their precious alone time to learn his body. Their one-on-one training sessions had taken on a more heated approach. As they sparred, they each became aware of the unspoken challenge from the other, an added hint of seduction and competition to every movement.
When Rey had kicked his footing out from under him one morning, he had landed with a surprised gasp onto the mat, only to have her straddle his hips a second later. Without pause, she had brought her lips crashing down on top of his, as she intertwined their fingers together, holding his arms down, positioned above his head. He hadn’t relinquished control to her completely, rolling them over after a few moments of intense kissing. Mimicking her fervor, he had ground his pelvis into hers, causing her to feel a different kind of heat forming between her legs, one that caused her to want to go further than they had all week.

Despite their accelerated pace, they hadn’t ventured to the full act. Rey wasn’t complaining. She enjoyed hearing Ben fall apart at her hands and similarly, she enjoyed being broken by his own efforts. There was a delicious ripple that flowed through her body each time she orgasmed from his touch, as if her body knew it had been made for him and was happy to answer his call. It made it so easy to continue falling for him.

Rey’s phone rang, startling her out of her musings. She was in between her morning classes, having just dismissed her kickboxing ladies from the studio. She saw Jyn pop-up on her caller ID and immediately picked up.

“Hey, boss.”

“Hey! I’m glad I caught you.”

“What’s wrong? Do you need me to come in early or something?” Rey asked, worried this impromptu call had something to do with the secret Ben was keeping from her.

“No,” Jyn reassured her from the other end. “Nothing like that. I was actually calling you to let you know Bodhi asked to pick up a couple of shifts. He needs the extra money and I figured you might need a break. How would you feel about getting tomorrow night off?”

A night off? And not just any night — a Saturday night. Rey hadn’t had a weekend night free since she had started bartending, not that she had had any money to do anything prior to working her two jobs. Plutt had made her work constantly. She had forgotten what a weekend was supposed to be like. This felt surreal, but her instant joy was tampered when she began calculating how this would affect her month’s budget.

Could she afford to take off a Saturday? The tips had been good, better than she had anticipated when she had started at the club. She made decent money, but Saturday’s were easily the best nights
to work. She brought in double and sometimes triple what she made during the week on a Saturday.

“Rey?” Jyn called to her, drawing out of her thoughts. “Are you there?”

“Yeah, yeah. I’m here.” She bit her bottom lip, worried how the night off would hurt her finances, especially since she had spent most of it for the month already on the lingerie. Suddenly she felt silly for the purchases…until she remembered how Ben had reacted. Speaking of reactions — having the night off would allow her to rest up for Sunday so she could train longer and harder with Ben. She had wanted to do more with their gun defense tactics. If she got more rest, she’d have a better reaction time. She relented. “A night off would be great. Thanks, Jyn.”

“Wonderful! I’ll let Bodhi know. See you tonight, Sunshine.”

She hung up, glad for the extra time with Ben, but for some reason she had a strange feeling, as though she was forgetting something. Shaking her head, she shrugged the sensation off. She was probably just feeling weird about having the Saturday night all to herself for a change.

Turning her focus away from the weekend, she welcomed her next class into the studio and started her Spotify playlist.

“Phasma.”

“Sir?” Her British accent on the other end came through clear and crisp. She seemed to be surprised to hear from him. He realized it had been over a week since he had requested her services. While he was with Rey he didn’t need cleaners or any support. Rey was everything for him. She kept him grounded and centered. His anger didn’t overpower him. Instead, he had found a new level of calm due to her love. His assistant seemed to remember herself and cleared her throat. “What can I do for you?”

“You have an extra key for my apartment, do you not?” He asked.

“Yes, sir. For deliveries and emergencies.”

“I need you to make a copy for me please.”
“Of course, sir. I will have it to you before noon.” She didn’t ask who the key was for or why he needed a spare after he had lived in the same spot for years. It was one of the many blessings of having her as his assistant. She was straight and to the point. She didn’t delve into the personal, which made his next ask more difficult.

“Thank you, Phasma.”

“Anything else, sir?”

“Actually, yes.”

He had never invited her to come out before. Hux was the one who dragged everyone from their homes after hours, not Kylo Ren. He was sure his request would surprise her, but he had vowed to be better for Rey and part of that was bringing his girlfriend into his life. While Phasma and Hux weren’t exactly his friends, they were the closest thing he had. He wanted Rey to meet them and for them to meet her.

“Do you have plans tomorrow evening?”

“Saturday night, sir?” As he had expected, she appeared baffled by his line of questioning.

“Correct.”

“No, sir.”

“Excellent. I’d like to order a car for the night. Please invite Hux to join us. We are going out for the evening. I’ll take care of the tab, personally.”

There was a long silent pause on the other end. He wondered if he had caused his assistant to faint from shock.

“T-thank you, sir.”
“No need to thank me. You two deserve a night out. I appreciate you making the time to join me.”

“I’ll arrange it today. Do you have a place in mind?”

Kylo gave her the address to Rogue One and once he had answered a few more questions for her to coordinate, he hung up. It was the he saw a text message from Jyn Erso on his notification screen.

All set.

The smile returned to his face. The countdown was on. In less than twenty-four hours, Rey would wake up to the birthday she had always deserved — the birthday he had designed for her.

Rey was half-way through her lunch when Ben arrived back at the academy. She quickly scarfed down the remainder of her salad before he came up. She was dumping the dirty dishes into her sink when he walked through the door.

“Hey,” she smiled around the corner of the kitchen at him. “How was the city?”

“Same as always,” he replied, depositing his bag on the living room floor. “Did you eat?”

“Yep. Just finished. I can make you something, if you’re hungry,” she offered.

“I’m good.” He ran a hand through his hair. “Actually looking forward to a nap.”

Rey nodded in agreement. Having an active sex life was more draining than both her jobs combined. Though she enjoyed every second of it, her body felt as though it had gone through a major overhaul. She was still Rey Niima, but she was different. It was hard to describe. She felt fuller, more whole. After her powerful orgasm from last night, she craved a few extra hours of sleep to perk up before her afternoon shifts.
Together, they went up to bed. Wordlessly, they striped down to their undergarments, Ben in his dark plaid boxers and her in her practical white cotton undies and sports bra. It was more comfortable to sleep naked, but Rey was still recovering from the night prior. She couldn’t afford a repeat performance so close to working hours, which reminded her.

“Jyn called me today,” she announced.

“Oh?” He murmured into the pillow, before stifling a yawn. “Everything alright?”

“Yeah. She gave me tomorrow night off.”

“That was nice of her.”

“Yeah, it was.”

It struck her as odd he didn’t question her manager’s decision. Being well traveled and as clever as he was, he had to know Saturdays were the days to make money, yet he didn’t seem curious as to why Jyn had given her off. Maybe he was as tired as she was or maybe it was because he knew. Perhaps it was the secret he had been keeping. Both options didn’t seem right. She thought about other possibilities for his reaction — or lack thereof. It wasn’t as though Rey had told Jyn it was her birthday or....

Wait.

Had she? Rey tried to recall all her recent conversations with her boss, trying to remember if she had let it slip her birthday was coming up. The prior nagging feeling she had felt had been about Saturday, because with all that had happened over the last week, Rey had forgotten all about her birthday.

It had never been a day for celebration. Plutt was not one to waste his time or money on her. She was his source of income, a tool to leverage to bring in extra money under the table. He barely cared enough to make sure she had clothes to wear and food in her belly. There were times when he denied her those courtesies as well, out of spite or as a form of punishment, so no, birthdays were not something she paid a lot of attention to.

She wondered if she should tell Ben. Seeing as how he was apt to buy her things, she wasn’t sure if it was a good idea. She didn’t want him responding to the news and buying her a present out of guilt. After all, she had forgotten the event herself. It wouldn’t be right for him to feel obligated over a day
that barely registered on her radar.

*Next year, she told herself. Next year I'll tell him and then we can celebrate.*

*If he’s still around*, an ugly voice taunted her from the shadowy corners of her mind. *A year is a long time, Rey, and everyone always leaves you.*

Clenching her jaw, she pushed the traitorous thought away from her. Ben wasn’t like everyone else. He wouldn’t abandon her the way her parents had or mistreat her the way Plutt had done time and time again. Ben loved her. He would continue to be in her life far longer than any of them and. He would not disappoint her.

Right?

One look at Ben’s face and she knew he wouldn’t disappoint her. He was watching her with complete adoration. Unless he was an award-winning actor, she didn’t think he could fake an expression like the one he was giving her now.

“There you should talk to your friend,” Ben suggested, catching her staring at him. “The one who doesn’t like me. The one leaving for…” he started snapping his fingers as he tried to think of the destination.

Rey helped him out. “You mean Finn. He’s leaving for South Africa on Sunday night.”

“Maybe you should give him a call and see if he wants to get together, since you have time off.”

It made sense. She had been avoiding Finn’s calls and text messages since he had insulted her and Ben at the Blue Wall. She didn’t want to go another two weeks without speaking to him. Even if he didn’t approve of her choice for a boyfriend, he was her best friend. She would be upset if he left for his big trip without telling him goodbye. It was kind of Ben to think of Finn, especially given how her best friend had treated her boyfriend. Ben’s consideration solidified her belief he was going to be with her long enough to make it to her next birthday.

“You’re right. Maybe the four of us could go to dinner together?”
Ben was quiet for a moment. “Rey,” he said gently, and she prepared herself for his next words. There was a hint in his tone to tip her off she wasn’t going to like what he was about to say. “I think it would be better if you went by yourself. I don’t want to cause another scene.”

She let out a sigh of relief, having thought he was going to say something else — something more final. Rey internally berated herself for allowing her inner demons to get the best of her. Ben was not her parents. He wasn’t going to abandon her. She reached over to him, placing her hand on his arm. “Ben, you’re my boyfriend. I want you to be there.”

“I want to be there,” he told her, “but not at the expense of your friendship. We can work on my standing with your friends when they get back from their trip. For now, I think it’s important you have time with them.”

Rey felt like pouting. She finally had someone. After being around Poe and Finn and their happily-ever-after haze, she wanted them to see her in her own element. She wanted her friends to know she had found someone who would be that person for her, the one to make her smile and laugh, the way they did for one another. She had waited so long for him. Now that she had him all she wanted to do was spend time with him and show him off. It was slightly immature, like a child brandishing their newest toy, but Rey didn’t care. She loved him. She wanted everyone to know he was hers and she was his.

However, she was sure the sentiment wouldn’t go over well with Finn.

With a sigh, she realized Ben was right. Forcing her relationship on Finn wasn’t going to change her friend’s mind. In fact, it was likely to push him further away. If she wanted to clear the air between them, she needed to come to him as herself, as just Rey. When he returned from overseas, she could invite him over to her apartment to meet Ben officially.

“Alright,” she grumbled.

“Don’t be mad, sweetheart.” He kissed her forehead. “It will all work out.”

“I’m not mad.”

“Liar.”
“Ok,” she huffed, “I’m a little mad. It’s my-.” She stopped herself before she could say it.

Damn it!

“For what?”


Ben’s face fell, but he didn’t press her. “Alright.” Rey stared at her phone, oddly uncomfortable with the idea of calling her best friend. Ben acknowledged her unease, by placing his hand over hers. “Call him.”

She knew he was right. Finn had been there for her through some of the worst times of her life. He and Poe had been her family long before she and made friends with Rose and Jess and before she had been accepted as part of the squad at Rogue One. She owed it to him to reach out. With a deep breath, to calm herself, she dialed.

It only took one ring before he was answering.

“Rey?”

“Hey Big Deal,” she greeted him teasingly, trying to break the ice.

“Hey,” he sighed with relief. “I’m glad you called.”

“Yeah,” she smiled over at Ben, giving his hand a squeeze. “Me too.”

They decided to go to Atollon, the original restaurant they had planned on visiting last week. Rey was grateful how easy it was to fall back into their usual carefree banter. They both mumbled out apologies for how they had behaved. Finn told her about his pre-flight checklist, which was getting out of hand. Rey announced her night off and her plan to have dinner together, which her best friend jumped at. She discussed bringing along Rose and Jess. Finn agreed, enthusiastically.
After hashing out the details and sending a few quick texts to her girlfriends, Rey ended the call with Finn. They had agreed on a time and he had promised to take care of the reservations, since it was her birthday. When he had mentioned the significance of the date over the phone, she had cupped her hand over the end, trying to shield Ben from hearing the news. Maybe it was good he wasn’t coming out with them tomorrow night. Finn was terrible at keeping secrets.

She yawned, her exhaustion catching up with her, as she set her phone down.

“Get some rest, sweetheart,” Ben kissed her forehead. “You have a big day tomorrow.”

Rey was already half asleep, not thinking twice about the meaning of his words.

The next morning, Rey opened her eyes, hand flying haphazardly about as she attempted to shut off her phone alarm. The blaring horn kept going off as she struggled to find it. She may have been given Saturday night off, but as far as the daytime went, she was still responsible for her morning classes. With a groan, she rolled out of bed, shutting off her alarm. It wasn’t until she had forced herself out of bed, she noticed it was empty.

“Ben?”

“Down here,” he called from her kitchen.

With a yawn, Rey padded down to him, rubbing the back of her hand against her eyes to remove the sleep dust which had settled in overnight. “What are you doing down here?”

The words left her, as she took in the sight of him standing in her kitchen with her cup of tea. That wasn’t all he had. On her countertop, he had made a ridiculously large stack of pancakes. Sprinkled across the top were chocolate chips and fresh banana slices. In between, she noticed the words drizzled across in chocolate syrup, “Happy Birthday!” She raised her eyes to her to-go cup. Where Rose normally wrote her name in black Sharpie marker, it read ‘Birthday Girl’ with a smiley face.

Suddenly, it all clicked in her mind.

“Y-you…you knew?”
“Rose told me,” he replied sheepishly. He took a step towards her, holding out the drink. “Happy Birthday, sweetheart.”

Rey took it from him and placed it off to the side. She threw her arms around him, hugging him tightly. “Ben Solo! I can’t believe you.”

“It’s just breakfast,” he chuckled, hugging her back.

“It’s just breakfast,” she mimicked him, rolling her eyes, even though he couldn’t see. “Right. And I suppose Jyn giving me the night off was not connected to this in any way either?”

“Maybe.”

She pulled back to take in his face. The tips of his ears were red. “Maybe?”

“I wanted you to have the birthday you deserve. Rose mentioned you haven’t celebrated before, so I planned a day for you.”

Rey’s eyes widened. So much for him not going overboard. “A day?” He nodded. “What exactly did you plan, Ben?”

“Sit down,” he gestured to the open seat behind him. “I’ll tell you everything.”

Over the course of the next fifteen minutes, Rey fell in love with her boyfriend all over again. No one had ever done so much for her. Not even Finn and Poe combined had done so much for her in the entire time she had known them, let alone all for one occurrence. By the time Ben was done detailing out the rest of her Saturday, there were tears in her eyes and she was fighting back a sob.

“Tomorrow, we’re going to Cloud City,” he finished. “I got us a private tour of the facility from an old friend.”

“What?” Rey shrieked, nearly knocking over her tea in her excitement. “Cloud City in Bespin? The
“That’s the one,” Ben chuckled. When she didn’t say anything else, he cleared his throat, unsure how to take her stare. “Is that ok?”

“Ok? Ok? I mean…”

Rey couldn’t come up with the words. Ben had arranged everything. Not only had he secured her a night off of work so she could actually experience the club as a guest, but he had organized a car to chauffeur her, Rose, and Jess around starting with their trip to Atollon for dinner with Finn and Poe. The dinner, which she assumed he had actually made the reservations for, was only the start of her evening out. She’d get to be with her friends to celebrate, before the boys went home to prepare for their flight. Then it would be her and girls to go dancing, as Jess had begged for over the last couple of weeks. Ben promised to show up at the end of the night to bring her home so they could celebrate — just the two of them. And now — now he was telling her he was taking her to her dream job tomorrow. It wasn’t ok. It was fucking fantastic!

Pancakes forgotten, she started to cry. To think — she had doubted Ben would be with her next year for her birthday. The idea now made her sick to her stomach. He had been her boyfriend all of one week and already he was taking better care of her than anyone else in her life ever had. She could see the amount of detailed planning he had put into this so-called day, which was really turning into a full-blown weekend. It was beyond what she had expected and more than she could comprehend. How could this man — this wounded soul who she had only met months earlier — love her this much? How was it possible?

“I’m sorry,” he apologized, hastily, kneeling by her side. He misinterpreted her tears, believing her to be overwhelmed or even mad. “I know you told me you didn’t appreciate expensive gifts, so I thought an experience would be better. I wanted you to have happy memories of your birthday, something pleasant to look back on since you never got a chance growing up.”

“No, no,” Rey sobbed into her hands. “It’s not that. It’s just-.” Her voice cracked and she could barely find the words. “You’re too good…too good to me, Ben.”

“Don’t say that,” he responded sternly, pulling her hands away so he could see her face. “Remember what I told you? I do all of this because I want to, because I love you. I want you to have all of this, Rey. I want you to have everything — everything you’ll let me give you.”

She threw her arms around him once again. “I love you,” she cried into his shoulder, burying her weeping face in his shirt. There as nothing else she could say. There was no way to put into words
everything she was feeling — everything he had made her feel by his gesture. “Thank you so much, Ben. Thank you.”

“Happy Birthday, Rey.”

It took her a bit to get straightened out after her meltdown. Ben was patient with her and held her hand while she demolished the stack of pancakes he had made her. As she ate, he would gently stroke the pad of his thumb across her knuckles, a constant reminder he was with her. Her heart had never been quite so full and after she had finished her breakfast, neither had her belly. She may have just woken up, but she felt like she needed a nap to digest the meal currently sitting in her stomach.

“Too much?” Ben teased.

“Yeah,” she blushed, feeling silly for having insisted on eating each and every thing he had made her.

“How about we skip training today? You can take a nap before the girls come over,” he suggested.

Rey’s face broke into a wide, loving grin. “Ben Solo,” she said, reaching over to ruffle his hair. “You really are too good to me.”

Classes were a challenge to concentrate on. Rey could hardly contain her excitement. She wanted to fast forward through her sessions with her students to kick-off her first real birthday. It had her hurrying through exercises and dismissing her class right at the top of the hour.

Thankfully, the rest of the time went by quicker. After her classes, as promised by Ben, they took a nap. She skipped lunch, still too full from the mountain of pancakes she and consumed for breakfast. The flour-based meal helped keep her unconscious until Ben roused her from her dreamless sleep.

“Sweetheart?”

“Mmmmm.”
He chuckled. She felt the mattress dip as he leaned in to kiss her temple. “Rey, love, you need to wake up. Jess and Rose are on their way over to get ready for tonight.”

“Five more minutes,” she begged, still half asleep, as she rolled away from him.

Smack.

Rey’s eyes flew open and she sat up like a shot. Had he just… ?

Ben was smirking, evilly. Oh, he had, had he? “I told you. You have to get up, Birthday girl.”

“A spanking?” She raised a brow at him. “Really, Solo?”

His smirk remained. “I think you liked it.”

Rey stuck out her tongue, childishly. Ben dove for her. She managed to duck out of range, slipping out of bed and into the bathroom.

“Just remember who you are going home with tonight, sweetheart,” he called through the door. “The more you tease me now, the worse it will be for you later.”

As if she could forget.

With a sigh, she leaned herself against her sink basin. She wished they had more time. She wanted to tease him, if only to get him back for spanking her. His strike hadn’t hurt. He hadn’t meant it to. It was playful, just a way to nudge her out of bed, but it had immediately set fire to her belly. Now, she didn’t want to take the time to get ready to go. She wanted to stay in and finish what he had started.

If she snuck out of the bathroom quick, she’d still have time to text her friends. She could tell them she overslept and needed another hour. That would be enough time, right? She recalled their last tryst and grinned to herself. They were building up their endurance and stamina.
“Jess and Rose just pulled in,” Ben called from the parking lot.

Well, there goes that idea.

Rey ran a comb through her hair and rinsed her face with cold water before re-emerging. Ben was suitably dressed in dark jeans and a fitted t-shirt, while she was still in her pajamas. She appraised his muscles, lines and contours which she knew existed beneath the thin fabric. He was magnificent. She had thought him handsome before, but now, knowing what lurked beneath the surface she felt as if she would never be satisfied unless they were wrapped up in one another.

A knock at her door, took her attention away from admiring his form. She followed her boyfriend down to let her friends into the apartment.

“Hey!” Her two friends chorused loudly. They were both in loose fitting clothing, bags of makeup and other items held between them.

“I’ll see you later.” Ben moved to excuse himself from the girly fray. He kissed Rey, running a hand down her back to settle on her hip, adding in a quieter tone, ”my little minx.”

Rey smiled up at him, as he pulled back. “What are you going to do until I see you later?”

He grinned at her. “I need to pick up a couple of things. You’ll see.”

She gave him one last kiss before he took off, leaving her to the mercy of her girl friends, who were eager to get her dressed up for their night out.

“I’m not sure about this,” Rey told Jess as her friend led her away from her apartment door towards the bathroom. “I mean, it’s just dinner and work.”

“It’s your birthday dinner!” Jess insisted, as she plucked up her makeup bag from the floor. “And it’s not work. Not tonight. Tonight, we are partying it up! We need to look our best… well Rose and I do. You’ve already got a man.” She disappeared into the bathroom, leaving Rey and Rose standing
together in the bedroom.

Rey scoffed. “What does that have to do with anything?”

Rose gave her a sympathetic smile. “It’s nice to have someone.”

She considered her friend’s words. It was a blessing to have Ben. He had been endearingly sweet to her. From the time he had begun training her up until now, he had been careful with her, only pushing her to become a better fighter but never crossing the line. He respected her comfort. He was fair.

Having him as her boyfriend brought their relationship to a new level. He acted the same, always taking things slow, making sure she was alright before proceeding. As chivalrous as it was, her desire was starting to burn out of control. She was less and less interested in him being a gentleman and more invested in releasing his animalistic side.

Her lips curled up in a devilish smirk as she imagined going all the way. Maybe she should have told him it was what she really wanted for her birthday. He had unwrapped her from her bodysuit. Would it be too forward of her to ask to unwrap him for her day? It was an alluring thought, leaving her skin warm and prickly with need.

She considered taking another shower to cool herself off, when she noticed Rose watching her expression, as if she could tell what Rey was thinking. Suddenly, she felt like a terrible friend. She had been so caught up in enjoying her time with Ben that she hadn’t spent a single minute with either of them.

“I’m glad we’re getting a chance to go out together tonight.”

“Me too,” Rose beamed. “It’s so nice of Ben to coordinate all of this for us.”

Rey paused for a second. Had Rose called him Ben? She knew he permitted her to call him by his birth name, but he still flinched when his uncle or Maz used it. Sensing her confusion, Rose explained. “When he came into the coffee shop the other day he told me I could call him Ben.”

“He did?”
“Yeah.”

Rey felt her eyes well up with tears. She wasn’t sure when she had gotten so emotional. It seemed like since Ben had come into her life she had gone through several changes. She recognized some were due to stress, but others were because of the impact Ben had had on her. She wasn’t being dramatic when she said he was too good to her. He really was. He had changed her entire life.

“I’m glad,” she told Rose, truthfully.

“He’s not the same as when he first arrived,” Rose commented, reading Rey’s face.

“Wonder why?” Jess teased, sarcastically as she beckoned them into the bathroom. Then to Rey, she asked, “Are you ready for your makeover?”

“Jess,” she groaned as she took in the various containers scattered about her sink.

Rey was apprehensive about going through another makeover. Finn and Poe had been pushy. She had only humored them out of guilt, but she was not thrilled with the idea of going through the tedious process again so soon.

“Come on, Rey,” her friend whined. “It’s your birthday. Tall, dark, and handsome is giving you the royal treatment. The least I can do is get you ready to go.” Jess made a sad, puppy-dog face, which Rose mimicked aside of her.

“Please, Rey,” she begged. “I haven’t done anything like this since Paige and I were living together. Jess never let’s me do her makeup.”

“Alright,” Rey relented.

Jess cheered and Rose clapped her hands together, happily. Rey took a seat, while her friends busied themselves with matching her skin tone to a concealer and picking out the appropriate color palette for her look.
“We should do a smokey eye,” Rose suggested to Jess. “It will go well with her outfit.”

“I actually haven’t decided what I’m wearing yet,” Rey confessed to them.

“Don’t worry,” Jess grinned. “We’ve got you covered.”

Kylo was not interested in staying for girl time or whatever it was Jess and Rose has cooked up, but he hesitated outside Rey’s apartment door upon exiting.

She had been emotional most of the day, going from surprised to crying to hugging him so hard he thought she’d leave bruises. It was a bit of a whirlwind and he would be lying if he said he hadn’t been holding his breath to see how it all played out. As luck would have it, she was appreciative of his gestures — more than appreciative. It had gone as far as her not believing she was worthy of what he had done.

He would have to work harder to prove to her he meant everything he told her and did everything because he genuinely wanted to. From her perspective, it probably was a lot to take in. Her birthday had never been something to celebrate before. He had taken her on a complete 180-turn with his plan. Still, he wanted her to enjoy it all. He wanted her to be happy.

In a short amount of time, her happiness had become paramount to him. Rey was the most important thing in his life — more than his fancy apartment, more than his car, more than his ability to travel, even more than his career. She truly was his everything.

Kylo could hardly believe she had become so much to him in so little time, but he wouldn’t have change it for anything. Rey had had a choice and she had chosen him. That in itself was enough to make him smile, even as he went downstairs to pick up his manager and assistant.

Corellia was still slow by the time he reached his apartment. The nightlife wouldn’t start up for several hours, giving him enough time to shower and dress at his place before it was time to meet up with his co-workers.

As he entered his home, he noted the persistent red flashing light of his answering machine. He had yet to play the last message from the other week. By now, he was sure there were at least a dozen others on the tape. He ignored them. He would listen to them later, after Rey’s birthday weekend.
was over. He only wanted to focus on her tonight.

He wandered through his place, peeling off layer after layer of clothing as he made his way to the bathroom. The apartment felt more like an impersonal hotel room than his home. After his week spent rolling around — among other things — in the sheets with Rey, he didn’t feel the same comforting vibe here as he did when he was at her place.

Of course, if all went well tomorrow with his uncle, they would be discussing how to make his apartment more homey.

Turning the chrome knob is his shower, he stepped under the spray of water to cleanse himself. His thoughts ran amuck as he lathered up with Aventus.

So far, Rey had accepted all he had planned for her. The final touch was a touch more drastic than renting a car or paying for a four star dining experience. Giving Rey a key, was a major step.

He had thought about it since he had begun planning her surprise birthday. He still wasn’t sure how she would react. If her earlier response was any indication, it would probably be an array of emotions before she settled on one. He hoped it would be a happy one.

By giving her a key, he wasn’t officially asking her to move-in, though he’d be lying if he said that wasn’t his long-term goal. He wanted her to have a safe place to go to, a place where she could crash in the city, and one closer to Cloud City, once she worked there, because he was sure she’d make an impression and a job offer would be forthcoming. Of course, if Rey wanted to move in with him, and away from his cockblock of an uncle, he’d be all for it.

He just wasn’t sure if Rey would be.

They had gone through a couple of major milestones together recently. He was concerned this one would scare her more so than his declaration of love or admitting he was a Virgin. On the other hand, they were practically living together now and once she started working at Cloud City and he was no longer on doing his community service, they wouldn’t have a need to commute to Tatooine anymore. They could remain in Corellia — together.

Together had a nice ring to it, almost as nice as when Rey had referred to them as ‘we’. Kylo was convinced anything Rey said better.
As he mused to himself, he realized his skin was pruning. He had been standing under the water clean but unmoving for too long. He shut off his shower, grabbed a towel, and returned to his bedroom.

Having frequented Rogue One over the last few weeks, he should have felt confident in what to wear, but because it was Rey’s birthday, he was left standing in front of his closet debating. After nearly half an hour of holding up various shirts, he landed on a black crew neck with a gray blazer and a pair of dark-wash jeans. Rey was sure to appreciate a pop of color, even if it was a shade of black. She liked to tease him about his monotone wardrobe.

And Kylo...well he just liked to tease his girl as much as he could.

When Ben had told her he had rented a car, Rey had assumed he meant an Uber. What waited for her and her friends was a limo with a driver at the ready. Rey had only seen them in the city and she had never been in one before. Jess and Rose were cheering behind her, besides themselves, while she wondered what type of engine the vehicle had.

Jess was the first to hop in, followed by Rose. Rey was the last, her eyes studying the exterior of the transport before she ducked inside to join her girl friends. The interior was just as nice with black leather seats and a divide between them and the driver. As he shut the door, allowing them to settle in, Rey glanced around. A mini fridge was located on the side, closest to Rose and a bottle of champagne sat in a bucket of ice by Jess. She had already started to reach for the bottle when the driver pulled away.

She poured three flutes full, hanging them out. Rey had never had champagne before. She wasn’t sure how it would taste, but she wasn’t about to waste it. Besides, Jess and Rose were all for it.

“To Rey!” Jess toasted, raising her glass. “Let her birthdays always be awesome and let her boyfriend continue to spoil all of us.”

Rose and Rey laughed, as they raised their glasses in unison. The three girls clinked their flutes together, before each taking a sip. The flavor was better than Rey had expected. Jess closed her eyes and hummed happily. Rose took another quick sip.

“Please,” Jess drawled, as her eyes fluttered open. “Please tell me he has a brother.”
“Sorry,” Rey laughed again. “He’s an only child.”

“Figures,” Jess muttered, but she was soon too busy pouring more champagne to worry about it. Rey decided to stick with her one glass, not needing a headache from overindulging.

The trip to Atollon was uneventful. Rey enjoyed having some girl time. Rose, Jess, and her fell into easy conversation discussing everything from their jobs, to Max’s amazing lattes to what they were most excited to hear the DJ play at Rogue One. By the time the driver pulled up to the restaurant, Rey was feeling the champagne she had consumed and a happy buzz from having such good people in her life.

“Miss?” The driver held the door open for them, as they exited the limo.

“Shit, Niima! Look at you!” Poe catcalled her from the sidewalk, as she emerged. “Movie star!”

“Hi Poe,” Rey strolled over, giving him a one-arm hug as he continued to tease her.

“Oh my God. Are you wearing makeup?”

“Um, yeah,” Jess confirmed for her. “Done by yours truly and her bestie,” Jess gestured to Rose. “Thank you very much.”

“Poe Dameron. Jessika Pava and Rose Tico.”

“Enchante, mademoiselles.” Poe kissed their hands. Jessika laughed and curtsied, playing along with his theatrics. Rose just rolled her eyes, not impressed.

“He’s incorrigible,” Finn commented, appearing at Rey’s side. “Hey Peanut.” He pulled her into a full hug, which she happily accepted. “Happy Birthday.”

“I’m glad I got to see you before you jet off.” Rey told him as she stepped back.

“Me too.” Finn told her. He coughed a bit, an awkward silence stretching between them. “Listen,
“He’s not here,” Rey interrupted. “Tonight it’s just me and my friends.”

“Yeah, yeah, he said when he came by D’Qar.”

“What?” She hadn’t known he actually went to see Finn. She had assumed they had spoken over her phone or through Poe.

“Crap,” he mumbled. “I don’t think you were supposed to know about that.”

She shook her head, smiling to herself. Finn really was terrible at keeping secrets. “I’m impressed you two didn’t kill each other.”

“Don’t think I would have tried.” Rey made a face of disbelief. He chuckled, rubbing the back of his neck. “Ok, yeah, so it probably wouldn’t have ended up well for me if I tried, but you’re like my sister, Peanut. I just want you to be careful.”

“I am,” she promised him. “Ben’s a good guy.”

“Yeah,” Finn sighed. “As much as I hate to admit it, I’m going to have to agree with you. I almost fell out of my seat when the receptionist told me he came to see me at work. He asked me to put it aside for you — our differences — so you could have your day.”

“He did?” Rey swallowed, feeling all her emotions from earlier boiling up. How could this precious man love her so dearly? She was no one, yet he treated her like a queen.

“He did,” Finn confirmed with a nod. “He was a real class act about it too. Plus, there’s,” he shrugged at her, “You.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Rey,” Finn made a face. “Come on. I don’t think Poe or I have ever seen you this happy. I-”
took a deep breath. “I’m happy for you, Peanut — really, I am.”

“Finn!” Rey wrapped her arms around her best friend, not caring if all of Jess’s carefully applied makeup rubbed off as she hugged him.

Though she had known Poe technically longer, the bond she shared with Finn had always been the strongest. It was his opinion she held in high regard and it was him she consulted when she wanted to make a pro/con list about a major choice in her life. She let their embrace wash over her, removing any lingering resentment from their fight.

“Hey! You better not wreck my masterpiece!” Jess cried from where she stood between Rose and Poe.

“Sorry.” Rey broke away from Finn to lean back and blink her eyes. She had seen actresses do the same when they wanted to get rid of their tears without spoiling their makeup. She hoped it actually worked.

“I’m Finn,” her friend introduced himself to Rose and Jess, while Rey pulled herself together.

After checking her appearance in the window’s reflection, she turned back to her friends. “Who’s hungry?”

Chapter End Notes

Major thanks to @abyssalspark who continues to put up with me! :) She’s awesome and I’m so thankful for her constant support of my writing.

Woo! I’m on a roll this week. First I started a new fic: Shadow Song and then I updated Same People, Different Eyes. New chapters for all three will be up next week!
With Love (Pt. 2)

Chapter Summary

In which Kylo decides to do something stupid and Rey decides she's ready for more...

Chapter Notes

Many thanks to my beta @abyssalspark.

A special thank you to @reylorobyn2011 for letting me vent and inspiring me. Her suggestions have helped me get over my writer's block. If you haven't already, go check out her works. She's so talented!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
“What’s the occasion, Ren?” Hux questioned, when Kylo arrived to pick up his manager outside Gleeson Drive. Hux lived in a penthouse at Starkiller, a premier apartment complex at the heart of downtown.

“Do we need an occasion?”

Hux rolled his eyes. “Never once — not in the entire time I’ve been with the First Order — have you initiated a night out.” Kylo felt his jaw tighten at Hux’s tone. His manager was far too observant. “So, I’ll ask again. What is the occasion?”
“Let’s wait for Phasma. I don’t want to have to repeat myself.”

“Fine.”

The driver pulled away from the curb and they began their ride to pick up their colleague.

Nautilus, though not as new as Starkiller, was another luxury apartment building in the downtown, only a few blocks over from Hux’s location. It took several minutes to get through the dense Saturday night traffic, all of which Hux and Kylo sat in silence.

Both men lifted their heads when the sound of the car door opening signaled the arrival of their co-worker.

Phasma entered the car with a curt thank you to the driver. She was wearing black, same as them, though instead of a suit like Hux, she had worn a lace jumpsuit. It had a plunging neckline, baring pale skin adorned with layers of white gold necklaces. There was almost enough jewelry to cover what skin she had decided to show.

“Boys,” she nodded in greeting to them both.

“Phasma.”

“Thank you for coming out tonight,” Kylo said.

Hux wasted no time in launching into his interrogation. “Alright, Ren. Out with it. What’s the deal with tonight?”

“Ugh, I’m stuffed,” Finn groaned, leaning back in his chair.

“Me too,” Rose chimed in, patting her belly.
“Me three,” Jess and Poe added in unison.

Meanwhile, Rey continued to annihilate her steak, enjoy the juicy cut and all the sides that went along with it.

“How is she still eating?” Rose asked.

“It’s a thing of beauty, isn’t it?” Poe replied, jokingly, as he put his arm around his boyfriend’s shoulders.

“She’s so tiny. Where does it all go?” Jess wondered out loud.

“Bottomless pit,” Finn interjected.

“I can hear you, you know,” Rey glared at them. “And may I remind you none of you would be here if it wasn’t my birthday.”

“Well, Peanut, technically your boyfriend is the reason we are all here,” Poe pointed out. “Who would have thought Kylo Ren was such a romantic?”

“I think it has more to do with Rey than anything else,” Rose remarked. “Ben isn’t the same since they started dating.”

Rey blushed all the way to her hairline. She hadn’t been the only one to see the changes in Ben’s demeanor. Her friends, Finn included, had picked up on his calmer attitude. It felt strange to know it was due in part because of her, but she’d be lying if she didn’t admit to liking it.

“He still acts like her bodyguard,” Jess commented.

“Can you blame him?” Poe asked. “With Plut-.” Finn smacked him, cutting him off before he could finish his train of thought. Poe sheepishly apologized. “Sorry, Peanut.”
“It’s alright,” Rey replied, quietly. Suddenly, finishing her steak didn’t feel important. Instead, she wanted it as far from her as possible. She pushed her plate back and was relieved when their waiter immediately stopped by to clear it.

The mood over the table darkened. A silence fell between them all. Rey bit her bottom lip, worried the easy flow of conversation had been ruined by her ongoing issues with her former guardian. Despite all the planning Ben had gone through, her past continued to haunt her. She wouldn’t truly be free until Plutt was caught.

“Let’s not talk about that,” Rose places her hand over Rey’s and have it a comforting squeeze. She rallied the rest of the group around her. “Tonight we are celebrating our Rey of Sunshine!”

“Here, here!” Finn agreed, raising his wine glass.

The group cheered, their glasses all meeting over the center of their table. Rey watched as they all returned to their smiles. She let go of a breath she hadn’t known she was holding. Rose was right. Tonight was for her. She couldn’t let Plutt ruin this gift.

“When do you take off?” She asked Finn and Poe.

“Early tomorrow morning,” Finn answered.

“Really early,” Poe groaned. “Which is why we have to take a rain check on the clubbing tonight, Peanut.”

“Yeah,” Finn nodded. “It’s a long flight and there is no direct option, so it will take us a whole day to get there.”

“Damn!” Jess cried.

“That warrants a rain check,” Rose agreed.

“Well, I’m glad I got to see you both before you left.” Rey smiled across the table at them. “I can’t believe you’re actually becoming a big deal, Big Deal.”
Poe laughed, while Rose and Jess smiled politely, though it was apparent they were confused by the joke.

“I’m excited,” Finn admitted. “We are going on a tour of SAFL’s main campus the first day we are there.”

“I’ll be at the pool,” Poe interjected.

Finn rolled his eyes. “Their food security program is one of the best. I’m meeting with Dr. Drimie after the tour. I have so many questions for him.”

“About three pages worth,” Poe added.

His boyfriend elbowed him, playfully. “It’s not every day you get to meet your hero in the flesh.”

“That’s awesome!” Rey beamed. “I’m so proud of you.”

“Thanks, Peanut.”

“When do you get back?”

“Two weeks from Monday,” he told her. “We don’t get in until around midnight, so my boss is letting us have off on Tuesday to reset from the jet lag.”

“One day,” Jess scoffed. “You will need more time than that.”

“I wish,” Finn chuckled, “but it’s a work trip, so,” he shrugged and they all nodded, understanding. To Rey, said, “I wish we could go with you tonight. I’ve been wanting to see this club you work at.”

“You’re missing out,” Jess grinned. “I’ve been trying to find time to go for months. And my girl works there!” She nudged Rey playfully.
“You two will have to come to Tatooine and we can do this again when you get back from your trip,” Rose suggested.

Rey beamed. She was thrilled both sets of her friends were getting along so well. It was a wonderful feeling, better than any Burberry bag or Cartier necklace. Her family was all together with her — well, almost all of them. She couldn’t help but miss Ben. While it showed his maturity that he had chosen to let her make amends with Finn alone, she wished he was with her to be a part of her dinner.

She reminded herself he was taking her home tonight, so at some point in the evening he’d be showing up at Rogue One. The anticipation sent a thrill through her. After all the surprises he had given her, she was preparing to give him one he’d never forget.

“We’re going out to celebrate a friend of mine’s birthday,” Kylo enlightened his coworkers.

“A friend?” Hux repeated, skeptically. “You don’t have any friends.”

“Well, she’s more than a friend.”

Hux’s eyes widened. “She?”

“Who is she to you?” Phasma asked, too blunt to care about formalities or a sense of decorum.

Kylo swallowed, considering his options. Telling them Rey was his girlfriend seemed strange. While he had gone out with both of them on numerous occasions, they rarely spoke of personal matters. Plus, at his age, saying Rey was his girlfriend sounded a bit immature, even if that was what she was to him.

It wasn’t all that she was to him. She was his home. She was the love of his life — the person who gave him purpose and made him a better version of himself. She was his everything.
He was not saying that to Phasma or Hux. He’d never hear the end of it, so he settled for the socially acceptable term.

“My girlfriend.”

Silence filled the car.

Maybe he had misjudged his co-workers. Perhaps Rey was correct and he had written them off before he had given them a chance to show how supportive they could be. Kylo was about to show them Rey’s picture when it happened. First Hux snorted, followed by an attempt to breathe and finally finishing with a howling of laughter.

*Maybe not.*

Phasma was stifling her chuckle, but she was laughing too. At least she had the decency to pretend not to be humored by his admission.

He waited impatiently for the two of them to stop giggling like children before he turned his phone around to show them the picture Rey had snapped earlier in the day. Phasma’s face changed instantly, as she gingerly took his cell from his palm.

“That’s her?”

“Yes.”

Kylo watched her reaction as she took in Rey’s genuinely bright smile and flushed cheeks, while he stood behind her in the image, his arms wrapped around her and his lips brushing a kiss atop her head. It was a picture Jyn had snapped at Rogue One earlier in the week when he had dropped Rey off. Jyn had insisted he needed a new background for his phone. Somehow her suggestion had morphed into a photo session in the bar. Though he had opposed the idea at first, he was glad for it now. He had a phone filled with shots of him with Rey — his favorite being this one.

Phasma’s expression was unreadable for a long time as she scanned the photo, clearly skeptical, but after a few minutes, she handed the phone back and gave Kylo a rare smile.
“This is the girl from the file?”

“What file?” Hux questioned, his eyebrows raising.

Kylo ignored him to answer his assistant. “Yes.” He hadn’t thought she’d remember, considering the number of requests she got on a daily basis, but Phasma had always been clever. If she disapproved of his relationship, she didn’t let her face show it.

“Congratulations, Ren.”

“Congratulations?” his manager scoffed.

Ignoring Hux, he smiled at his assistant. “Thank you.”

He hadn’t counted on Phasma being the romantic type. She seemed rather pleased, as if she had suspected he’d eventually take the plunge for a pair of pretty eyes. Rey was far more than pretty — she was breathtaking and kind and generous and — he could go on but he doubted his co-workers wanted to hear him babble about his girlfriend all night. Though he’d probably do it anyway.

Maybe when he had asked her to complete the background research Phasma had suspected it was for more than his dubious intentions. She would have been wrong, initially. Of course, now, she would appear to be correct.

“You seem happy.” Phasma remarked, as she caught him smiling down at the image on his phone.

Hux snatched it out of his hand and Kylo turned his attention back to his assistant. “I am. She is-.”

“Obviously an escort. How much are you paying her?” Leave it to Hux to turn the entire conversation into something unseemly and despicable.

“Armitage!” Phasma rarely used his first name. Kylo watched the redhead cringe slightly before recovering.
“What?” Hux snarled, pointing at the image on the screen. “No way a girl like that would be with him unless it was for money.”

Kylo wanted to regale them with the mattress story and how their first real fight had been over money — over how she didn’t want him buying her anything — but he kept his mouth shut. If Hux didn’t want to believe it, then let him fester about it. By saying nothing, Kylo could manage to irritate his manager further.

When neither of them took the bait, he continued to press from a different angle. “Have you told Snoke about your lady friend?”

“It is nothing for him to be concerned about. My personal life has nothing to do with the ring.”

Hux rolled his eyes. “Ren, everything you do is of Snoke’s concern. When he finds out about her, he is not going to be pleased.”

“What does it matter if I have a relationship or not? The others all have girlfriends.”

“The others aren’t the top-ranked MMA fighter in the league and the main source of income for the club.” Hux pointed out, his mind solely focused on the business aspect.

Kylo considered his words. While he had considered spending time with Rey over the next few months, he had never gotten around to thinking beyond that. What happened when he went back to the ring? His travel schedule would be unpredictable and she was stuck working locally. Between his training schedule and his professional fight engagements, his free time would be severely limited, not to mention hardly aligned with her chaotic schedule.

Would they remain together after the new year? Kylo wanted her to be with him, regardless of their careers or where they lived, but he knew Rey had trust and abandonment issues. Paired with his own trust issues, he wasn’t sure how she’d fair with him taking off to Canto Bight and anywhere else he had to go post-January. Knowing her, she’d try, at least for a while, but after months of barely seeing each other, would they make it?

“Maybe I won’t come back to the ring.” He remarked casually, remembering his back-up plan.

Hux and Phasma’s faces both paled — a difficult task seeing as how they both had milky
competitions from their lack of time outside.

“W-what?” His manager looked as if he was about to have a stroke. “Excuse me?”

“You heard me;” Kylo muttered in a bored tone. “Maybe I’m done with all.”

“Sir,” Phasma began, falling back into her professional demeanor. “While I understand your attachment to this girl-.”

“My girlfriend, Phasma.”

“Yes, yes. Of course. Your girlfriend,” she tried again. “I have to caution you about the ramifications of such a rash decision.” Hux nodded next to her, as they both stared at him. They were eyeing him as if he had just said he was thinking of committing a felony, which wasn’t too far off from what had landed him in his current predicament with the board. “Have you considered wha-.”

“I have considered an alternate career path upon retirement from the MMA,” he answered before she could finish.

“Shit,” Hux cursed, leaning back into his seat. He ran a hand through his hair, before snapping once more. “Fuck, Ren! What the hell are you thinking?”

*That a life with Rey is worth it*, he answered internally.

Thankfully, they arrived at Rogue One not long after, granting him a reprieve from answering their questioning looks. Kylo greeted Chirrut and Baze as they walked in. Chirrut wasn’t focused on any of them, but he was grinning from ear to ear, prompting Baze to tell him to stop “looking like a fool.” Phasma and Hux paid the two no mind, apparently still in shock from his revelation, and followed Kylo’s lead to the corner of the bar.

Cassian, Jyn, Kaytoo, and Rook were all there. Kylo’s normal seat was occupied, which wasn’t an issue tonight, as he had guests. They waited until three seats together became available. Once they had secured a place to sit, they each ordered. Hux had gin neat, while Phasma had hers mixed with tonic. Kylo didn’t have to order his. Kaytoo brought his his normal whiskey without having to be told. With drinks in hand, the trio fell into silence.
Kylo wasn’t bothered by it. The club was loud enough to drown out most attempts at conversation anyway. He past the time scanning the crowd looking for his girl. He knew it was still early, but he had kept himself from texting her since she had left for dinner with her friends and now he was becoming antsy. It wasn’t long before Hux broke the silence, less comfortable with the void than Kylo or his assistant.

“See anything you like, Phasma?” Hux asked, his eyes lingering on the sea of dancing people.

“Not interested,” she muttered, before taking a sip of her gin and tonic.

“Not even one?”

She raised an eyebrow at him, setting her glass down before replying, “I’m a married woman, Armitage.”

Kylo nearly spit out his whiskey onto his manager. Phasma was married? She had been working for him for years. He had never heard her mention a significant other, let alone a spouse. She never had any pictures on her desk or on her phone. She never brought up any personal commitments. In fact, she rarely spoke about anything personal. He stared at her, wondering what else about the Amazonian woman he wasn’t aware of.

“The fuck?” Hux stammered, vocalizing Kylo’s immediate reaction. “You never told me that.”

“You never asked,” she responded with a half-shrug of her shoulders.

“Is it anyone I know?” Hux continued to press. He hated being out of the loop, no matter the content. Armitage Hux had to be in the know at all times. He told Kylo it was for his job, but Kylo knew better. The guy was worse than a thirteen year old girl when it came to gossip.

Phasma took another sip of her drink, staring a the bar instead of making eye contact with them. She didn’t appear to be interested in sharing, but she wasn’t walking away from them either. After a moment, she gave them a name. “Tormund Bane.”

Now Kylo did spit his drink out. Hux cursed loudly and glared at him, as whiskey spray filled the air
between them. Kylo had been able to turn at the last second, keeping the liquid from going all over his manager. Hux still wiped at his face with a bar napkin.

“The Ginger Giant?” Kylo questioned, using the man’s ring title.

Phasma nodded, “That’s the one.”

“Holy shit,” he wheezed, feeling the burn of the whiskey in his nostrils. “When did that happen?”

“It will be six years in May.”

Hux launched into an all out investigation, peppering his peer with queries to sate his growing interest in this new revelation. Phasma, to her credit, simply smiled and humored him. Meanwhile, Kylo turned back in his seat, leaning onto the bar and staring into his nearly empty drink. He peered at the copper liquid as if it held the answers to the universe.

Phasma was his favorite person (who wasn’t Rey) and the closest thing Kylo had to a friend. Until Rey had entered his life, Phasma had also been the only female he spoke with on a consistent basis. It didn’t bother him she had kept her relationship from him. It did make him curious as to why, but he was not about to ask. He wouldn’t have gotten a word in edgewise anyway, not with the way Hux was going on and on, as if he was suddenly a member of Scotland Yard. It made Kylo wondered about how she had managed to have it all — a promising professional career and love, long-standing and important enough to say vows to make it official.

Prior to meeting Rey, he had denied himself attachments under a misguided concept that it would detract from his goal of achieving greatness. In reality, he was actually afraid of rejection. He had been fooling himself, but even after he had met Rey, he had seen her as a stepping stone, a way to expand his career. Then he had spent time with her and all he thought he knew had changed. Kylo wondered if the same had happened for Phasma. He mulled over the change in her face when she mentioned Tormund. Though she had turned away from them, he had seen a hint of blush. The woman actually flushed at the mere name of her husband. He didn’t want the details behind it, but it made his curiosity gnaw at him. She was obviously very much in love with him.

Kylo hoped Rey loved him in such a way. Had she flushed at the mention of his name at dinner with her friends tonight? He could see her glancing away, blush covering her face, hiding her freckles and running to the edge of her hairline. She always looked so beautiful with the splash of color on her tanned skin. Had Finn questioned her reaction or had he remained silent — the way Kylo was now? The vision of Rey reacting to his name, the way Phasma had, made his chest ache with need. Rey and her ever present shining smile flashed in his mind. It had only been a few hours, yet he already
missed her.

He thought of how she had reacted when he had spanked her. Her eyes had lit up with surprise and a need to retaliate, but there was a hint of pleasure there too. She had liked it. He knew she liked it when he took control in the bedroom. There was an appeal to it, though it was difficult for him to decide which he liked more — being in control of Rey or being controlled by Rey. Both were attractive options.

Kylo swallowed the remainder of his drink quickly. Images like that were not going to help his developing desire for his girlfriend. Earlier this afternoon, he had been daydreaming about their future — a future he hadn’t once mentioned to her. He couldn’t fall into the same disastrous cycle as before. He couldn’t make decisions for Rey. If he wanted a future with her, they needed to make those choices together.

We.

She had said ‘we’ yesterday morning. It had meant a great deal to him then. It meant more now. After the conversation with Phasma and Hux in the car, he needed reassurance. Remembering how she had said ‘we’ grounded him, reminding him he had time. It was only August. He still had four months until his suspension was up. There wasn’t a reason to rush things. After all, it was his first relationship and hers, as well. They could take their time, continue having fun together, exploring one another. In time, he could broach the subject of their future with her. In time, he could ask her to be with him forever…if that was still what she wanted.

As if the universe was sending him a sign, Hux tapped his shoulder, before pointing past the bar out to the dance floor.

“Ren, isn’t that your girlfriend?”

Kylo rotated in his seat, his eyes locking onto Rey’s form in the massive crowd of bodies. Her hair was down, falling in waves about her, framing her face perfectly, as it bounced around from her movements. She had on some kind of metallic halter top, which caught the lights depending on how she angled herself and she had worn black shorts instead of full pants, showing off her toned legs. Her face was done up with makeup, highlighting her already perfect features, but nothing could highlight her main asset. Her smile was glorious, spanning over her mouth into her cheeks, creating dimples. She looked radiant.

“That’s her, right?” Hux asked again, nudging Kylo, who had been too busy admiring her to respond.
“Yeah.”

“I’m going to go say hi,” his manager stated, before standing up and adjusting his shirt.

It took a moment for Kylo’s brain to catch up. The First Order manager obviously had intentions beyond saying hello. The way his eyes roved over Rey’s body was making Kylo uncomfortable. Hux regarded her as if she was a meal. Kylo didn’t want his manager looking at his girlfriend like that. He didn’t want anyone looking at her like that. He started to see the flaws in his birthday plan. Why had he let her go out like that?

She’s mine, he thought, possessively, suddenly overcome with uneasy thoughts. He had never been good with people. His own parents hadn’t understood him. In the end, his uncle hadn’t either. He had always been too emotional, too rash in his decision making. The intensity with which he lived his life drove people away. He was fairly certain his possessive nature would not earn him any favor with Rey or her friends.

“Wish me luck.” Kylo watched Hux down the remainder of his gin before waltzing out on the floor.

His manager walked through the sea of dancing people with poise. Dressed from head to toe in black, it should have been a challenge to follow Hux’s movements. However, his red hair stuck out against his dark colored clothing and the majority of the patrons at Rogue One. Hux worked his way through all the jumping bodies to Rey and her friends.

It was as if it was happening in slow motion. Like watching a car wreck, Kylo couldn’t tear his eyes off the scene. Rey was too busy swinging her hips and bouncing her head to the beat to notice his manager’s approach. Her friend were doing the same, all crowded together in their trio. His grip on his glass of whiskey tightened the closer Armitage — and really, who named their kid Armitage? — got to Rey. He expected the tumbler to shatter any second. Then a hand was over his.

“If you’re going to do something stupid, do it when it counts,” Phasma told him. For a split second, he glanced over at her. Her eyes were boring right into him, as if she could see the root of all his indecisiveness. Maybe she could. This woman was proving to have more layers beyond her tough exterior. Her lips were set in a hard line and her voice had a ‘you-know-I’m-right-and-you’re-wrong’ tone. She was serious, perhaps more serious than Kylo had ever seen her before.

Something stupid.
Following Hux’s example, he poured the rest of his drink down his throat. Liquid courage was needed if he was going to do this. It must have been stronger than he thought because in the next instant, he was practically running through the throng of grinding dancers to her. Hux was already talking to her and her friends, who had all stopped dancing. Rey was wearing her signature smile and her friends appeared equally content to speak with the redhead.

That was enough.

“Rey.” He broke through the sea of people, nearly pushing Hux over in his haste.

“Ben!” Her face broke into a genuine grin, wider than before. It was such a small win, but it gave him smug satisfaction, especially when he caught Hux’s surprised expression in his peripherals. “You’re here! This is,” she gestured to Hux, then bit her lip. “I’m sorry, I forget your name.”

“Armitage Hux.”

“Oh! You’re Ben’s manager!”

“I am,” he grinned, reaching for her hand. He brought it up to kiss it. Kylo had seen him work this old trick many times before. He stepped between them, effectively cutting off Hux’s attempt.

“Thank you for coming out to celebrate with us! It’s so nice to meet one of Ben’s friends,” Rey smiled politely at him, then turned her full attention back to Ben. “I didn’t think you’d leave the bar. You normally don’t like the crowds.”

“Yes, Ren,” Hux drawled, his voice more nasally than normal, as he insisted on calling Kylo by his known name. “Since when do you socialize?”

Kylo felt his face pale, as he recognized he was standing in the middle of the crowded dance floor with hundreds of half-drunken, sweaty bodies. The only one he was interested in was standing in front of him. He started to wonder if his plan hadn’t backfired on him. Rey seemed genuinely elated he had shown up, but he hadn’t stopped to consider how he would do with so many people. Rey had made a rather accurate point. He barely tolerated people in general and though he had made some improvements since being with Rey, he was entering sensory overload by being in the thick of things.
Then he remembered Phasma’s advice from the bar. He was going to do something stupid.

“Younwannadance?” In his haste and aided by the liquor in his system, his question came out in one, sloppily elongated word.

Rey’s eyes widened at his ask. He hadn’t shocked her as often as she had shocked him. He wasn’t sure he liked it. She looked slightly out of her element, usually so happy and unaffected. She had her own world, a place of her own creation that was as pure as she was. He was never meant to have such light in his life. He had shied away from it his entire life. Nevertheless, here he was, trying to break into it for her, desiring to live in the light with Rey...if only for a fleeting moment.

“She’s all yours,” Jess said, pushing Rey towards him with a sly smile.

Kylo watched Rey’s cheeks flush under the strobe lights. He would never get tired of seeing her blush for him. She bit her bottom lip to hold back a laugh, as if there was an inside joke going on between her and her girlfriends. One glance at Rose and Jess’s faces and he realized there probably was. Both of Rey’s friends appeared to be fighting equally as hard to contain their laughter.

Rey took his hand and led him away from the group, towards the stage where the DJ was spinning the next song. Kylo barely noticed anything, except her petite hand wrapping around his. She barely fit around him, his form dwarfing her smaller one, but her hold was tight. The sight reminded him of what they had done earlier in the week. It sent piping hot sparks flowing through his veins.

Once they got up front, right by the stage, she turned to smile at him over her shoulder, as if checking to see if he was still with her. He wasn’t certain he was. He felt as if he was floating. Rey hadn’t bought into any of Hux’s usual antics. In fact, she had remained unaffected by his charm, too overjoyed to have her boyfriend with her to notice the other man’s attempts. It minimized his nerves, allowing him to once again focus on her and the fact it was her birthday night. She squeezed them into a spot off center. Only then did she drop his hand.

The music was much louder, making it impossible for them to talk. He didn’t care. Rey was here. He didn’t have to be without her any more tonight. Her presence alone was enough to calm him. He watched as she moved to beat of the music. She was swaying back and forth, bobbing her head again. Her hair was falling over her shoulders, flapping back and forth with her movements. He realized he was standing still, watching her, mainly because he didn’t know what else to do. Kylo didn’t know how to dance.
This was a stupid idea.

Rey peered up at him, her lips curling into another beaming smile. She shouted something. He couldn’t hear over the music. She laughed. — at him or herself, he couldn’t be sure. Then her hands were reaching out, taking his again. He relished the warmth she brought him from her touch alone. She began to tug and shake at his arms, trying to direct him on how to move.

Kylo found himself staring at her little hands. They were much smaller than his own. He had touched her before, felt her skin against his own but this time was different. He felt a tingle of electric energy rush from her to him. There was a current running through his body, making him jittery. Maybe it was due to the deep thrumming of the base, which pulsating through his body or all the strobe lights, either way, he felt as if he was about to have an out of body experience.

The song changed. Rey cried out, starting to jump in place. He saw her face light up, as she mouthed, ‘I love this song’ back at him. He couldn’t contain his own chuckle. She looked like a kid on Christmas morning, overly excited and full of innocent joy. He loved that about her — how she could take such a small thing and turn it into a huge victory.

Her tugs on his hands became more insistent as she hopped about. She wanted him to do the same. Well, Phasma had hinted he needed to do something stupid. He might as well go all the way. The great Kylo Ren reduced to a dancing idiot over a girl. He could hear the headlines now, along with a scornful insult from Snoke. He pushed it all from his mind.

None of that mattered now. Rey was holding on to him, radiant as the first day he had met her. She rarely appeared so free around him. Confident, yes. Independent, of course. Happy, always. But free… she had always had her guard up in his presence — had kept it up until this morning when he had admitted to knowing it was her birthday. Not that he could blame her. Her past history kept her constantly in a state of self-protection and his first impression had been unforgettable.

And his behavior following it.

Unforgivable.

Yet here she was, attempting to teach him for a change. Teach him how to dance. Teach him how to have fun. Teach him how to be a person again, instead of the shell of a man he had become. Kylo had resigned himself to believing his training was fun, his addiction to winning fights was enjoyable, and his path was set. Being around Rey had changed it all. She had unofficially been teaching him for weeks. She had been the motivation for his changes in behavior, changes his therapist, as well as others had noticed in him.
Observing her hip rolls and two-stepping, he broke into a goofy grin. She didn’t care how she looked. She didn’t bother with other’s opinions because she was truly self-made, truly her own person. Once again, he became aware of how the light inside her burned brighter than any star he saw in the sky. She was glowing next to him, alluring and free-spirited.

She was perfect.

He briefly took in the others surrounding them. Everyone seemed to be dancing in similar styles, moving to the beat. Most were couples, causing the electric pulse to course about him yet again. It startled him to the point he pulled out of Rey’s grasp. She barely noticed, putting her hands up in the air as she swayed. He followed her lead, internally scolding himself for losing her contact. Following her example, he began to jump up and down, earning himself another wide grin from her, as she took in the state of him. He tried to ignore the flap of his hair against his face, hoping under the shadows, his ears weren’t too visible.

All too soon, the music changed, leaving the upbeat pop for a more sensual hip-hop number. Rey stilled, her eyes immediately locking onto his own. Gone was the grin and the laid-back nature of her movements. He noticed the air around them was humid, as beads of sweat ran down the back of his neck below the collar of his shirt. Kylo glanced around. The other couples were closer, arms wrapped around each other, hips grinding in slow, rhythmic circles.

The jolt of electricity within him sparked across his skin, as Rey guided his hands to her waist. She moved her hips back and forth, lingering when she pressed her back end into his groin. Leaning into him, she began grinding on him, entwining her fingers with his as he held onto her. He could feel her shirt riding up, exposing the taut muscles of her stomach beneath. Her skin was warm to the touch and so inviting. No one would be the wiser if he slipped a hand into her shorts. They were too close for anyone to notice.

Kylo hooked his thumbs in her waistband, gently rubbing across her flesh. Rey’s hands left his to wind up around his neck, her fingertips teasing the edge of his hairline. He ducked his head down, mouth hovering over her neck. She continued to gyrate her hips, rolling them back. Kylo’s self control was lessening by the second. The sensation of her rocking against him while he let his hands roam freely across her expanse of skin had him painfully erect in his pants. He was sure she could feel it.

“If you keep doing that,” he breathed against her ear, “I’m going to carry you out of here, take you home, and have my way with you.”

His girl pivoted around, instantly, a mischievous glint in her hazel eyes. “Promise?”
God, he loved this woman.

This was one vow he had every intention of keeping, so he didn’t hesitate when he replied. “Promise.”

She grabbed his hand, taking off like a lightning bolt. The dance floor was suffocatingly hot. He could barely form a conscious thought after his very vivid, very rousing mental images of burying himself in Rey, filling her and claiming her in the physical sense. He tugged at the collar of his shirt, half expecting steam to pour out, as if he was in some sort of cartoon, as she guided him towards the bar.

“Five minutes.” She held up her hand, each finger extended out. “We say our goodbyes and we’re out of here.”

He nodded, completely floored by her determination to leave. He didn’t want her to regret leaving her birthday party prematurely, but she didn’t give him a chance to object, already off towards Rook to thank him for covering her shift and say goodnight. Rey chooses for Rey, a smug voice in the back of his head reminded him.

At the bar, he waved to Kaytoo, trying to flag him down for two bottles of water. If they were going to be doing what he hoped they were going to be doing, they needed to hydrate. Phasma was still seated in her prior location, sipping a fresh gin and tonic. She didn’t take notice of him, too engaged in her drink and her phone. She wasn’t one for public outings, much like himself, however she didn’t seem at all bothered by sitting in the corner alone. He had assumed Phasma would chat someone up. Though fierce, she was the most approachable out of his little trio. She tended to blend into whatever situation she found herself in, like a chameleon.

Kylo was stunned to find his more disagreeable acquaintance talking up Rose. Even more staggering, was the fact the girl had Hux smiling. It wasn’t the condescending sneer he normally wore, nor was it a seductive charming smile meant to lure her into one of his conquests. No, it was an authentic smile. Kylo contemplated ordering another whiskey to wash the sight from his memory. It was alarming, to say the least. Luckily, Jess joined them, causing Hux’s face to return to his normal indifferent gaze.

He turned his attention back towards where Rey had run off. It took him a minute, but he managed to locate her. She was crossing the floor to say goodbye to her managers, but she was no longer alone. A guy was reaching for her, too close for Kylo’s liking. Rey was shaking her head, stepping back. The guy continued to persist. Water forgotten, Kylo stormed across the floor toward her side, his intent clearly written across his face.
She beat him to it.

“Let go of my hand!” Rey shouted, bending his fingers back and putting him into a wrist lock. Kylo noted it was one of the techniques he had taught her. He wasn’t sure if he was more thrilled by the fact she used one of his techniques or that she had rejected the guy.

“Bitch!” The man hissed.

Kylo inserted himself between them. “What’s going on here?”

“That wench broke my fingers!”

“No, means no, asshole,” Rey snapped, from behind Kylo.

“Cu-.”

Kylo’s fist flew before the filth could finish his insult. His knuckles connected with the miscreant’s nose, resulting in a satisfying crunch of cartilage. The man wheezed, clutching his face and doubling over. Kylo had never felt so gratified from a hit. He was only partially aware of another man approaching from his side.

“What the hell?”

Shit.

Malbus came up aside of them, taking in the man’s appearance, as well as Rey’s position behind Kylo. “Sunshine?” The bouncer ignored Kylo, addressing who he was shielding instead.

“Baze, this guy doesn’t know the meaning of no.”

The imposing bouncer, regarded Kylo momentarily, before grabbing the wounded patron by the
scruff of his shirt. “You’re blacklisted from this club,” he shouted in his gruff voice. “Learn how to act like a man.” Kylo watched, as he escorted the degenerate out. He thanked whoever was listened in the universe that he hadn’t been thrown out too for his actions against the guy — or worse, reported on. The league would not be forgiving.

“I had him, you know,” Rey’s voiced pulled him back to her upturned face.

“He was vulgar,” Kylo shrugged, as if it was nothing. “Besides, I haven’t hit anyone in a few months.”

“I could have handled him,” she told him, crossing arms over her chest. Her eyes had hardened and she was no longer smiling.

Was she mad? He was trying to protect her. “I know you could have.” Her eyes softened, slightly at his honesty. “But you shouldn’t have to.”

“Well, Kylo Ren-“ Her tone was teasing. He hadn’t heard her use his new name recently. It didn’t sound right. He had grown a accustomed to her calling him Ben. Hearing her say anything else seemed wrong. He didn’t like it. “-not everyone is lucky enough to have you as their personal bodyguard.”

“No. Just you.”

Rey’s smile grew, at his words. He held his breath. She was looking at him with a dark, lust-filled gaze. Apparently, he wasn’t the only one who was craving skin on skin contact this evening. If she stared at him like that for much longer, he was going to take her right here and right now in the shadows of the bar.

As if reading his mind, she fisted her hands in his shirt and rose to her tiptoes to whisper, “Let’s get out of here.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you to everyone for their support of this story. I try to reply to all the comments because I appreciate each and every one, but I wanted to say it again. Thank you. If it wasn't for all the kind words and support I don't know if I'd be motivated to continue
writing. This is honestly the longest fanfic I've ever written and I'm having a lot of fun with it. Hope you are too!
Burning Desire

Chapter Summary

In which Kylo and Rey FINALLY spend some *quality* time together....

...and an unexpected guest turns up.

Chapter Notes

Thanks to @abyssalspark who gave me some helpful hints on my smut-writing, since I'm very insecure about it.

Thank you to moonlightrey for creating this beautiful moodboard. She's so talented!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Goodbyes were a brief affair. Rey was anxious to get home and have Ben make good on his promise to have his way with her. She had practically dragged him out of the club, earning more than one amused look from her friends both in front of and behind the bar.

Rey realized her desire was quite transparent. Everyone had caught on to why she suddenly felt the need to cut her birthday festivities short. Jess had given her a rather enthusiastic thumbs up, while Rose had blushed clear to the top of her head. Of course it was Jyn who wore a knowing grin, while Cassian seemed on the fence about the entire situation. Ben’s friends seemed on the fence as well, but Rey didn’t know them the way she knew her friends so she tried not to think too much about it.

“Someone’s in a hurry,” Ben jokingly commented, as he permitted her to yank him through the
“It’s my birthday,” she retorted, leading him down the sidewalk to where her driver had parked. “What I say goes.”

Ben chuckled, placing his hand on the small of her back to guide her towards a different car. “This one is mine,” he informed, as he directed her. “Leave the other for your friends.”

Rey paused. “What about your friends?”

“I’ll send this back for them once we are done. I’m sure Hux will be there until closing since I’m picking up the tab.”

“Alright,” she grinned at him over her shoulder and continued walking.

The driver opened the door for her. Rey slid inside, moving over to allow enough room for Ben to squeeze in next to her. The interior of the vehicle was identical to the car he had sent for her, though there was no champagne and instead of holding three giggling girls, it only held her and her boyfriend — her very tall, dark, impossibly built boyfriend.

Rey felt herself growing warmer. She knew the air was on, but her body was on fire, desperate for the release she had been craving since Ben had woken her in the afternoon. That moment seemed to have happened years ago. Now, sitting next to him, alone in this car, she wasn’t willing to wait any longer.

Once the driver had pulled away, she made sure the partition was closed. Then, she crawled into Ben’s lap. Steadyjing herself on his shoulders, she placed one leg on either side of his own before grinding down on his pelvis.

“Rey.” He huskily said her name, while bringing his hands to settle on her hips.

“I missed you,” she replied, cupping his jawline and stealing a kiss. “I’ve been thinking about you all night.” Another kiss. “Were you thinking about me?”
“Yes,” he groaned, letting his legs fall apart slightly to readjust. Her bottom sank a bit and as it did, she could feel his arousal through the thin barrier of clothing between them.

“Ben,” her voice came out breathy, almost like a pant.

“We’re going home, sweetheart. Just hang on,” he told her, stroking her side with one hand, while the other smoothed her hair down.

He had told her to hang on. He couldn’t have said anything closer to what she desired. Rey did want to hold on. She wanted to hold on to his shoulders or forearms while he thrusted up into her and made her his in the most primal sense. She wanted to feel him beneath her as they rode home — and she rode him.

Just as her fantasizing began to ease her need, they hit a bump in the road. Rey yelped as her body became suspended momentarily before landing back down on Ben’s lap. The force of the lift and the new angle it provided had them both moaning.

She was a goner.

“Please.”

Normally she would be concerned about how desperate she sounded, but right now her body was in control. She couldn’t think clearly about anything but her intense need to be sated.

“Sweetheart,” Ben panted. He sounded almost as bad as she did. “We’re almost there.”

Rey was lucid enough to know that wasn’t correct. Tatooine was at least twenty minutes out. “No,” she whined, ducking her head and hiding it in the crook of his neck.

Ben chuckled, rubbing comforting circles into her back. “We’re going back to my place. It won’t be long now.”

She perked up, sitting back to study his face. “Your place?”
He had never taken her to his apartment before. Suddenly, a thrill of excitement shot through her. She was going to spend the night at his home for once. As frenzied as she felt, she took a moment to revel in what this meant for their relationship. It was another step. He was letting her in.

First, he had brought all his friends and now he was going to share his place with her. It was another layer of commitment, an unspoken promise to remain a constant in her life. While Rey appreciated all Ben’s kind words, especially when he told her he loved her, his actions spoke volumes about how he felt for her.

“Is it ok we’re going back to my place?” He asked.

“Of course,” she replied, unable to keep the smile off her face.

“Good,” he breathed, obviously relieved, “because I packed a bag with some of your things while you were sleeping this afternoon.”

Rey’s eyes widened at his confession. “You did?” She couldn’t recall seeing him pack. “When did you do this?”

“You are a very sound sleeper, sweetheart,” he told her as he tucked a strand of hair behind her ear. She blushed, hoping he hadn’t seen her shirts with the holes in them from years of being worn. She didn’t have sophisticated garments like he did. “I only grabbed a few things for tonight and tomorrow. Cloud City is closer to Corellia and I figured you’d want to sleep in tomorrow morning.”

“You mean later today?” She asked, noting the time.

“Yes,” he grinned, before leaning forward to kiss her.

She felt her desire pooling between her thighs. The fervor returned, negating her joy at how thorough Ben had been in planning her birthday. As in awe of him as she was, the more pressing need of being with him overpowered her.

“Ben.”
“You’ll be the death of me,” he whispered, before capturing her lips once more.

She allowed herself to bow forward into him, resting her weight against his chest. His arms wrapped around her lower back and rear, keeping her tucked securely on his lap. She ran her fingers up and down his shoulders, gently drawing lines over his muscles and teasing the back of his neck with a few tentative strokes. Ben growled against her mouth.

“I owe you for that spanking this afternoon,” she reminded him.

“The one you liked?” He smirked.

“Mmm,” she removed the grin from his lips with another searing kiss. Rey tilted his head back, delving her tongue into his mouth to taste more of him. His fingers dig into the flesh of her hips, dragging her even closer, if it was possible.

She felt his hips buck up and his erection pressed directly against her core. It sent a shockwave rippling through her. Rey tipped back, hands leaving him to unbutton her shorts. She straightened her legs just enough to shimmy her shorts down, before yanking them off.

“Rey?”

“I need you,” she sighed, bringing her face back down to meet his. “I can’t wait.”

Ben removed one hand from her to snake between her thighs. He traced the seam of her panties, letting out a hiss. “Fuck. I should have just kept you home tonight,” he groaned. He bowed his head to latch onto her neck, while his fingers teased her through her underwear.

“Ben,” she whined.

“Shhhhh,” he cautioned her. “I don’t want the driver to hear you, sweetheart. You’re mine.”

Without hesitation, Rey nodded. “Yours.”
The second she said it, he hooked a finger into her panties and slipped the digit inside her. Rey bit her lip so hard she tasted blood, but her effort kept her cry from erupting in the backseat of the limo.

“God, I love you,” Ben crooned against her neck, as he kissed and nipped at her flesh.

“I love you,” she breathed, tugging at his hair to force his head back. She dove in for a kiss. She wanted to feel him everywhere —her lips, her back, her chest her core — just everywhere.

Ben responded by adding another finger. He started thrusting in a slow, deep pace, while his thumb circled her clit. Rey felt the fullness of his broad fingers. The delicious stretch of her inner muscles welcoming him had her nearly delirious. Instinctively, she rocked her hips with his movements, intensifying the feel.

He moaned in her mouth and continued to drive her towards climax. As he picked up the pace, Rey matched him both in the canting of her hips and her kisses. Her fingers yanked at his hair, directing him as she tasted all him.

It wasn’t until she felt the crest of her orgasm looming before that she had to pull away from him. Their eyes locked. Ben knew what she needed. With deft precision, he flicked his thumb over her bundle of nerves. Rey came with a shout, her legs tensing and then going limp as she fell forward into him.

Ben resumed rubbing her back, carefully brushing her hair away from her face. Tenderly, he kissed her forehead. “Happy birthday, sweetheart.”

Rey smiled, drifting off on his shoulder in her post-orgasmic haze.

Kylo watched his girl collapse into his chest upon her release. Instantly, she succumbed to exhaustion. He took the opportunity to study her. Kylo knew the sight of her would never get old. She was gorgeous both inside and out. It was moments like this one where he felt the need to pinch himself, to force himself to realize this was his life now. Rey was his life now. He smiled to himself. She was so innocent, like a child. Despite having just completed some rather not innocent activities, she couldn’t have looked more pure as she laid against him.
She hummed in her sleep, her breathing light and deep as she slumbered. He ran a hand through her hair and down her back until he was met with cool skin. Her lower half was still bare. In the air conditioned compartment, he worried she’d catch a chill.

Kylo did some maneuvering, shrugging off his jacket, while keeping Rey perched on his lap. Once he had the garment off, he wrapped it around her bare legs, keeping his girl protected from the cold.

*His girl.*

The more he thought of her that way, the more real it felt. They had told each other they loved one another. He assumed for most people the admission would have set them at ease, but for Kylo who had lived in doubt most of his life, he didn’t think he’d ever *not* need to hear those words uttered from Rey’s lips. It was a constant validation of what they were and he needed it — needed it like he needed air to breathe.

He wasn’t sure when he had become so reliant on her. It was terrifying. Kylo had grown used to being alone. After years of searching for a form of validation from his family, he had decided to give up. If he wasn’t looking for approval, there was no way he could be denied it.

But Rey hadn’t denied him anything. She had given herself to him, spending all her free time at his side and sharing what little she had in the way of food and possessions. He wanted to do the same. Her birthday was only the tip of the iceberg.

If they continued building a life together, as he hoped they would, he wanted to give her everything and anything.

Rey woke to Ben laying her down on the backseat, as he worked her shorts back on. As she came to, she realized the car had stopped. She saw the outline of the driver waiting outside their door, but he hadn’t opened it. She was sure Ben was to thank for keeping their rendezvous under wraps.

He smiled at her when he saw her watching him. “We’re here.”

“Mmm, about time.”
“Really?” He chuckled. “I think I kept you occupied for the entire ride.”

“You did,” she winked at him. “And I promise to make it up to you.” She sat up, kissing him lightly on the tip of his nose.

“About time,” he parroted back at her, smirking.

Ben knocked on the door. The driver opened it in response and Ben gestured for Rey to get out. She gave herself a once over to make sure all her clothing was in its proper place before she stepped out. As she did, she felt Ben’s hand rest gently on her lower back. He kept himself as close to her as possible while he exited, looping his arm around her side when he tipped the driver.

“Thank you, Mr. Ren. Have a good evening, sir.”

“You too.” The driver gave them both a curt nod, before returning behind the wheel.

Rey took the opportunity to survey the building they had been dropped off at. It was an impressive structure, towering over a majority of the other buildings in Corellia. The dark glass reflected the various lights from the street and surrounding architecture, making it blend with the night time sky. It was magnificent.

“Come on,” Ben smiled down at her, amused by her gawking. “It gets better.” He dropped his arm to take her hand and led her inside.

The lobby was immaculate but before Rey could really inspect it, Ben was dragging her into the elevator.

“Who is in a hurry now?”

“Contrary to what you may think, this isn’t exactly comfortable for me,” he motioned down to his groin, where his pants were still tented.

Rey flushed, feeling both thrilled for exciting him and guilty for leaving him unattended while she slept. She had the chance to make it up to him now. Jess had slipped several condoms in her short
pockets earlier while the girls had been getting dressed. Rey was grateful to have them. She didn’t want to go forward without protection or worse, having to stop in the middle of anything because they needed to go out and buy protection. If Ben was uncomfortable now, she was fairly certain he’d be inconsolable if she had to drag him out to the drugstore for ‘supplies’.

“This is me,” he told her, when the elevator reached his floor.

The lobby had been beautiful, but Ben’s apartment was the most exquisite home Rey had ever set foot in. They had entered into what appeared to be his living room. It was large enough it could have housed her entire apartment. All of the furniture looked brand new, including the artwork on the walls. Like Ben, the apartment appeared to favor white, black, and shades of gray, though she did see a few red accents throughout the area.

Behind her, he flicked on the lights to a hallway on her right and the kitchen, off to her left. The kitchen overlooked the living room, while the hallway went back and out of sight.

“Bedroom?” Rey asked, eyes scanning the doors she could see from where she stood in the entryway. She could check out the apartment later. Right now, she had a more pressing interest.

“This way.” Ben led her back, passed a few doors to his room.

Like the living room, it was large, housing an impressively large bed fitted with obsidian linens. *Figures*, she thought, a smile tugging at her lips. Her boyfriend lived in a monochromatic world. If they ever moved in together, they were going to have some serious redecorating squabbles.

*Move in together?* Rey caught herself in the daydream. *Where did that come from?* They had just gotten together. She couldn’t rush into anything, especially something as intimate as living together. Besides, she loved her apartment at Ahch-To. She didn’t need to move.

Ben came up behind her, wrapping his arms around her waist and leaning down to place his chin on the top of her head. “Like it?”

“I’d like it more if you were on it,” she replied, coyly.

“How about a compromise?” He kissed the top of her head. “You lie down on it and I’ll follow.”
Rey turned around in his arms, bending over at the waist to begin undoing her shorts. Ben dropped his hands, taking a step back to watch as she stripped out of her outfit. The shorts dropped, followed by her sequined tank, leaving her in her black lace undergarments. They were a present from Rose and Jess, who had told her she needed them for the full effect. At the time, Rey hadn’t been sure, but the look on Ben’s face confirmed her friends’ choice.

Slowly, she sat back on the bed, using her arms to help her scoot back until her legs were stretched out in front of her on the mattress, bare and beckoning.

“Join me?”

Ben didn’t respond verbally. He made quick work of his own clothes until he was left standing before her in only his boxers. The thin cotton fabric did little to hide his bulging erection and she found herself licking her lips at the prominent outline.

He stalked towards her like a panther in the night, closing in for the kill. Rey felt a tingle of anticipation ripple through her, as she watched him watching her.

This was it. This was what she had been waiting for.

He crawled onto the bed and she expected him to cover her body with his. He didn’t. He remained close enough for her to feel the heat of his skin, yet not touching her.

“Ben,” she whined. She hated how unhinged she sounded. She had gotten some release in the car. He hadn’t. Despite that, she still craved him. If anything, their rendezvous in the car had only made her want him more. She needed to be touched again. She needed more of him — all of him. “Please.”

“Shhh, sweetheart,” he knelt on the edge of the bed, over her. “I want to go slow. I want to savor this…and you.”

“I don’t want to go slow.” Rey reached up, grabbing hold of his shoulders. She tried to use her weight to pull him down on top of her. He didn’t budge. She glanced up at Ben to find him smirking at her.
“Want to try that again?”

Rey did and achieved the same results. She let out a groan of frustration. Why wouldn’t he take her? She could tell he wanted it. The tenting in his boxers was proof of that. So why was he insisting on going slow? They had been taking it slow all week. Tonight was her birthday. She was calling the shots. She wanted him — hard and fast and without limits, the way they sparred together in the dojo.

“Please.”

“Take those off,” he gestured to her bra and panties.

Fast as lightning, Rey shimmied out of her undergarments, waiting impatiently on her knees for him to take her.

“Lay back down, sweetheart.” His command was gentle, but there was an underlying hint of control. Biting her lip and hoping he was about to do as she wished, Rey obeyed.

Ben stayed where he was, watching as her chest rose and fell with each breath, his eyes scanning over her naked form. “God,” he whispered, “you’re gorgeous.” Rey felt herself blush. They had been naked with one another more times this week than she would have thought possible, yet his simple compliment was enough to send color across her face and down through her chest. He palmed himself through his boxers, still appraising her.

“Do you know how many times I thought of you like this?”

“Tell me.”

He let out a half-growl, half-groan. “More than it was appropriate.”

Rey giggled. “I’m pretty sure none of what you were thinking was appropriate.”

“Touche.”
“But since I’m down here, why don’t you demonstrate what you were fantasizing about?” She crooked her finger, signaling him to join her.

Ben leaned down, sliding his massive hands up her body, starting at her legs. She could feel the delicious heat of her arousal coursing through her veins at his touch. He guided his hands up to her breasts, where he took one in each hand. He gave them each a tentative squeeze, circling the pads of his thumbs over her nipples. Rey felt a jolt rush through her. She arched off the mattress with a moan, her head tilting back slightly.

“So sensitive,” he murmured, before ducking his head down to replace his one thumb with his mouth.

He flicked the tip of his tongue back and forth over her erect nipple, causing her to writhe beneath him. Rey reached up, grasping for his hair — his silky smooth impossibly perfect hair — but Ben caught her wrists with his opposite hand. In a move reminiscent of the one he had used to disarm her in the studio, he pinned her hands above her head and angled his face next to hers.

“Rey,” he breathed her name against her neck, drawing a line with his nose up from her collarbone to her ear. He drew her earlobe into his mouth and sucked on it teasingly. She fought against him, trying in vain to free her hands so she could pull him closer. She was dying with need. He wasn’t close enough. He wasn’t where she wanted him to be. He was toying with her.

“Stop trying to rush it, sweetheart. I want to take my time with you.”

“You’re torturing me.”

Chuckling, Ben withdrew enough that he could look down at her face. “Hardly.”

He began to lave at her other breast, making slow, languid circles with his tongue around her nipple. Rey felt her back arching in response. She could feel her heart hammering away in her chest. She was warm, so warm her skin felt itchy. She considered peeling it off, if only to feel relief for a precious moment. It was all Ben’s fault — of that she was sure. He wanted to take his time to savor. She had a different thought. She wanted to be devoured by him.

Ben started to suck upon her flesh, leaving small purple bruises in his wake as he trailed down to her thighs. The closer he got to her core, the more desperate she felt. She cried out, when he nibbled on her inner thigh, feeling his stubble against the smooth skin of her leg as he did. He was still holding her hands down with one hand while the other moved to her hip to keep her flat on the bed.
He backed up, kneeling onto the floor. Ben released his hold on her, only for a moment to drag her down to the end of the bed. She propped herself up on her elbows to watch, as he lowered his face to the juncture between her thighs. Immediately, she started to reach for him. Just as she dug her fingers into his hair, he pressed his mouth against her aching center.

Rey fell back onto the mattress, feeling her eyes roll into the back of her head. Ben’s tongue was as broad and thick as the rest of him. She could feel each pass as he lapped at her slick folds, now wet with her arousal and his saliva.

“Ben,” she moaned, unable to look at him. Her back was arching so far off the bed, she was sure she’d snap in two. “Oh god.”

He pulled his face away and she let out a discontented noise. “You don’t have to be quiet here. We aren’t in the limo anymore and we aren’t at your apartment. Luke isn’t across the parking lot. It’s just us now. You can be as loud as you want, my little minx.”

Rey blinked, unsure she had heard him correctly. He wanted her to be loud?

Her hesitation prompted him to continue his assault on her. He lowered his head back down, as his fingers pulled back her hood to expose her most sensitive place. Ben licked over her clit, before pressing his lips over it and sucking gently. Rey cursed, feeling her orgasm building in her abdomen with fervor. He slide a finger into her while he continued to stimulate her bundle of nerves. She bit her lip to keep from howling. Ben took notice.

“I want you to scream for me, sweetheart.”

To prove his point, he slid a second finger into her and began pumping them in and out with the relentless pace he had worked up to in the car. He kept that hand thrusting into her, while his other hand, massaged her clit. His mouth rotated between the two location, licking and sucking as he saw fit.

Rey felt as if she was losing her mind. All week they had been learning each other with their hands and their mouths, but what Ben was doing now was wholly different than any other time he had pleasured her. Perhaps it was because she had gotten off during the drive over, but she was overwhelmed by a newfound euphoria. It was powerful — so powerful it threatened to consume her whole.
“Ben,” she cried, her voice cracking, “Now. Please. I need you now.”

“Tell me what you need, Rey.”

If she hadn’t been a wreck on his bed, she would have smacked him for sounding so smug. Damn man and his large ego. It was as large as...well everything else he had!

“You. I need you inside me now,” she pleaded, her hips rising off the mattress.

Up until now, Ben had appeared calm and in control. However, the instant her ask left her lips, he let out a strangled sound and tore his boxers off. They ended up somewhere on the floor behind him, lost in the fray along with her undergarments.

He knelt down on be ned and positioned himself over top of her. “Protection?”

“Oh!” Rey’s half-lidded eyes were blown wide. “Yes! In my shorts.”

Ben’s face had mixed emotions for a moment and she wondered if he had wanted to continue without one. The idea was tantalizing, but she wasn’t on any birth control. She didn’t have health insurance and without, the cost was too high. It hadn’t been a problem before, but now she would have to revisit it.

He left her momentarily to dig around through the pile of discarded clothes until he found her stash. He dumped the collection of little foil packets onto his bedside table, taking one between his teeth. Rey let it a break she hadn’t known she had been holding as she watched him wrap his member.

“Ready?”

Had they been somewhere else — and not naked, about to have sex for the first time — his question wouldn’t have seemed so absurd. However, considering the compromising position they were in, with her lying down and him kneeling over her with one hand holding himself while the other held onto her hip, Rey almost laughed. Almost.
Ben’s question was innocent. She could see the uncertainty in his eyes. His composure had altered drastically from before. He no longer looked the part of predator catching prey. He was nervous. Rey realized on some level she should be nervous too, but she wasn’t. She had never felt as safe as she felt with Ben. This was right.

“I’m ready,” she told him, completely calm and confident in her decision.

He let out a relieved sigh and brushed the head of his cock across her folds as he aligned himself. Rey let out a sharp gasp at the sensation. She was thrumming with need. His adjustments were the most excruciating teases.

But it all came to an end when he pushed inside.

“Fuck!” Ben hissed.

“Yes,” Rey screamed, simultaneously.

“God, sweetheart, you feel so good.” He bent down to kiss her forehead, before drawing his hips back slightly so he could push back in.

“Ben,” Rey breathed his name, unable to say much else as she grabbed onto his upper arms.

He had her caged in under him, his toned arms on either side of her as he worked himself in and out of her body. His abs were tight, constricted like his face as he concentrated on the movement, while also not crushing her beneath him.

Rey was positive she and never seen a more delicious sight.

She had expected to feel pain or at least some discomfort, but all she felt was some pressure. It was different than her building arousal, though not entirely unpleasant. Instead of the new sensation, she focused on Ben and how he looked as he pumped in and out of her.

His exertion was causing him to breath deeper, more ragged breaths. Rey found herself also gasping for air at times, unaccustomed to how her body was changing with each thrust.
Ben shifted forward, burying his face in her neck. His panting sent hot air flowing over her collarbone and against her ear. She let out a pleased sigh, hands sliding down off his arms to his lower back. Like this she could almost reach his butt — his very toned butt.

God, she wanted to spank him right now, just to see what he would do. She owed him one for this morning.

“Rey,” he puffed against her neck.

She wiggled her hips a bit, trying to move so she could see his face. The motion changed their angle and they both cried out as Ben hit a rather sensitive spot deep within her walls.

“Fuck!” He cried out, his voice hoarse. “Do that again, sweetheart.”

Rey did her best to mimic the motion, rewarded for her efforts when they both felt a shock of gratification dance through them. They continued chasing the growing pleasure in their cores. As they did, Rey became aware of Ben’s hips bucking wildly and the primal sounds coming from both of them. It was obscene and not at all the romantic and slow-paced event she had anticipated when Ben had said he wanted to go slow.

This was not slow. This was fast and hot like fireworks — lifting off with a spark and crescendoing into a glorious explosion.

She recognized her impending orgasm, fingers digging into the smooth flesh of his buttocks as her walls began to flutter around him. “Ben. Ben. Ben,” she chanted over and over, as if she knew no other word in the English language.

“Look at me, Rey,” he growled, removing his face from her neck, to hover over her. They locked eyes. “Say you’re mine.”

Rey felt herself shatter. “I’m yours!” It came out as a broken scream, her walls clenching down around him.

Ben roared above her, following her in her descent. “Mine.”
Hip hips jerked a few more times, before he let out a throaty groan and collapsed onto his side, pulling her along with him, to keep them connected. Rey didn’t complain. She liked the feel of him, liked knowing he was one with her. It felt right.

He kissed her forehead, kissed her nose, kissed her lips, and then down her throat. “Love you. Love you so much,” he repeated over and over again, whispering the words into her skin, as if he could tattoo them on her.

For several moments, they laid like that, entwined in each other’s arms, legs tangled together, connected hip to hip.

Once their heartbeats returned to a normal rhythm, Ben slowly pulled out from her, moving off the bed. He walked into the bathroom, removing the used condom and washing up. Rey was too spent to even consider the idea of moving. She felt as if she was floating. None of what had happened tonight felt real. A part of her — the survivor — feared leaving the comfort of Ben’s bed, scared any motion would cause her to wake up and this whole thing would be nothing more than a pleasant dream. The larger — more rational — part of her brain told her she was exhausted from the night out and their intense love-making.

*Love making?*

Rey smiled to herself. She had never thought about sex that way. Sure, people had called it that — usually teachers who tried to romanticize what sex was or were too uncomfortable with saying the actual word out loud — but not Rey. She had never had time for sex or relationships. Now she found herself enjoying both.

The bed felt as if it had wrapped itself around her, collecting her in its soft linens and keeping her nestled in its safe space. She allowed herself to enjoy the comforting sensation, wondering why she hadn’t thought to ask Ben what kind of sheets he had when she had gotten her new mattress.

“How are you feeling?”

She opened her eyes, only realizing once she had that she had closed them in the first place. Ben was standing on her side of the bed holding out a glass of water. She hadn’t heard his question, only the sound of his voice, pulling her out of her thoughts. Rey forced her body to sit up, so she could accept the drink. She only opened her eyes enough to make sure she didn’t spill.
“Thank you.”

Ben waited patiently while she took a deep sip, before helping her place it on the nightstand. “Rey, are you alright?” He asked again.

“Yes,” she smiled, up at him, opening up her eyes fully to take him in. He looked concerned. Slowly, her mind began to function again and she realized why he looked so worried. “Of course. I’m just enjoying it all.”

His face relaxed. “Ok,” he breathed out the word, as if he had been holding it in.

Rey studied him for a moment in the dimly lit room, considering she should check-in on him too. “Are you alright?”

“Alright?” He chuckled, running a hand through his messed up hair. “That was fucking fantastic!”

“No pun intended?” she quirked an eyebrow at him.

“Pun intended,” he replied, wrapping his arms around her and playfully tackling her back down onto the bed. She fell back laughing, as he kissed the side of her head. “Pun,” here he ground his hips against her, “very much intended.”

Rey’s felt another surge of heat pooling in her groin.

“Round two?”

Kylo woke up to a warm body pressed against his own. Eyes still closed, he smiled.

Rey.
He felt her baby smooth skin under his arms, where he had wrapped himself around her last night after their third — or what it fourth? — round. Kylo had fantasized about being with Rey more times than he could count, yet nothing came close to what he had experienced last night. It went beyond any daydream and fulfilled more than his aching need for physical intimacy. What they had shared was more than that and it gave him the courage to present her with the key he had made for her later. He planned on giving it to her once they got back from Cloud City.

With a yawn, he opened his eyes, reaching up with one hand to wipe away sleep dirt. Aside of him, Rey leaned back, instinctively seeking contact with him.

“Rey.” He exhaled her name along the nape of her neck, before he placed a kiss there.

She shifted back against him, her rear grinding into his crotch area. He groaned, simultaneously loving and hating the sensation she triggered with her movement. It was possible she was still asleep and he didn’t want to wake her if she was still exhausted from their late night. He knew how difficult it was to rouse her normally. His girl liked her sleep.

“Sweetheart, are you awake?” he tried again.

She mumbled something incoherent and backed up onto him again. Her taut ass dragged steadily against his budding erection. This time, Kylo was unable to contain himself. He swallowed a groan, as he tried to keep all the blood from rushing to his head. He was turned on to the fullest extent. Having Rey pressed against him was only making it painfully obvious. He placed his hands firmly on her hips, attempting to keep her from grinding any more. It was then he heard her muffled laugh.

So she is awake!

Little minx.

“You think it’s funny?” He growled, playfully. In the next instant, he was flipping her onto her back and positioning himself over her. He put one knee between her legs and the left side to keep his balance. Her eyes widened. There was no fear there, only the twinkle of mischief. “What are you going to do now, Ms. Niima?”

Propping herself up on her elbows, she leaned forward to kiss him. “How about that?”
“Mmmm, good start,” he smirked, “but not quite what I had in mind.”

“And what did you have in mind, Mr. Solo?”

He lowered himself onto her, rocking his hips against hers, teasing her as she had him. Rey’s eyes fluttered closed and the playful expression on her face vanished. For a second, he forgot they had plans to meet his uncle later or that he wanted to talk to her about their future. He ran his lips down the column of her throat, grazing his teeth lightly across the flesh before peppering it with another line of kisses.

“Ben!”

Rey’s hands grasped hold of his sides, her hips rising off the mattress as she arched into him. Hearing her crying out his name with such need drove him over the edge. He froze above her, thankful they had gone clothing last night after their final round. She stared up at him, eyes wide and skin flushed.

“Tell me to stop.” He said, his tone somewhere between begging and commanding.

He wasn’t sure which he wanted more. Despite all his years of intense training, he could feel the results of last night’s events in his muscles. He was sure Rey could too. It didn’t stop him from feeling a newfound hunger — a need to be buried deep within her always.

Rey didn’t tell him to stop.

Instead, she reached across him to grab a condom off the nightstand. She sat up, prying her legs out from under him and mirrored his position. They were both kneeling before each other, naked and staring, unsure what to do. After last night, he had assumed he’d be comfortable with going again. They had already done it multiple times. Why was now any different?

For some reason, the sunlight had him feeling far less confident than the night prior. In the darkness he had felt like a predator. He had taken control, working Rey’s body to hear her delicious cries of pleasure and see her fall apart at his touch. Over the course of the week, he had learned what she liked and what would send her over the edge. Last night, he had learned a few more tricks. He intended to use them again.
If he could figure out how to initiate it.

Luckily, Rey made the first move, carefully placing her hands on his bare chest. She ran her fingers over the smooth skin, as if tracing every muscle to memorize it. Kylo closed his eyes, savoring the sensation of her delicate touch. He loved feeling her against him, no matter where it was. Her hands on his cock, her lips on his, or her hands in his hair — anytime she touched him, he felt his body respond in kind.

And he felt it all the more when she stopped touching him, like how she stopped touching him now. He opened his eyes, seeing her removing her undergarments.

“Lay down,” she told him, shuffling back to let him pass.

Kylo didn’t have to be told twice. He started to lay back on his bed, adjusting himself so his shoulders, neck, and head were supported by the pillows. With the barest hint of pressure, she pushed him down until he was lying flat. Like in the limo, Rey sunk down on his hips, straddling him.

*Oh, so my little minx wants to be in control,* he mused.

He’d let her have her fun. He had delivered on her request from last night — taking her fast and hard. Now he was going to let her do the same to him.

Rey sat up on her knees, one hand splayed out on his abdomen to keep her balanced, while the other gingerly stroked his weeping member. He shivered at the contact, pleased by how small her hand looked on him. It was a point of pride for him. But nothing beat the sight which came next.

After a few more strokes, Rey positioned his head against her entrance, teasing him over her lips a few times, before sinking down until she swallowed him completely in her cavern. She bowed forward with a hiss. Kylo swore, his hands immediately grabbing her waist to hold onto her. Rey placed her hands on his shoulders, flashing him a wicked smile before she closed the distance between them and kissed him. She rolled her hips, experimentally, moaning against his lips when the angle hit the perfect spot within her.

She repeated the motion, trying to hit the same spot consistently. As she undulated on his hips, he glided his hands up from her waist to caress her breasts. They fit perfectly in his hands. He felt a
surge of delight at that. It was as if she had been made for him. As petite as she was, in contrast to his larger form, she fit with him — in more ways than one.

As if to prove that theory, Rey leaned back. The weight of her body at such a slant, however slight it was, generated a whole new kind of feeling. Kylo felt himself hit her center and Rey’s eyes were blown when he caught her gazing down at him. Her mouth was opened in that little ‘o’ he loved to see so much.

Spurred on by the sight of her, he rose to sit, using his arms to keep himself propped up. Rey sat up straighter, still grinding her hips down on him. She moved her hands to his neck, fingers massaging, while her thumbs stroked the lobes of his ears. Kylo hadn’t realized how sensitive his ears were until he allowed Rey to play with them. It was like an electric shock ran straight from her touch down through his body to the tip of his cock. It had him approaching his climax.

“God, sweetheart,” he groaned, tilting his head back.

Rey brought her lips down to kiss him and he lost it. She had had her fun. Now he wanted to be back in control.

With one arm, he pushed all his pillows together behind, as she continued to gyrate. Kylo shifted, allowing the pillow to support him, as he sat halfway up against the pillows. He grabbed onto Rey’s upper thighs, matching her rhythm as she worked herself forward and backward. She grinned down at him.

Kylo flashed her a wolfish smile, before he lifted her up off of his cock. Rey gasped, unprepared for his assistance, until he guided her back down onto him just as quickly.

“Fuck!” she cried, keeling forward. She laced her fingers behind his neck, pressing her forehead against his as he drilled up into her. “God, Ben, don’t stop!”

“I won’t,” he promised, thrusting up into her in time with when he brought her up and down.

The impact was deeper and waves of pleasure seared through them both until Rey couldn’t intelligibly speak and Kylo was having trouble forming a coherent thought.

It only took a few more sharp thrusts and he felt himself careening over the edge. Rey crashed her
lips against his the second he came, her walls clamping down on him at the same time.

Kylo wrapped his arms around Rey, hugging her tight against him, as his hips canted a couple of times, working through the downward spiral of his orgasm. Rey, in turn, cradled his head, pressing feather-light kisses to every inch of his face and neck. The lovers sat together in their embrace, blissful and temporarily sated.

When Rey slipped off of him, Kylo took a few minutes to get cleaned up in the bathroom, before joining her back in bed and under the covers.

“Breakfast?” he asked.

Rey turned her head to smile lazily over at him. “I’m starved.”

“Can’t imagine why?” he grinned, before propping himself up to kiss her. “I’ll order in.”

Kylo rolled over on his opposite side, grabbing his phone off the bedside table, where it sat with only one condom remaining. Had they really gone through almost all of them in less than twenty-four hours? He couldn’t help smirking with pride, ridiculously pleased with his stamina.

Rolling over onto his back, he scrolled through the options for delivery on one of his apps. “What would you like, sweetheart? It’s your birthday weekend.”

“Mmmm, pancakes,” she hummed. “Please.”

“As you wish.”

He placed an order for an egg white protein bowl for himself and a stack of buttermilk pancakes for Rey. The app said it would be about forty-five minutes, which gave them time for another round. Kylo made a mental note to stop at the drug store, while on their way back from Cloud City, for more condoms.

They were going to need a value-size pack to get them through the week.
Forty-five minutes and another shockwave of an orgasm later, Rey found herself out of breath and with a sheen of sweat across her body.

“Can every day be like today?” she asked Ben, as she peered over at him from where she was lying across his chest.

“If you want it to, sweetheart,” he leaned forward, kissing her forehead, “of course it can.”

She hummed, happily, closing her eyes and resting her cheek on him.

There was a knock at the apartment door, prompting them to get up. “That will be breakfast,” he told her, as he nuzzled his face into her neck.

“Good, I’m starving.” Right on cue, her stomach grumbled rather loudly. Rey blushed with embarrassment. She hated when it did that, but if it bothered Ben, he didn’t show it.

“I’ll get it,” he replied. She rose up on her tiptoes, turning her face into his neck and giving him a quick peck on his pulse point.

“Go get a shower,” he said. “Then we can eat.” Ben kissed her on her temple, before she stepped into the master bathroom.

Rey didn’t bother to shut the door. “In case you care to join me,” she called out to him, trying to entice him to come back quickly. “It would save you money on your water bill.”

She watched as he hastily searched through their pile of forgotten clothes to find something to wear.

Rey smiled to herself, as she followed him moving about. As hungry as she was, she was far more interested in diving back under the sheets with him. Having shared themselves fully with one another had been heaven and Rey only wanted to do it again and again. She had never been this happy before.
Nothing could remove the giddy grin from her face.

Kylo stood in the bedroom, staring at the steam rising in his bathroom. Maybe he could place another breakfast order from a different place to buy him some time. He could sneak up on Rey and surprise her the way she had surprised him earlier.

Another knock at the door summoned him away from her.

As if the delivery man was aware of Kylo’s thoughts, the knocking became louder and more insistent. Forgoing a shirt, he tugged on his boxers. He didn’t care if the delivery kid saw him. Let the teenager know what he had interrupted. Kylo was filled with inflated pride over what had transpired between him and Rey. Nothing could wipe the smile off of his face.

There was another knock, as he made his way towards the living room.

“Coming!” He bellowed.

*This kid is not getting a tip*, he thought, agitatedly, as he undid his locks. In hindsight, he should have check his peephole before he did. If he had, perhaps he could have avoid the confrontation about to take place.

He swung the door open, not looking up, as he tabbed through his wallet for the appropriate bills. “How much do I owe you?”

Had he glanced up, he might have caught the man in front of him and his amused expression. As it was, it was the stranger’s chuckle which caused Kylo to look up and notice the man’s face. It was a familiar one.

“I had started to think I had the wrong address.”

It wasn’t their breakfast delivery.

It was none other than Han Solo.
I know this is the chapter everyone has been waiting for. I hope it lived up to your expectations. *fingers crossed*
Sign of the Times

Chapter Summary

In which Han interrupts Kylo and Rey's morning with varying degrees of success...

Chapter Notes

In honor of the 4th, here's my present to you...some fireworks between the Solo boys!

Thanks to my beta @abyssalspark.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Kylo hadn’t seen his father in years but with one glance at the older man, he felt as if no time had passed at all. The familiar anger resurfaced and he stood in his doorway with his hands in fists.

“What are you doing here?”

“I left you a message saying I was coming to town and I wanted to see you,” Han explained. “Didn’t you get it?”

Kylo didn’t recall getting any such voicemails on his cell, unless… Glancing over his shoulder, he
caught the blinking red light of his answering machine.

*Damn it!*

He knew he should have checked his messages.

“I’ve been busy,” he ground out, glaring at the older man. “What do you want?”

“Watch the tone,” Han cautioned him. “You may not like it, kid, but I’m still your father.”

“Since when?” Kylo snarled.

“Since the day you were born,” Han shot back. “Now I know you and I don’t see eye to eye on things, but that doesn’t mean we can’t work on it.”

“Work on it?” Kylo frowned.

Where was this coming from? He hadn’t seen or spoken to his father in years, not since the day Han had come to the First Order and interrupted Kylo’s training. He wondered if Maz had gotten tired of waiting on him and had reached out.

“Lando called,” Han said, shattering Kylo’s initial theory.

*Oh, so that’s what this is about.*

Kylo glowered at his father. “Well, if you already talked to him then you know now is not a good time for you to be here. My girlfriend–.”

Han’s face lit up instantly and he interrupted him. “So it’s true? You actually have a girl?”

He felt absolutely murderous at his father’s disbelief. “Yes,” he replied through gritted teeth.
“I want to meet her,” Han ordered without hesitation. “She’s gotta be something special to put up with the likes of you.”

“Funny,” Kylo rebuffed, “that's what people used to say about you and Leia.”

Han’s smile faltered and his eyes narrowed. Pointing a finger at Kylo, he lowered his voice. “Listen here, kid, you can be pissed until the end of time with me, but you will show your mother some goddamn respect. You will not call her by her first name like she’s a stranger. That woman gave you life.”

“That’s about all she gave me.”

“She’d take it away if she heard you talking like this,” Han stated.

“Probably,” Kylo replied, crossing his arms over his chest. He then remembered he was only in his boxers. It wasn’t the best way to receive his father. Han had been caught in dozens of precarious situations, but Kylo was pretty sure catching his son in a post-coital bliss was about to be at the top of his list. He could almost hear the way his father would squawk about it to his work colleges.

*And then the kid had the nerve to answer the door shirtless. I mean, can you believe it? He’s got stamina like his old man, that one.*

Kylo groaned, shaking his head. There was an image he’d rather not think about. In all honestly, he’d rather not think of his father in any way, but least of all involving anything sexual. It was just wrong — almost as wrong as Han Solo being here in the first place.

He sighed, his anger at his father was exhausting what little energy he had left. Kylo needed his breakfast delivery to reinvigorate him before Cloud City. There had to be a way to get Han out of his apartment. He thought about what Maz had told him and about what Dr. Connix would say. Both women, though from vastly different walks of life, had never steered him wrong. They had both offered him advice which had changed the course of his life for the better. It had led him to Rey.

*Rey!*
Kylo felt himself blush to the tips of his ears. She was still in the shower. God, he hoped she wasn’t waiting for him. His plans of joining her had been completely derailed by his father’s unexpected arrival.

“So are you going to let me in or are you going to throw your old man out on the curb?” Han asked, interrupting Kylo’s train of thought.

Obligated, Kylo took a step back, holding the door open to allow Han and his duffle-bag into the apartment. “Wow,” his father let out a whistle, “you’ve certainly done well for yourself, kid.”

“I’m not a kid anymore,” Kylo responded, shutting the door and putting all the locks back in place. “You missed most of those years, remember?” He scolded himself for not checking the peep hole before opening the door. Perhaps if he had been so diligent about security sooner, he could have avoided this mess.

Han dropped his duffle-bag unceremoniously in the middle of the floor, before he moved into the living room. He settled down on the couch, spanning his arms across the back. “What do you want me to say, Ben? I’m sorry? I shouldn’t have sent you off to live with Luke? Because I am sorry.”

“I’m sure you are!” Kylo snarled, annoyed his father could look so calm while making such statements. There was a weight to their conversation, a decade of things left unsaid between them and Kylo couldn’t fathom how his father always navigated such difficult conversations with the greatest of ease.

“If I could go back and do it all over again, I would.”

“I bet,” Kylo grumbled.

They fell into silence once more. Han had nothing else to add and Kylo was growing weary of their verbal sparring match. He wasn’t sure what had prompted him to allow his father inside his home in the first place. When he had purchased the apartment, he had never intended on being in it much. It was only there for him to shower and sleep when he wasn’t training at the First Order or traveling for matches. He had never intended for his family to see it. In fact, he hadn’t intended for anyone to see it. He wasn’t the type to host people or parties. That was Hux’s m.o.

“You got anything to drink?”
At least there was one thing they could agree on. A strong drink was sure to help him concentrate enough to determine a way to rid himself of his father before he ruined what was left of Rey’s birthday.

“Yeah,” Kylo gestured to Han to follow him into the kitchen. He went to the top cabinet above his fridge where he had stashed a vintage bottle of Corellian whiskey.

“Ah, the good stuff,” Han remarked as he watched Kylo set the bottle on the counter. “How much did that set you back?”

“More than the Resistance makes a year,” Kylo answered without pause.

He wondered if his father cared. The smuggler turned hero was sure to have less concerns than Leia over how Kylo spent his money, especially if it was on liquor.

Kylo handed his father a glass before pouring them each a double. He didn’t normally drink so early in the day, but Han’s surprise visit warranted a generous dose of whiskey.

They both regarded the floor, unable to meet each other’s eyes as they slowly sipped their drinks. Han was sandwiched in the corner of the kitchen, furthest away from the entry way and Kylo, was standing by the archway leading into the living room. He figured if his father made any more comments about his childhood, he’d need to put as much distance between them as possible. It was good to have an exit path.

Han broke the silence first. Again.

“How has your mother tried to guilt trip you into her charity ball yet?”

“She called a few weeks ago.”
“Did you actually talk to her?”

“No,” Kylo admitted, before taking another sip. “She left a message.”

“Ah, so it was just my message you didn’t get,” Han rolled his eyes. “How convenient.”

Kylo set his glass down on the counter next to him, ready to throw down a harsh rebuttal, when he heard Rey’s voice from the back of the apartment.

“Ben?” She called from the bedroom.

Han locked eyes with his son. Kylo blanched. “Ben? You let her call you Ben?” Han asked, barely able to contain the smile erupting across his face.

“Don’t start,” Kylo hissed at his father.

“What?” Han wasn’t about to let it go. “You don’t let any of us call you by your name, Ben, and we’re the ones who gave it to you.”

“Shhh,” he growled at his father lowly, before shouting back to Rey, “In the kitchen.”

“You’re not going to take a shower?”

Kylo wished the damned whiskey would kick in, so he could blame his burning red cheeks on the drink. He was an adult. Why did he feel like his father had caught his hand in the cookie jar? Oh right, because he had just lost his virginity to his girlfriend at the ripe age of thirty-two.

“I’ll grab one later,” he told her.

“Are you sure?”
All he wanted to do was go back there and pick up where they had left off, but he couldn’t fathom doing that while Han was in his apartment. Apparently his uncle wasn’t the only cockblock in the family. Kylo bit the inside of his cheek. Why were they always ruining things for him?

“Yeah, sweetheart.”

Han raised a brow at the pet name. ‘Sweetheart?’ he mouthed at his son, before smirking and taking a long sip of his drink.

Before Kylo could snap at him, Rey called back down the hall towards the kitchen. “Alright. Be out in a minute.”

Kylo turned back to his father to see the older man wearing a smug grin. “Guess I was around enough for you to learn a thing or two,” Han commented. He kept his voice low enough there was no chance Rey could hear him.

“That’s so like you to take credit for something you had entirely nothing to do with.”

Han shrugged. “I helped make you, didn’t I? That ought to count for something.”

“It would count for a lot more if you left,” Kylo remarked. “As you can tell, I already have company staying over.”

His father dismissed his reasoning. “Are you trying to convince me you two are sleeping in separate rooms?”

“No, I-.”

“Then you have space for your old man to crash a few nights.”

“I don’t actually, because my-.” Kylo’s argument died in his throat when he saw Rey walking towards him. He immediately realized he should have had the forethought to tell her his father was present. His practical side warred with his insatiable desire for her. On one hand, Han was about to have all the proof he needed that Kylo did, in fact, have a girlfriend. On the other hand, Kylo didn’t
like the idea of his father seeing his girlfriend so exposed.

She was dressed in his shirt from the night before. Her hair was a wet mess, the tendrils sticking to her jawline and her neck. Her skin was still flushed from the heat of the shower jets, turning her normally tanned glow into a rosy shine. Normally he didn’t have guests and now he had two. Then again, normally one of the guests wasn’t a woman walking around barefoot, leggy, and irresistible either. Though the sight of her immediately sparked a need in him to take her right then and there on the kitchen counter, the practical part of his brain was acutely aware of his father.

"What are you wearing?" Kylo asked, as Rey sauntered into the kitchen. He had to work to keep his voice level.

“A shirt."

“You mean my shirt?"

"Do you mind?" She asked, as she raised her arms to pull her hair back into a sloppy bun on the top of her head. As her locks moved away from her face and neck, he could see a purplish-blue bruise forming on her skin from the night prior. He also noticed how his shirt rose up, revealing more of her smooth thighs. He had to resist the urge to lunge forward and yank the shirt back down.

"No, not at all," he replied, keeping himself between her and his father. He had basically caged her in the entryway between the living room and the kitchen. He figured it wouldn’t take her long to notice their very curious audience member, once she slipped past him, but he couldn’t find a way to prevent her from entering.

"Good, because it's comfortable," Rey told Kylo, as she moved past him to make herself a cup of tea.

"Looks better on you anyway," Han declared, from where he stood in the corner. Rey nearly jumped out of her skin. She cursed, retreating behind Kylo when she spotted the owner of the voice. Kylo glared daggers at his father, feeling her hands on his back. She was trying to shield herself.

"Rey, you know my father, Han Solo." Kylo gritted out. He remained in between his dad and his girlfriend, effectively blocking her from view.

"You could have mentioned you had company," she snapped, swatting Kylo’s arm. He saw her
begin to fuss with the shirt, as she attempted to cover up more of herself.

"Ben's manners are lacking." Han pushed off the counter to stand at Rey's side. "Good morning, Rey. It's a pleasure to meet you." He picked up her hand, depositing a light kiss on it. Rey immediately began blushing. Turning back to Kylo, Han grinned. "That's a proper morning greeting for a beautiful woman, Ben. Take notes."

"Piss off, you freeloader."

"Are you staying here, Han?" Rey asked, peering around Kylo to where Han’s duffle-bag was sitting on the living room floor.

“Certainly not," Kylo muttered. “He just showed up this morning.”

"Without asking?" She looked rather amused by this. Kylo watched as her fingers rubbed the seam of the end of his shirt, a sign of her nerves, despite the friendly smile on her face. He momentarily forgot how annoyed he was with his dad’s presence. She looked like she belonged here, standing in his kitchen, wearing his shirt. He was lost in her smile, admiring how beautiful she was and loving the fact she was all his. Han be damned. Kylo was glad Rey had spent the night. He wanted her to spend every night.

"I thought we were on the mend," Han feigned a hurt expression. “I’m still your father, after all.” Kylo scoffed and rolled his eyes.

“Um, I should go put on some pants,” Rey said, backing up and nearly tripping over her own feet in her haste to get out of the kitchen.

“Don’t change on my account.” Han had the audacity to wink at her, resulting in Rey turning scarlet.

Kylo wanted to scream. Couldn’t his father see that he wasn’t being charming? He was just being an idiot and he was making both of them uncomfortable.

“That’s enough out of you,” Kylo growled.
“Hey, kid. She’s a looker. You did good.”

Staring at the floor, Kylo wished it would swallow him up. He had gotten a miracle in Rey and now it seemed that miracle was over. He was about to enter hell, courtesy of his father and his father’s profound humiliation tactics.

Rey startled him by saying, “Ben’s handsome.” She wrapped her arms around his waist, leaning into his side.

“Where do you think he gets it from?” Han asked with a laugh.

“His mom, of course,” Rey responded without missing a beat.

Had Kylo mentioned he loved his girlfriend? She was perfect.

Never in his life had Kylo seen his father struck speechless, but it happened. Rey’s comment had thrown him off completely. For a full minute not a single one of them spoke. They were stuck in a strange three person stare down — Kylo glaring, Han in shock, and Rey smiling away, like her normal sunny self.

“I like her,” Han chuckled eventually. Angling towards Rey, he said, “Leia is going to love you.”

“Is your mom coming by too?” Rey asked, looking up at Kylo.

“No.”

“Oh,” her face fell slightly. Was she disappointed? “I’d like to meet her some time.”

“You should come to the charity gala she’s throwing,” Han suggested. “That’s why I’m in town.”

“Ben didn’t mention it,” Rey replied.
Kylo saw her disappointment grow. He scrambled to think of a reason why they couldn’t attend. He wouldn’t be showing up there, if not to spite his parents, because he also didn’t want to do Snoke any favors. Since Maz had told him about Snoke’s strange fixation, Kylo had been losing interest in reappearing at the First Order gym. Though he loved fighting, the thought of setting foot in the establishment now made him feel uneasy.

It was as if blinders had been removed from before his eyes. He had started questioning past choices and decisions the organization had made in regards to him. All of them had been at the direct order of Snoke. Kylo was sure the old man was playing some sort of chess game. In his mind, he always kept several steps ahead of his opponent. Since he couldn’t battle things out in the ring, he took victories using manipulation and legally binding contracts. Kylo had no interest in being part of either.

“Leia is hosting a charity ball next Saturday night,” Han was saying to Rey. “One of those black tie things,” he groaned. “She always ropes me into these shindigs. But if you and Ben came along, you’d give me someone to talk to.”

“I don’t know,” Rey rubbed her hands up and down her bare arms. Kylo recognized the gesture. She was embarrassed. A formal event wasn’t her typical event and she probably didn’t have a dress to wear for it. If she had wanted to go, he’d buy her a dress — hell, he’d buy her a dozen — but not this event. He couldn’t show up with his girlfriend at an event that both his parents and his employer were bound to be at. He wasn’t ready to confront either.

“Oh, come on,” Han encouraged her. “Ever since Lando got blacklisted, I have no one to chat with. Everyone else is so dull.”

“Lando?” Rey queried, her interested peaked. “As in Lando Calrissian?”

“The one and only,” Kylo’s father beamed.

“We’re meeting with him today!” Rey announced, unable to contain her excitement. “Ben is taking me on a private tour for my birthday.”

“It’s your birthday?”

“It was yesterday,” Kylo interjected, giving his father a look over Rey’s head. This was not going the way he wanted. How much clearer did he need to make it? Han was intruding on his home and his time alone with his girlfriend. He needed to leave.
“Happy Birthday, kid,” Han ignored his son, giving her another charming smile.

Kid? Han only ever called him ‘kid’. What was with that?

“Thank you!”

“If I had known,” his father continued, “I would have gotten you a gift.”

Rey started shaking her head, waving her hands back and forth to signal him no. “There’s no need. Ben’s spoiled me enough.”

“Oh?” Han finally met Kylo’s eyes.

“Yes,” Rey circled her arms around Kylo’s midsection once more, giving him a hug. “He sent me and my friends for a nice dinner in the city and then we went clubbing and today we’re going to see the best engineering firm in the world!”

Han nodded, a smile gracing his weathered face, but his eyes stayed trained on Kylo. “Sounds like a nice time.”

“It was.”

“I’m sure Ben will be sure to invite Leia and I next year,” Han commented. Kylo didn’t miss the dig. “We’d like to celebrate with you both.”

“Oh!” Rey was grinning ear to ear. “That would be so nice. I worked for Lei — Senator Organa before I started at Ahch-To.”

“You work for Luke?” Kylo watched his father’s attention snap to his girlfriend, as recognition dawned on his face.
“Yes,” Rey continued, oblivious to how she was playing right into Han’s hand. Kylo ground his teeth harder. The sly silver fox was working his charm on Rey, getting all the details he would surely use to report back to his wife. Kylo shook his head, glaring at his father, who ignored him.

“Hope the old farm boy is treating you well,” Han chuckled.

“Master Luke is great,” she confirmed. “He’s been so patient with me.”

“Don’t know where he gets that from,” Han remarked. “The Skywalkers are not a patient bunch, but you already know that. You’re with Ben, after all.”

Rey hugged Kylo around his side. “Ben’s a gentleman. He’s been good to me.” She informed Han. “What they say about him in the papers is misconstrued. He has a good heart. I think he got that from his parents.”

Kylo dropped his glower, glancing down at his girlfriend. She was positively radiant as she spoke about him. There wasn’t a single second of hesitation in her answer, just pure adoration and confidence.

If he hadn’t been in love with her before, he was in love with her now. He stopped listening to what she was saying and focused on how she said it. The words were meaningless because the look in her eyes and the way she gestured as she talked spoke volumes about how she felt about him. Kylo only saw her in that moment. The fact that his father had interrupted their morning together faded away. The nagging reminder that their delivery was indeed late, no longer held sway over him. No, all of it was unimportant when he had the love of the woman next to him.

She was perfect.

As if the universe wanted to taunt him, a knock came at the door. Kylo blinked, coming back to himself. Rey was still going on about him — about what a skilled fighter he was and how patient of a teacher he had been with her. She wasn’t at all affected by the fact their food had finally arrived — another display of how important he was to her. Rey loved food.

“I’ll get that,” he announced, more to her than Han. Kylo glared at his father one final time, a warning look before kissing the top of Rey’s head.
This better be breakfast, he thought angrily, as he stormed out of the kitchen. One interruption is one too many.

The moment Ben left the kitchen, Han approached Rey. Whereas before he had been filled with humor and light in his eyes, his expression was now somber. “I didn’t mean to crash your birthday,” he apologized. He rubbed the back of his neck, the way she had noticed Ben did sometimes when he was uncomfortable. “I thought if I called and left a message, he’d have the opportunity to call and tell me not to come. At least then I’d get to talk to him.”

Rey started to feel the man’s anxiety leaking into the air between them. As self-assured as he had always appeared in the media, the man before her seemed to be just as lost as his son. Neither one of them were good with talking about their feelings. It was easier for them to fall back into past habits than try to resolve their lingering issues. As curious as she was to understand what had happened between them, Rey didn’t want to ask. She had vowed Ben would tell her when he was ready. She wasn’t going to rush him or Han into discussing it.

“He’s a very accomplished fighter,” Rey beamed with pride, trying to get Han’s mind off of Kylo’s frosty reception, “despite his temper. If it hadn’t been for his altercation with Nines, I never would have gotten the chance to know him — the real him.”

Han stared at her, his expression unreadable. There was a glistening to his tired eyes, she recognized as tears. He took a deep breath and for the first time since she had met him, he didn’t appear as the cock-sure pilot she had read about or seen on the news. He looked like a tired old man, trying to make peace with something.

“I never did right by him.” Han admitted. “I was gone too often, never there when he needed me. Then one day I came home and he was all grown up. He moved out and we lost him.” He snapped his fingers, the sound echoing in the silence between them. He took another deep breath. “Just like that.”

When he met her gaze again, he no longer wore the amused expression he had upon her entrance to the kitchen. Han was serious now. Rey cleared her throat, moving to lean next to him on the counter.

“Maybe,” she admitted. He turned his head to look over at her. “You may have lost him back then,” she continued, “but you could reach him now. You’re here for a reason, aren’t you?”
“Yeah.” The man chuckled, ruefully. “Because my ex-wife won’t let me stay with her.” Running a hand through his hand, he sighed. “What they don’t tell you about being a hero is that it ruins your life. You save so many, but there is a cost. The ones you love the most pay for it.”

“So tell him that,” Rey suggested.

Han regarded her, hands running over each other in front of him, as he contemplated her advice. His hands were covered in calluses, like hers from years working under Plutt. She wondered if under his worn leather jacket if his body was scared from his many adventures. While he wore his physical scars, evidence of his past exploits, her scars were mostly hidden beneath the surface, yet, she felt a kinship to him.

He wasn’t a bad man. True, he had failed his son, but it didn’t make him bad. Han was here now. There was still time of him to make things right with Ben — to let their past die and start anew.

“I don’t know how my son got you,” he said, bringing her out of her reverie, “but I’m glad he did.”

“That makes two of us.”

Grinning, Han nudged her with his shoulder, pushing her slightly off balance. With a laugh, she repeated the gesture, shoving herself into him. He wasn’t as easy to move.

“Rey, the food’s here,” Ben called from the living room.

“Would you like a cup of tea?” Rey asked Han, still smiling.

“Nah, I’m going to let you two crazy kids eat in peace,” he told her. “Besides, I grabbed a breakfast burrito from Mos Eisley on the way over.”

“The bar?”

“Yeah,” Han chuckled. “You know it?”
“My friends and I used to go there for Taco Tuesday,” she informed him. “Dollar tacos and cheap drinks. It beats ramen and PBR every time.”

Han grinned. “I know I said it before,” he told her, patting her on the back, “but I like you, kid. I’m glad I got a chance to meet you before Ben screws it all up.”

Rey’s smile fell off her face. At the same exact moment, Ben stalked into the kitchen. “Get out,” he snarled at his father.

“I was only kidding,” Han held up his hands.

“No you weren’t,” Ben hissed. “Get out. Now!”

Before Rey could say anything to either of them, Ben was ushering his father out of the kitchen. She stared at the empty spot where he had been standing only seconds before. With a shrug — she was sure he’d be back — she rose to her tiptoes to search the cabinets for a tea kettle. Why were all of Ben’s cabinets so tall? She couldn’t reach anything!

On her third try, she found a tea kettle and a box of Earl Grey. It wasn’t her Green Tea, but it would do. Using a spatula, she managed to knock both items down from the high shelf and into her waiting arms. She set about making her morning drink, ignoring the rising voices from the living room. There was the sound of a door slamming and then a shouted curse.

Rey took a deep breath and concentrated on figuring out his stove.

“Did you throw your father out?” She asked when Ben came back to the kitchen. She had her back turned to him while she waited for the tea kettle to heat up.

“It’s not kicking him out if he wasn’t invited in the first place.”

“Ben,” she laughed, turning around to stare at him. “He’s your father.”

“Only when it’s convenient for him,” he grumbled, staring at the floor, like a petulant toddler. Rey held back another laugh. How could a man as large as Ben manage to look like a child?
“He’s trying,” she told him, crossing her arms over her chest, as she leaned back against the stove top.

“By showing up out of the blue?”

Rey walked over to him, cupping his chin in her palms. “Ben,” she said, softly. “Did you see how happy he was to be here?”

Ben mumbled something under his breath, too low for her to hear.

“What?”

He sighed, leaning back and running a hand through his hair. “He’s only here because of you. He’s probably scouting you out for my mom so they can make a big deal out of this thing.”

“This?”

“Us,” he gestured to her and then back to himself. “You and me.”

“Us,” Rey repeated, not hiding her growing smile.

“Because I’m yours,” Ben told her, his agitation dissipating as he leaned down, “and you’re mine.” He pressed his lips to hers gently.

“And it’s still my birthday,” Rey added, as she pulled back.

He cocked an eyebrow, suspiciously.

“Which means what I say goes,” she continued.
His face changed and she could tell he was beginning to put two and two together, but he waited for her to finish.

“And I think it would go a long way if you let your dad come with us to Cloud City.”

“No.”

“But Ben-.”

“No, Rey!”

Her eyes widened and she backed away from him. He hadn’t raised his voice to her like that before. Though a part of her wanted to snap right back at him, the initial shock of his fury disarmed her. She hadn’t heard him use that tone since she overheard him in his uncle’s office. Rey was transported back to the time when he had first arrived at Ahch-To — when he had said he didn’t want her at the academy.

Their week together had been perfect, a complete fantasy. Rey had thought it would last forever. She thought they’d stay in their warm little bubble for the rest of their days and it would be magical, because Ben was different. Ben wouldn’t abandon her.

It seemed she was wrong.

The all too familiar panic rose in her chest, as her inner demons taunted her. *See? Told you he would end up disappointing you. Everyone always does, Rey. No one wants you. They only want to use you.* Rey swallowed, trying to ignore the lump forming in her throat. She willed herself not to cry. She couldn’t cry — not here, not in his apartment.

Her heart stammered in her chest. Last night she had been beyond excited to see his place, believing it was a step in the right direction for them. Now, she felt confined and trapped. She was nearly an hour away from her apartment — her sanctuary — and her phone was lost somewhere on his bedroom floor, probably hidden under the mess of their discarded clothes. Her body tingled with apprehension. She wanted to leave — wanted to get out of the apartment before he said anymore.

Turning, she walked straight into Ben’s chest. He placed his hands on her upper arms, steadying her. Rey was vaguely aware of him staring down at her. She ignored him, fixing her gaze on the tiled
floor. Ben swore. “Shit, I’m sorry, Rey. I didn’t mean-.”

His apology was cut off by the tea kettle whistling. Rey jumped at the sound, startled. She quickly returned her attention to preparing a cup of tea. The warm drink would soothe her rattled nerves and give her something to occupy her shaking hands with. Plus, she didn’t want Ben to catch the tears in her eyes. This way, she could keep her back to him a bit longer, just enough time to get her emotions under control until she could figure a way to get home.

“Rey?” He came up behind her, tentatively placing his hands on her hips. She stiffened. “Sweetheart, I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have yelled like that.”

She bit back her lower lip.

Ben’s temper had gotten better since the day he had blown up in the academy office, but it was still very much a part of him. Rey tried to remind herself Han wasn’t a traditional father figure. She tried to justify Ben’s reaction, despite her hurt over how he had shouted at her.

Seeing Han here — in his son’s home, genuinely interested in what Ben was doing — gave her hope. Perhaps the two could reconcile. If Ben gave his father a chance, perhaps the two could start over and have a relationship. It was what she would have wanted if her parents were ever to resurface. She believed it was what Ben wanted too… deep down.

Ben had told her about his strained relationship with his parents and how he had grown up with them absent for most of his life. She couldn’t understand exactly what he had gone through, but she did understand how it felt to be abandoned, as if you weren’t good enough for anyone to care for you. As much as Ben had tried to get away from his family, turning his back on them they way they had turned on him, she still saw the scared little boy sometimes. She could sense the hurt and loneliness in him.

“I shouldn’t have overstepped,” Rey managed to say, hating how her voice cracked as she did. “This is your home and I didn’t mean to ruin your plans for today by inviting him.”

“Rey,” Ben pressed a kiss to the back of her head. “Sweetheart, if you want him to come with us, he can. It’s your birthday. It’s your choice.”

She closed her eyes, taking stock of the moment. Rey felt him holding her, could smell his sweaty skin in the air around her, and could hear (and feel) his deep slow breaths. She appreciated the
closeness of him, the careful way he had wrapped himself around her, overwhelming all her senses as he apologized. The Ben Solo she had met back in June would never have apologized to her and never so hastily after an argument.

“If there is an us,” she told him, “then we need to start making choices as an us.”

“Us,” he repeated, as if tasting the word for the first time.

“Yeah,” she enveloped her arms around his, keeping him firmly in place. “Us.”

“Us,” he said again. “I like the sound of it. It sounds like a future.”

“Oh and girlfriend doesn’t sound like a future thing?” she teased, dropping her arms.

“Of course it does,” he insisted, trying to force her arms back into their former position where he was hugging her and she was hugging him against her. “But us sounds more…”

“Long term?” Rey offered, biting her lip after she said it. She mentally kicked herself for being so transparent. She didn’t want to scare him. They had just had sex for the first time (and several times afterwards). There was no need to rush into any other major milestone discussions so quickly.

Like living together? a traitorous voice in her head chimed in.

Speaking of living together. Where was Han?

“Ben?” Rey began, “where exactly is your father?”

“In the spare bedroom.”

“So the door slamming?”
“It was me. I told him to stay in there until I figured out what to do with him.”

“Did he take his duffle with him?” Rey asked, thinking back on her conversation with Han.

“Yeah,” Ben nodded. “Why?”

Her face broke into a large grin. “Because I’m pretty sure he’s RSVP-ing for us to your mother’s charity ball as we speak.”

Ben’s nostrils flared. “Shit!” He wheeled around and made for the spare bedroom, while Rey laughed.

Chapter End Notes

I know a lot of you were expecting Snoke at the door and yes, he is going to make an appearance, but not yet. *evil laugh*

I’m going for another triple update this week. I started with Shadow Song, now HMWYBS, and the next to update (probably on Thursday) will be Same Eyes, Different People.
Chapter Summary

In which Kylo and Rey go to Cloud City and Kylo's past comes back to haunt him...

Chapter Notes

So first and foremost, I have to apologize for how long it has taken me to update this fic. This is my baby and it means the world to me, which is why it was so difficult for me to update. I had terrible writer's block and I refused to post a chapter that was half-assed, so here's the result of a nearly two month drought of inspiration for this fic. Hope you enjoy!

Second, I'm not an engineering expert. All the details within this chapter are from research I conducted, but I do not pretend to know what I'm talking about when it comes to machines.

Third, for my readers who choose not to read the smut parts -- Fair warning: There is smut in this chapter. If you aren't interested in reading it, please skip from "Little Minx" to the next section break.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
The Vanquish sped down the highway leading out of Corellia towards Bespin. As Kylo gripped the wheel, his mind replayed their fight over and over again. He was slowly torturing himself with each mile they drove. For all his talk of letting Rey chose how to love her life and being better for her, he
had irrevocably fucked up...again.

Han showing up unannounced had triggered him. His old wounds tore open along with his former walls. Kylo had shut down and shutting down meant shutting people out — not Rey, just everyone who wasn’t Rey — which meant his old man.

Raising his voice to her was the act which caused him to cringe the most. He couldn’t forget how shocked she looked or how she had flinched away from him, as if she was afraid he’d hurt her. As if he ever could. But he remembered that Rey had her scars too. Violence was a trigger for her and he had thoughtlessly turned on her, unleashing all his pent up emotions onto the only person he loved.

*Idiot*, he cursed himself.

Kylo peeked over at her, as they left Corellia city limits. She was leaning back against the headrest, staring out the window taking in all the scenery. There wasn’t much to see outside the city beyond the desert sand and a random bush here or there, but she remained focused on anything but what was inside the vehicle.

He couldn’t blame her.

“Rey,” he quietly said her name, afraid to scare her any more than he already had.

“Yeah?” she turned to him, a grin on her face when she took him in, but the smile didn’t quite reach her eyes.

He sighed, feeling worse than before. His girl needed to smile always. She was light and joy and freedom. She wasn’t meant to be sad — not now, not ever.

As Rey had predicted, Han did call Leia and RSVP’ed before Kylo managed to intercept him. The end result being that Kylo was now on the official guest list for the charity ball, along with Rey. This resulted in Han being uninvited from their trip to Cloud City.

“I’m sorry about Han,” he apologized. “I overreacted,” he continued before she could tell him it was fine. They both knew it wasn’t. “I wasn’t prepared to see him. I wanted today to be perfect for you and he showed up and I just lost it.”
She was watching him, eyes locked on his, seeing beyond the physical and diving right into his soul.

“I’m sorry,” he repeated.

“I know,” Rey reached over, placing her hand to his cheek, lightly. “It’s f-.”

“Don’t say it’s fine,” he cut her off. “If you’re upset, I understand. Just don’t...just don’t lie to me.”

“I’m not, Ben,” Rey insisted.

And he believed her.

The way she was staring at him was not disappointment or resentment, as he had been expecting. She seemed almost ashamed.

“Then what’s bothering you, sweetheart?”

She bit her bottom lip, not answering.

“Rey?”

When she answered him, her voice was so small he nearly missed it, “I don’t have a dress for the ball.”

As Kylo continued to drive Rey out towards his uncle’s business, he placed his hand on her thigh. Relief soaked through him at her response. “I’ll take you shopping this week,” he offered.

“It’s alright,” Rey waved him off. “I’m sure I can borrow a gown from Jess.”
Kylo had seen how excited Rey was at the prospect of meeting his mother, another family member of his whom she admired. But he had also seen how concerned she was by the dress code. She didn’t have anything black tie worthy in her wardrobe.

He knew she already felt guilty about the dress she had purchased the night they reconnected and the lingerie which she had surprised him with. Kylo had offered to pay for them, which only served to upset Rey further. He didn’t want her worrying over money — not when he had plenty for both of them.

There was another option, though he was hesitant to take it.

His mother had connections all across Corellia. She was on a first name basis with several well-recognized designers and even a few up and coming ones — or at least she had been according to the last magazine article he had read on her. It was the most communication they had. Unlike a normal family who spoke on the phone or had Sunday dinners, the Organa-Solo clan tended to use media to come up to speed on the latest and greatest in each other’s lives.

“About your father,” Rey started, capturing his attention instantly, “he told me he wanted to make amends.”

Kylo scoffed. Of course Han Solo would tell Rey some sob story as a way to weasel back into his life. As much as he was prepared to lash out again, he controlled his anger and calmly questioned her about his father’s conversation, “Did he ask you to talk to me?”

“No,” Rey wrapped her hand around his, “actually, I think what he told me was in confidence, but…”

His gaze flickered from the road to her face for a moment. She was pensive, biting her bottom lip again and staring at her lap.

“Hey,” he gave her hand a squeeze, “I’m sorry if I’m coming off like an asshole. Ha- my father and I don’t have the best relationship.”

“Why?”

He swallowed. Kylo understood at some point she was going to ask this question. It was only
natural.

“After I got emancipated, my father and I stopped talking altogether,” he told her. “My mother at
least tried, but Han… well he never forgave me for taking them to court and choosing to change my
name.”

“Was it really that awful?” Rey questioned.

Normally if someone brought up his past, Kylo got defensive and shut-down, but this was Rey. He
wanted a life with her. If he shut down again or acted as irrationally as he had back at his apartment,
there was no chance of a future for them together. They had already wasted so much time. He
couldn't waste anymore on his rage.

“To me, it was,” he admitted, thinking back on the techniques Dr. Connix had taught him. He took a
deep breath before continuing. “I never got along with my peers. I was constantly targeted, always
alone. When I would come home after school, I expected to be in a safe place. It was safe,” he
clarified, “but it was lonely. My mother was off trying to save the world and my father… well, he
was hell bent on proving all the naysayers wrong.”

“Naysayers?”

“When my parents got married, there was a lot of churn in the media about my mother’s choice for a
husband.”

“Because he was a smuggler,” Rey supplied.

Kylo nodded. “Originally the rumors were that he had gotten her pregnant, but when it didn’t pan
out, the media took a more vicious turn with their stories. My mother weathered the storm but my
father… he struggled with it.”

Rey made a humming sound. “He sounds an awful lot like you.”

Her comment gave Kylo pause. Had he been in the same position with Rey as his parents had been,
there was no doubt in his mind he’d do whatever he had to in order to clear her name. He would
never allow anyone to speak ill of her.


Next to him, she squeezed his hand. “Ben,” she turned to look at him, despite the fact he had to keep his eyes on the road instead of her lovely face. “I’m not saying I understand what you went through, because I don’t. It would be unfair of me to say I did.”

“But?” He knew there was a ‘but’ coming.

“But,” her cheeks dimples as she smiled, “I think this is a second chance… for both of you. I don’t want you to miss it.”

Kylo nodded, bringing her hand up and across the gear shift to his mouth. He pressed a gentle kiss to her knuckles.

“I love you,” he told her, returning her hand to her thigh, never letting go.

“Mmmm,” Rey wrapped both her arms around his arm, hugging him. “I know.”

Cloud City was located at 327 Platform Drive in Bespin. The compound was designed in a circular fashion with the main building at the center and the surrounding facilities clustered in rings around it.

Rey had never seen the impressive campus up close. When she had researched it on her phone, the pictures had been beautiful but seeing it in real life was something else entirely. The lawns were well manicured with flowers in full bloom and perfectly sculpted shrubs to decorate the various intersections.

Ben chose a spot in visitor parking and they proceeded toward the entrance of the main building.

She found it odd there was no one in the lobby to meet them. Even though it was Sunday, she had expected someone to be working. With an international company as large as Cloud City, it seemed they would have staff working around the clock.
Just as she was about to ask Ben if he had gotten the day of their tour correct, a voice called out to them.

“Benny boy!”

Rey couldn’t help the laugh which escaped, as she saw Ben’s face contort into a grimace. He glanced over at her and she mouthed, ‘Benny boy?’

“Don’t ask,” he muttered in a hushed voice too soft for their approaching host to hear.

“Ah,” the man — who Rey recognized instantly as the owner, Lando Calrissian — came to stop in front of them, plucking her hand out of Ben’s. “You must be Rey,” he smiled, drawing up her hand to kiss it.

Ben snatched her back before he could. Lando just laughed.

“I see you took after your father, then,” Lando commented with a chuckle. “Han always was the jealous type.”

“Try to be professional, please,” Ben grumbled.

“I was only making introductions,” Lando insisted, feigning innocence.

“You’re being a flirt and you know it,” Ben snapped, keeping Rey tucked against his side.

Lando held up both his hands in a sign of surrender. “Alright, alright, Benny boy. Clam down. I was only trying to be friendly.” Then to Rey, he added, “It is lovely to meet you, Rey. Ben told me yesterday was your birthday. I hope it was a good one.”

“The best!” she gushed, excited to be at Cloud City and speaking to the man in charge of it all. “Ben went overboard.”

“Did he now?” Lando smirked over at Ben, whose grip on Rey’s waist tightened slightly.
“Yes, but this is by far the present I’m most excited for,” she admitted.

“Well then,” Lando offered her his arm, “I won’t keep a pretty little thing like yourself waiting. Shall we?”

Rey looped her arm around Lando’s, ignoring Ben’s possessive growl as she did. She was far too interested in seeing what lay behind the doors of Lando’s facility. The R&D department alone was worthy of an entire day’s exploration. Technology like what Cloud City was developing would change the world and she could barely contain herself as Lando led them through the double doors into the heart of it all.

While the corridors on the other side were standard, Rey was soon inside the core of the company she had dreamed of working for since she had decided she wanted to be an engineer.

Lando escorted them into a testing lab first. The main project within the chamber was a portable clean energy generator. Rey walked away from her guide, scanning the device, as she circled it. Her eyes were honed in on all the mechanisms, while her brain tried to piece together how it operated.

“Are you using a pulley system?” she asked Lando, not even glancing up, as she continued to study the generator with rapt fascination.

“Yeah,” Lando chuckled, though he sounded surprised. “How did you know?”

“Electromagnets are going to emit heat. Along with the friction from the pulleys, there is too much strain on the commutator. It will slow down the machine’s life the longer it runs,” Rey commented, off-handedly. “You’d be better off using twin magnets and parsing them out one on each side. You wouldn’t have to worry about it over heating then.”

She didn’t catch the way Lando turned to Ben, or how Ben wore his ‘I-told-you-so’ smirk in response.
Rey was in her element. Kylo had never seen her so entranced. She was naturally gifted as a fighter. Her body moved with unhindered grace and she possessed a prowess most trained for years to achieve. However, one look at her in his uncle’s lab and he knew this was her true passion.

He very nearly had to drag her from the lab to continue the tour, she was so fascinated by the… whatever it was his uncle’s team had constructed. Kylo hadn’t been paying attention to their discussion, only the way Rey’s face lit up when she asked specific questions and how her brow furrowed when she contemplated the answer. She was precious.

His uncle continued on the tour, taking them through the offices, a handful of other labs (where Kylo almost lost Rey to the machines within) and finally to their Research and Development level.

The second they arrived, Rey beamed. Her pupils dilated so wide, Kylo thought she was experiencing another blackout episode, but then she was grinning — all teeth and dimples and he let her go off with his uncle to inspect all the inventions inside.

It was like watching a child have free reign of a toy store. Rey danced between the desks and models, ping ponging back and forth in rapid movements, barely able to stay still long enough to take in one invention before she was inexplicably drawn to the next. Kylo couldn’t keep the smile from his face as he watched her.

He knew he had made the right choice. Regardless of what anyone said, this had been the ultimate birthday gift for Rey. Coming to Cloud City meant more to her than expensive handbags or designer brand jewelry. She only wanted simple things like dinner and drinks with him, seeing her favorite company up close and personal and well the last thing (the thing they had done last night)… that was Kylo’s favorite of all three.

“Ben, come look at this!” Rey waved him over, excitedly.

He went to her side instantly, finding her crouching over a rather large engine. To him, it didn’t look any different than the engine in his Vanquish, but he didn’t have the eyes for this sort of thing the way his girlfriend did.

“You found our prized bull,” Lando stayed, appearing behind them. “This is the Lobot. We are planning on announcing it for GA at New Year’s.”

“That soon?” Rey queried and Kylo sensed (as he had in the car ride over) there was a ‘but’ coming.
Lando turned his full attention to her. There was a glint of something in his dark orbs. “Why do you say that?”

Kylo watched as Rey proceeded to kneel down, peering up into the engine. She pointed at the center, indicating a part he wasn’t familiar with. “The space between the crankshaft and the alternator is too tight. Once this baby gets going, this section here,” she moved her finger, indicating the spot she was speaking of, “is going to rub against the alternator and it will eventually wear it down unless the friction causes it to melt first.”

Lando shot Kylo another baffled. Kylo repressed the urge to bait his uncle. He had warned the man that his girlfriend wasn’t the typical arm candy most celebrities kept. Rey was special.

“Anything else?” Lando chuckled, noticing how Rey hadn’t moved from her position on the floor.

“Yeah,” she continued, without hesitation, “have your engineers told you about the power distribution problem?”

“What?”

Kylo recognized the shock in his uncle’s voice. A displeased expression took over Lando’s features, as he moved to squat down next to Rey. Obviously, he hadn’t thought she’d actually find another opportunity for improvement. Kylo bit the inside of his cheek from laughing.

Oh his lovely, spit-fire of a girl. She had no idea how brilliant she was.

By the time Rey had finished explaining the situation to Lando, Kylo was beginning to feel restless. He took a seat off to the side, while the two conversed and pulled the engine apart. Not wanting to interrupt, he allowed Rey her shining moment while he perused his emails from work.

Marketing and Legal were finalizing the details of the fight in Canto Bight and Snoke was making the official announcement at the end of the month. Kylo sighed, running a hand through his hair. He hadn’t made a decision yet on whether or not he’d renew his contract. Tucking his phone back not his pocket, he ignored the messages. He wasn’t ready yet. This was still Rey’s birthday weekend. His focus was needed to be all on her. He’d figure out their future starting tomorrow.
“Your girl is a real gem,” Lando called to him, as he made his way over to Kylo. The older man was wiping his hands clean on a white rag, while Rey remained digging around in the engine, lost in her own world. “I might have to steal her.”

“Excuse me?” Kylo growled, immediately on high-alert. He didn’t like anyone saying anything that closely resembled removing Rey from him. Family or not, she was his.

Lando chuckled, holding up his hands in playful surrender. “Down boy. I only mean to say, I’d like to offer her a job,” Lando clarified. “Do you think she’d be interested?”

Kylo felt as though he should pinch himself. This was exactly what he had hoped would happened, wasn’t it? If Rey got a job at Cloud City, she wouldn’t have to work at the bar anymore with all those patrons leering at her and drunken idiots trying to flirt with her. Plus, Ahch-To was too far of a drive so she’d have to move. He’d be only too happy to suggest she forgo the apartment hunting and move in with him.

 Apparently his uncle could see the wheels turning in his head. Lando swatted him on the shoulder. “Hey, quit with the daydreams, Benny boy. I asked you a question.”

“Huh? Oh, yeah,” Kylo found himself nodding. “Her degree is in mechanical engineering. She’d jump at the chance to work here.”

“Perfect,” Lando cheered. “Let’s go to dinner to celebrate. My treat!”

“Actually, my dad is in town so-,” Kylo tried to find an excuse to get Rey home alone.

“Even better!” Lando interrupted. “Give him a call. It’s been too long since I saw the old scoundrel. He should join us.”

Kylo opened his mouth to object, but Lando was already off talking to Rey about his proposal. When Kylo saw the joy burst across her features he knew he couldn’t deny her anything.

“Oh my God, Ben!” Rey gushed, throwing her arms around him as they exited the Cloud City
facility. “Can you believe Lando Calrissian offered me a job? Me! And he’s taking us to dinner! Can you believe it?”

Ben’s only response was to hold her close and deposit a kiss on the top of her head. “You deserve it, sweetheart.”

“I mean, you don’t think I was too pushy with all my feedback, do you?” she asked, as he led her to the Vanquish.

“You? Pushy?” he teased.

She shoved him away playfully, picking up her pace as they approached the car. “Don’t you ruin this for me, Ben Solo,” Rey warned, jokingly.

“I wouldn’t dream of it,” he promised, hurrying forward to scoop her up in his arms.

Ben rested her back against the side of his vehicle, his hands positioning her legs around his torso, while he leaned into her. “Did you have a nice time?” he asked, his forehead pressed to hers, as he stared into her eyes.

“Of course,” Rey insisted, though her voice came out softer than she intended it to.

“Good,” he asserted, before capturing her lips with his own.

Suddenly dinner and her job offer were the farthest things from her mind. Rey’s body went into overdrive, flooded with the spark of arousal from having Ben’s body between her legs. He was so broad and built beneath her fingers.

She ran her hands up his chest, toying with the collar of his shirt before trailing one hand up the back of his neck, leaving the other to cup his jaw. He didn’t break the kiss, as her head tilted back. His tongue found entrance to her hot mouth and she couldn’t hold back her moan.

“Let’s skip dinner,” he suggested, breathlessly.
“But your dad and Lando,” Rey reminded him, not sure how she was in the right frame of mind to argue.

“They can eat and get drunk and commiserate,” he told her, ducking his head to leave hot, wet kisses along her throat. “I just want my girl in my bed.”

Oh.

Pleasure rippled through Rey, as she felt her resolve weakening. Surely Lando would understand if she was too tired to join them for dinner, right? It wasn’t as if she was standing him up. After all, Han was perfectly good company and they were old friends who hadn’t seen one another. They probably had a lot to catch up on.

“Ok,” she nodded, grasping Ben’s face with both hands. “Take me home.”

If it felt perfect to refer to his apartment as home, she blamed it on her aching desire.

The drive from Bespin to Corellia was the longest in Kylo’s memory. He couldn’t understand why people in the left lane chose to drive exactly the speed limit when that lane was clearly meant for passing. By the time he pulled into the apartment complex garage, he was gripping the gearshift of the Vanquish so tight his hand had gone numb.

“Ben?” He glanced over at Rey who was regarding him with a rather amused expression. “Everything alright?”

“Yeah,” Kylo responded, before leaning over to kiss her. “Everything’s fine, sweetheart.”

“Mmm, you barely said a word the entire time back,” she observed. “I thought something was wrong.”

“Just thinking,” he replied, unbuckling his seat belt and climbing out of the vehicle. About all the
“Ok,” Rey dropped it, happily taking his hand as they walked towards the elevator. There was a bounce in her step, her earlier excitement having returned. “I still can’t believe all of this is real.”

“It’s real,” he told her, guiding her into the elevator and selecting the penthouse. The security protocol demanded he punch in his pin and then they were climbing upwards towards his floor.

“I have to think about it,” she chewed on her bottom lip.

*Wait, what?*

“What do you have to think about?”

“Accepting Lando’s offer.”

“Why?”

“Because I can’t just up and leave Master Luke or my students,” Rey insisted. “Temiri and the others have come so far. I don’t want them to think I’ve abandoned them.”

*Of course.*

Of course Rey would feel as though she was leaving them behind. She was far too conscious of how abandonment at a young age had affected her. She didn’t want to do the same to those in her life. Kylo loved her all the more for her big heart. She was so compassionate.

“I’m sure you can speak to Lando about a start date,” he suggested. “Between him and Luke, you can work out a schedule for the transition.”

Rey beamed up at him, utter joy sweeping over her. “What did I do to deserve you?” she asked, cupping his face in her hands as she surged up on her toes to kiss him.
The second her lips found his, Kylo felt his need for her increase. He had kept his desires locked down since his father’s impromptu visit this morning but now, with Han out to dinner there were no more distractions to keep Kylo from enjoying his girlfriend.

And enjoy her he would.

Above their heads, the elevator dinged, announcing their arrival to his floor. It was as if the chime was the racing bell at the dog track. As soon as it sounded, Kylo was on her. He hoisted her up in his arms and carried her, bridal style to his front door. Part of him — the primal, alpha part — rejoiced in how she gasped at his sudden dominance and strength. The other part of him — the studious bookworm part — found it romantic. This was how he had carried her home after her blackout in the studio, though their current relationship stage was far more evolved than it had been back then.

“Ben!” Rey cried, though her protest was muffled by her own laughter, as he struggled to unlock the door.

“I’m not letting you go,” he told her. It wasn’t that Kylo didn’t think it would be easier to put her down and then get inside, but after an entire afternoon of not having his hands on her, he was desperate to feel her smooth skin against his own. Every second they weren’t naked in his bed was driving him to madness.

“Stubborn man,” she retorted with a shake of her head.

“Takes one to know one, sweetheart,” he returned with a smirk, as he gained access to his apartment.

He carried her over the threshold, kicking the door shut behind him, like the guys did in the movies. The apartment was — thankfully — quiet, which confirmed Han had indeed gone out to dinner with his old friend. Kylo brought Rey into his room, dropping her onto the bed. She landed with a huff, eyeing him as he locked his bedroom door and began stripping down.

“You’re not dressed appropriately for this, Niïma,” he chided, playfully, once he was down to only his boxers.

“What are you going to do about it, Solo?”
Rey shrieked when his answer turned out to be him grabbing her by the ankles and dragging her
down to the edge of his bed. He parted her legs, kneeling between them as they dangled off the
mattress. He removed her shoes, then slid his hands up her toned calves to her thighs and finally over
her center to where her zipper was. As soon as Kylo had removed them, the last lingering threads of
his control vanished. Rey had forgone panties and lay completely bare from the waist down.

“Fuck,” he hissed, as the scent of her arousal hit him. He made quick work of the remainder of her
clothing.

“Now who is overdressed?” Rey taunted him.

_Little minx._

Kylo tore off his clothes. He clambered over her, pinning down her arms while she thrashed about,
laughing and trying to break free of his grip. “Ben!” She giggled uncontrollably. Kylo wrapped one
hand around both her wrists, freeing his other for one sole purpose.

He couldn’t keep the knowing smirk off his face, as he trailed one hand down along her side, ever so
lightly. Rey jerked beneath him. _Ticklish._ He chuckled, dipping his head down to nuzzle at her pulse
point. The next time she called out to him, her voice was quieter and heady.

“Ben.”

“Yes, sweetheart?”

Her back arched when his teeth grazed over her neck, hips raising up to meet his. “Please,” she
panted, all teasing long forgotten under the haze of her desire.

God, he would never tire of hearing her ask for him.

With his free hand, he guided himself to her, stroking her clit with his head. Rey whined, trying in
vain to grab at him, but he kept her pinned down. Just as he was about to drive home, his brain
captured up to him.
“Shit.”

“What?” Rey’s eyes flew open and she tensed up underneath him.

“Condom,” he groaned, already backing off of her to retrieve one.

“Wait,” she seized his wrist, keeping him in place. “Leave it. I want to feel you — all of you.”

 Fuck.

If he hadn’t been hard before, hearing her say those words and seeing her look at him with those pleading eyes would have done the trick.

“You’re sure?” he asked, needing confirmation. He didn’t want her having any regrets once the passion-filled haze dissipated.

Rey nodded. “Please, Ben.”

Kylo settled over her, one hand on her hip and one hand holding himself. He felt his hands tremble slightly in anticipation. And then he sheathed himself inside, indulging in being wrapped in her slick heat.

He choked back a moan while Rey keened. It felt nothing like before. There was no barrier between them, nothing keeping him from her. Skin to skin was the most delicious feeling he had ever experienced. Rey was all around him, her body pulling him in deeper. It was too much and not enough all at once. The overstimulation was pleasurable torture and he reminded himself to go slow to prolong the experience.

When he didn’t move, her hands came up to his shoulders. “Ben.”

All it took was his name leaving her lips and Kylo was grounded. He rolled his hips, loving how responsive she was. Each movement he made, incited a reaction from her. When he canted his hips,
she sighed and gripped him tighter. If he gyrated against her, her head fell back and her mouth parted. And when he picked up his pace, thrusting into her with unbridled need, she cried out his name.

He liked that best of all.

Hearing her call out for him stoked his primal side. The spark she had lit earlier grew into a raging inferno, which threatened to consume him as it burned throughout his entire body.

With each cry, he felt the fire flare to life a little more, filling him with pleasure and reassurance. He chased the feeling, driving into her faster and harder with each thrust until he was upon the brink of release.

Somehow he managed to form a coherent thought and pulled out. Rey whimpered in protest, too far gone to think rationally. “Ben,” she begged, her voice strained.

“Shhhh, sweetheart, I’ve got you,” he whispered, as his hand slide down her hip.

Kylo rose up to his knees, keeping one hand on her. He ran his digits over her swollen lips, before sinking two fingers into her. Rey gasped then pleaded, “More.”

Carefully, he inserted a third finger, while taking himself in hand. He pumped his shaft roughly, attempting to match the rigorous pace he had set previously. Watching Rey come undone as she writhed beneath him sent him careening over. Ropes of spend shot across her flat stomach and decorated her pert breasts.

Rey’s eyes had fallen closed and the siren call of sleep came for Kylo as well. Despite the seductive pull, he got up from the bed, going into the bathroom to fetch a washcloth. He dampened it with warm water and returned to Rey’s side. She barely moved as he cleaned her up. When he settled in next to her, she was already snoring softly.

Unable to resist the call any longer, Kylo fell asleep.
He woke to the sound of a light rapping on the door. Immediately, Kylo glanced over at Rey, who was sleeping sounding curled up aside of him. He kissed her forehead gently, wrapping her up in the sheets before he tugged on his boxers and unlocked his bedroom door.

“What?” he whispered harshly, as he flung the door open.

“I knew you weren’t sick,” Han grumbled, taking in Kylo’s disbelief appearance.

“No, but you are piss-drunk,” Kylo huffed. “You smell like a distillery.”

His father shrugged, “Lando was buying.”

“Is that so?” Kylo asked, watching as his father staggered toward the guest bedroom. He was reminded of what Rey had mentioned during the car ride earlier. Rolling his eyes, Kylo went to his old man, ducking under one of Han’s arms so he could help him. “Jeez Dad, do you think you could learn to lay off the booze?”

“Y-your mother won’t…” his dad wheezed, practically falling through the doorway.

“Won’t what, Dad?”

“You’re mother won’t let me come home,” Han finally choked out, as he collapsed into bed.

Kylo regarded the older man for a moment, unsure how to digest this news. He hadn’t been close with anyone in his family since he had joined the First Order. There were rumors in the media surrounding his parents all the time, but he hadn’t given it much thought until now.

If Han was here and Leia wasn’t permitting him to stay with her things were worse than he had assumed. Given the amount of time they had spent fighting when he was younger, he wasn’t sure what constituted as bad in their opinion but he could see how much pain his old man was in. If it had been Rey to kick him out — which she had done before — he knew how he’d be holding up.

He wouldn’t.
So he threw his father a bone.

“Dad?”

“Yeah, kid?”

“I decided to take Rey to the gala next weekend,” he informed him, keeping his voice level. “I think she deserves a night out and she really wants to meet Lei- mom.”

“Yeah?” Han instantly looked less likely to self-destruct.

“Yeah,” Kylo nodded. “I’ll have to take her shopping for a dress but-.”

“No, no,” Han started shaking his head. “Don’t give your mother a reason to be mad at you too. Let her take Rey out. She always wanted a daughter.”

Kylo tried not to let the words burrow into his heart and leave another scar. Of course his perfect mother would have wanted a daughter instead of a son. A daughter who would have been like her. A daughter whom she could have controlled. Not the hot/headed, angsty teenager she had been burdened with. Not him.

No one wanted him.

Rey.

Rey wanted him.

And that was enough.

Kylo shook his head, ridding himself of the toxic thoughts. He yanked his father’s shoes off of his feet, before drawing the covers up around him. “Get some sleep, Dad.”
“Hey,” Han caught his wrist, just as Kylo stepped back. “You turned out good, Ben. You’re a good man. I know you didn’t get that from me and I’m proud of you, kid. I....” Their gazes locked as Han’s words fell away. Kylo could have sworn his father was about to say something that would make both of them uncomfortable. In the end, he changed his mind, telling Kylo about the visitors who had come looking for him.

“Your friends,” Han clarified, “the stuck up redhead and the giant blonde lady. Kinda an odd couple but-.”

“They aren’t a couple,” Kylo cut him off, “and they aren’t my friends.”

“Well they stopped by. I told them you were out with Rey,” Han yawned. "They said they stopped by to pick up something, so I let ’em in, then they left a couple minutes later."

“Thanks, Dad. Now get some sleep,” Kylo ordered. "I’ll bring you a glass of water."

He slipped out of the guest bedroom, hearing his father’s deep snores fill the air before he even had the door shut.

Kylo went to his office. As soon as Han had mentioned Hux and Phasma, he had gotten a bad feeling about their unannounced visit. Switching on the light, he hunched over his desk, hand trembling as he opened the top drawer. Just as he had suspected, it was empty.

Rey’s file was gone.
Chapter End Notes

Thank you to my beta @abyssalspark for sticking it out despite my radio silence. She always has the best comments and suggestions. Thank you!!!!

Moodboards for this chapter created by the lovely @EruIsse17 (at the top) and the amazing @reylocaligraphy (at the bottom).

This chapter's title is from the song by the same name by The Girl and the Dreamcatcher. It had the perfect vibe.

Come say hi on tumbler @wewantreylo
Concious

Chapter Summary

In which Kylo deals with the repercussions of the missing file and Rey deals with finding a dress for the Gala...

Chapter Notes

Since it's my birthday and you've all given me such a beautiful gift by subscribing, kudo-ing, and commenting on this fic, I've decided to gift you a new chapter!

Special thank to my lovely beta, @abyssalspark and my sweet, sweet friend @reysexualkylo who not only gifted me this beautiful moodboard for the chapter, but also wrote me an entire story for my birthday. You can read it here: Viridescent.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Rey woke to the sounds of someone banging around in the kitchen. She glanced at Ben’s bedside, reading the time from the clock. Since her boyfriend was breathing heavily next to her, she surmised Han was the one making enough noise to wake the entire apartment.

Pressing a kiss to Ben’s forehead, she slipped out of bed, and threw on one of his T-shirt’s and a pair of boxers. She had her own clothes, but his were far more comfortable. Plus, they smelled liked him, which was soothing.

She crept out of the bedroom to the kitchen, where Han was cursing gruffly in a low tone. “What did that frying pan ever do to you?” Rey teased, leaning in the doorway, as she observed him.

“Shit!” Han jolted, spinning to face her. “Morning Rey.”
“Han,” she inclined her head to him. “How was dinner?”

“Good, good,” he hurriedly replied, scratching the back of his neck. “I didn’t wake you did I?”

“No,” Rey partially lied, “I needed to get up for class.”

As soon as her release had hit her last night, she had succumbed to sleep. It was the perfect end to her birthday weekend. But now it was back to reality — working two jobs where she fought to find time for both sleep and her friends when she could.

Lando’s offer suddenly seemed even more appealing. She’d make more at Cloud City than she was able to pull in now, even with her increasing tips at Rogue One. Plus, she’d have health benefits and paid vacation. She wouldn’t have to feel so guilty asking Jyn for days off, the way she would when she spoke to her boss about taking off next Saturday to go to Leia’s gala. She felt her conversation with the co-owner of the bar would go easier than the discussion she’d have to have with Master Luke.

“How do you like your eggs?” Han asked, bringing her attention back to Ben’s kitchen and off more serious conversations.

“Over easy, please,” she told him, making herself useful by moving across the room to start a pot of coffee.

“Did Ben mention anything about a shopping trip to you?” Han didn’t look at her as he spoke, too focused on not burning the food.

“Sort of,” Rey responded. “He mentioned it on our drive over yesterday.” She shrugged, feigning indifference. “I guess it’s a pretty big deal, huh?”

“Yes,” Han chuckled. “The Princess always hosts quite a soirée.” He cracked a pair of eggs into the frying pan. “I suggested to Ben that he have his mother take you shopping. She probably has better taste anyways.”

“Oh ok,” Rey by her bottom lip, focusing on the stream of brewing coffee so Han wouldn’t see the
conflicted expression on her face.

She wanted to meet Leia again, this time as Ben’s girlfriend, but spending an afternoon shopping with the Senator seemed a bit too intimate for a first time meeting. Rey wasn’t sure what she would say to the woman. It wasn’t as if they had anything in common.

Leia came from a wealthy background and had been in politics longer than Rey had been alive. What if the woman didn’t like the idea of Rey — a nobody from Jakku — dating her only son? What if she didn’t think Rey was good enough.

\textit{Plutt didn’t think you were good enough either}, a vicious voice in the back of her head reminded her.

Rey cringed. She didn’t want to fall prey to her old insecurities, but in the face of meeting Ben’s mother, who happened to be the state’s Senator, she was beginning to feel unworthy.

“I know that look,” Han smirked, “but don’t worry, kid. Leia will be thrilled Ben finally brought a girl home.”

“Oh,” she replied, a bit too late, blushing to the edges of her hairline.

Rey had known about Ben’s history. They had shared in it together. Still, hearing his father call it out had her revisiting how it felt to know they were each other’s firsts. It filled her with a possessive sort of pride, knowing Ben could very well be her one and only and she could be the same to him. It was a nice thought.

“It’s a good thing, kid,” Han continued to grin over at her while he made breakfast. “Means you’re special.”

“There’s nothing special about me,” Rey blushed deeper. She had never been good with receiving praise, mostly because it was such a rare thing for her to hear.

“Tell her that’s not true, son,” Han ordered his son, as Ben appeared in the doorway. Rey glanced up from the coffee maker, taking in the sight of him. He looked different…upset even and she opened her mouth to ask what was wrong, when Han continued. “You are amazing. Don’t let anyone tell you otherwise.”
“You’re perfect,” Ben told her. He crossed the room to her side, leaning down to place a chaste kiss to her forehead.

“I made coffee,” she smiled up at him. “Would you like some?”

“Yes, please,” he responded. His face was neutral, but she saw a slight shudder pass through him, as if he had just thought of something unpleasant.

“You two eat while it’s hot,” Han instructed, handing each of them a plate. “I can clean up once you’ve gone. I know you have places to go and things to do.”

“Thanks, Han.”

“Thanks, Dad,” Ben told him, before leading her into the living room to eat.

Rey wanted to ask him about his sudden shift in behavior, but since they didn’t have dinner, she decided the conversation could wait for the ride to Ahch-To. She inhaled her entire breakfast, before dropping off the plate with Han in the kitchen and returning to Ben’s bedroom to change into her own clothes and pull her hair back for class.

Ben was quiet while he got ready. He barely said goodbye to his father before they went down to the parking garage. Rey tried to catch his eye as they piled into the Vanquish, but he always managed to be busy with something — starting up the car, buckling up or checking the rearview mirror.

On the drive back to Tatooine, the only sound was the radio. Ben was staring out at the road with a strong level of determination. Rey wasn’t sure what had happened since the night before. He had seemed just as satisfied as she had been, unless she was mistaken. She didn’t have any experience to compare to.

“Hey,” she reached over, squeezing his arm. “Are you alright?”

“Huh?” he snapped out of his trance, startled by her sudden contact. Rey withdrew her hand, biting bottom lip. Something was definitely wrong.
“Did Han say something to you last night? Was he upset we didn’t go to dinner?” she asked, trying to understand what was eating away at Ben.

“No, no, of course not,” he shook his head, eyes focused on the road. “He was too drunk to be disappointed.”

“He seemed fine this morning,” Rey commented.

Ben merely hummed and nodded.

He didn’t speak the rest of the way back. Each minute of silence caused Rey to feel more and more alone as she pondered over what had changed. Had she done something? Was he worried about her taking the job and being closer? Or was it something else?

Ben loved her. He had told her numerous times. More than his words, he had showed her. If he wasn’t happy with her, they wouldn’t have shared in the weekend he had planned specifically for her.

*Calm down, Rey*, she told herself. *You’re overthinking it.*

Things would be fine once they got back to their routine.

Thankfully they pulled into the parking lot not long after. Ben told her he needed to go back to the city to take care of some paperwork at the First Order. He gave her a light kiss goodbye, barely touching his lips to hers, before he was taking off down the road.

It left Rey feeling empty and sad. She watched the Vanquish disappear from sight, before throwing all her attention into preparing the studio for her kickboxing class.

Her usual students arrived, all chatty and relaxed from their weekend. Rey let the rock music pulse through her and managed to get a few hits in on her own bag while she thought up new combinations for those in attendance. By the time the hour was up, she had worked up a sweat. Despite using exercise as an outlet, she still felt uneasy over how Ben had acted.
Shaking her head, as if it would rid her mind of the negative thoughts, she went up to her apartment. To get her mind off Ben’s sullen mood, Rey FaceTimed Finn. He and Poe had arrived safely at their hotel in South Africa and he had immediately told her they had WiFi there.

It took several tries to connect, but soon her phone was ringing. The familiar sound of connecting played and she saw her best friend’s face from half a world away right in front of her.

“Hey Peanut!” he greeted her.

“Hey!” she beamed at him. “What time is it there?”

Finn glanced at something off to the side before focusing back on her. “It’s dinner time here,” he answered. “Poe is asleep. We’re still a bit jet-lagged,” he admitted.

“How is it?” Rey questioned, excited to know if it was everything Finn had wanted it to be.

“The facility is awesome,” he replied, smiling. “And the staff is amazing. They’ve been welcoming to all of us who’ve come over to train. We don’t officially start until tomorrow but already they’ve taught us some basic dishes to try out with the local produce we can score at the hotel. I’ve been experimenting in my room.”

“Sounds great!”

“It is, Peanut,” he continued to grin. “I’m so grateful to be here. It’s going to help me go far with my career. On Friday we are going to one of the farms the organization supports to see how they use irrigation technology to make sure all the crops are watered properly even when droughts occur.”

“Impressive,” Rey commented.

“So what’s new with you, Peanut? How was the rest of your birthday?”

“That’s actually what I wanted to talk to you about,” she said, slyly.
Finn’s face changed drastically. “Please tell me you didn’t do something crazy like fly out to Canto 
Bight and get married.”

Rey nearly dropped her phone. Wiping her head around, she double checked to make sure Ben 
hadn’t snuck into her apartment. Part of her almost wished he had, if only so things would go back to 
normal. When she confirmed he hadn’t, she breathed a sigh of relief and shook her head, trying in 
vain to ignore the blush which had blossomed across her entire face and neck.

“No, of course not,” she shook her head. “Don’t be ridiculous!”

“Hey,” Finn narrowed his eyes at her, “I’m not the one who left to go to the ladies and came back 
with a serious boyfriend in the middle of dinner. It’s even more impressive considering you two 
weren’t on speaking terms.”

“It was one fight and we figured it out,” Rey reminded him. “Besides, what I have to tell you is 
better than an impromptu wedding in Canto Bight.”

“Oh?”

“I got a job!”

“Um…” Finn looked unsure what to say in response.

“At Cloud City,” she added to clarify.

“Cloud City?” he cried, apparently loud enough to startle Poe awake.

Finn’s boyfriend’s groggy voice came through the phone from somewhere unseen. “Rey is gonna go 
work for Calrissian?”

“Yep!” she squealed.
“Congrats, Peanut!” Finn cheered. “I wish I was there so I could hug you. I’m so proud of you.”

“Same,” Poe said, though it sounded more like a groan muffled by the bed.

“How did you land your job of a lifetime?”

“When Ben and I were on our tour, I pointed out a few things and it impressed Lando enough to offer me a position there. I’m going to be joining his engineering team,” she regaled her best friend with some of the more intricate details, as he listened with rapt attention.

“And now you’re on a first name basis with the owner,” Finn concluded with a smirk. “Guess that Canto Bight wedding isn’t too far off the mark.”

“Finn!” Rey cried.

“What?”

“It’s way too soon to talk about something like that,” she insisted.

“If you say so, Peanut,” Finn chuckled, “but when dark, tall and handsome pops the question, I’m not gonna be surprised, alright?”

“Whatever,” Rey rolled her eyes.

Finn stifled a yawn and she thought she heard Poe snoring away.

She laughed. “Go get some sleep, Big Deal. I’ll talk to you later.”


“Love you too! Be safe and have fun.”
She disconnected the call, already feeling better than she had that morning.

Kylo sat in his Vanquish around the corner from the First Order gym scrolling through the chain of text messages he had sent to both his manager and assistant on his phone. Neither Hux nor Phasma had answered him. He had tried calling them last night, as well, but there was no response. Not by email, not by phone and not by text. He was beyond irritated and under all that irritation was the unvanquished fear of losing Rey to his own foolishness.

Why hadn’t he gotten rid of the file weeks ago?

He knew she had picked up on his behavior this morning, but without any response from either Hux or Phasma, he wasn’t able to calm himself. All he kept thinking was how he had brought this upon himself. Recognizing his mistake now was too late, of course. Kylo couldn’t go back and make it right. He understood he never should have sought to remove Rey from her position at Ahch-To, but how would he explain that to her when she found out the truth?

Everything was perfect…or at least it had been until last night when he realized the file was gone. It had taken him hours to get to sleep afterwards. He had tossed and turned, thankful Rey was too exhausted to be bothered by his restlessness.

He struggled to fall asleep and when finally he did, he had the same dream over and over. In the dream, Kylo found himself in his office tearing through every drawer and cabinet in search of the file, but somehow knowing he wouldn’t be able to find it. Then, just as he’d complete his search, Rey would walk in, the folder in her hand.

She wouldn’t say anything to him. She simply tossed the folder onto the top of his desk in front of him and walked out. He tried to follow her — tried to stop her — but he could never move fast enough.

Each time, he woke in a cold sweat, just as she slammed the door shut on him — on them. The imagery wasn’t lost on him. He needed to fix things before it was too late.

Even now, he was haunted by the idea of her learning what he had done. In his mind, he pictured how her heart would break at the invasion of her privacy, and a mistrust in the reason behind their
relationship. She would finally see that he wasn’t a good man, like she believed him to be. Kylo had spent the better part of the night trying to come up with a way to explain his actions, but nothing he thought of was enough to forgive his immoral decision to obtain information on Rey.

His girl had already been through more abuse and misplaced trust than any single person should have to endure. Kylo feared learning how he had attempted to remove her and then subsequently have her join him at the First Order would look to Rey. It would destroy her and any hope he had for a future with her along with it.

Which was why he needed to get the file back by any means necessary.

Taking a deep breath, he exited his car and stormed into the First Order gym. There was little chance Hux or Phasma were inside, but he didn’t care. He didn’t need them to be here. He needed Dr. Mitaka to be here. The nervous twittering doctor was simple to manipulate, especially because he was scared to death of Kylo. If Dr. Mitaka called the manager of the First Order in for a discussion about one of their contracted fighter’s health, Hux wouldn’t be able to deny the request.

The ginger bastard would never see it coming.

Kylo strolled past the front desk and into the main room. Several of the other fighters were inside, already working through their strength and conditioning morning workouts. A couple gave him a nod in recognition, but most kept to themselves.

There was no honor amongst thieves and no friends amongst ring contenders.

He walked toward the back where the offices were situated. Ducking into the medical section, Kylo came upon Dr. Mitaka’s door. It was open, the small man bent over his desk, reading through a stack of clinical charts.

Kylo entered, shutting the door behind him with a slam. Mitaka jolted up in his seat, scattering papers everywhere.

“R-Ren,” he stuttered, obviously caught off guard by Kylo’s intrusion.

“Doctor,” Kylo greeted him in return.
“W-what can I d-do for you?”

“I need a favor.” Kylo instructed the other man to call in Hux under the guise of discussing an irregular test result from his latest physical exam.

“S-Sir, would it be easier to just-.”

“Do it,” Kylo snapped, his patience worn thin from his lack of sleep and how upset he had already made Rey this morning.

Twenty minutes later, a rather flustered Hux burst into the room. “Mitaka, what did you find on Ren’s te-.”

Hux froze when he spotted Kylo leaning against a filing cabinet in the corner. His eyes widened and then he sneered. “This is a new low, even for you, Ren,” Hux grumbled.

He turned to leave, but Kylo was faster, punching his hand into the door to keep his manager from opening it. Dr. Mitaka shook like a leaf behind the safety of his desk.

“Where is the file?” Kylo demanded.

“I don’t know what-.”

“Don’t lie to me!” Kylo roared, slamming the open palm of his other hand into the door right alongside Hux’s head. “Where is it?”

Hux narrowed his eyes. “You left us no choice,” he started. “If you retire, we all go belly up. You’re be one who brings in the revenue.”

“I don’t give a fuck! Answer the question, Armitage!”
“It’s too late,” Hux answered, his voice quiet and resigned.

“Why?”

“Phasma already delivered it this morning,” he confirmed.

Kylo felt his stomach lurch. “Delivered to whom?”

“Snoke,” Hux clarified. “She gave it to Snoke.”

XXXXX

Things didn’t improve, as Rey had hoped.

By Thursday when she left after her morning class to meet Leia for dress shopping, Rey was beginning to feel borderline paranoid over Ben’s distance. His behavior had been off since Monday morning. He barely spoke to her and was constantly on his phone. Whenever she asked him if something was bothering him, he blamed it on not sleeping well.

On Wednesday night, he announced he was going to try sleeping at his apartment, but promised he’d be there the following morning to take her to the city for lunch and dress shopping with Leia.

Now, Rey found herself staring at him, as they drove towards Corellia. Ben did have dark circles under his eyes and his normally pale complexion was nearing a sickly white color.

“Ben,” she commanded with a firm voice, “Pull over.”

That got him.

His head snapped so quickly, she was astonished he didn’t give himself whiplash. “What?”
“Pull over. Now.”

Ben navigated to the side of the road, slamming on the brakes. As he put the car in park, he turned towards her, his face full of fear. “What’s wrong? Are you sick? Did you pull something in class? Do you need me to take you back?”

There he was — her handsome, protective man. Rey placed the palm of her hand to his cheek, gazing up into his chocolate brown orbs.

“Ben, what aren’t you telling me?” she asked softly. “You’re really starting to scare me.”

He released a breath he must have been holding, leaning into her touch. “It’s nothing, sweetheart.”

“If it’s bothering you, it’s not nothing,” she insisted. “Why won’t you tell me? Is it about Lando’s offer? I don’t have to take it if you don’t wa-.”

“No,” Ben clapped one of his hands over hers, keeping her against his cheek. “I want you to take it. I want you to move in with me,” he blurted out.

Rey gasped. “Y-you want me to move in?” Was that what he had been stewing over all week? He was nervous about asking her to come live with him.

Ben undid his seat belt so he could readjust, taking both her hands in his over the gearshift. “I don’t want to lose you once my community service is over. I want to see you every day — every morning when I wake up and every night before I go to sleep. I want to be with you, Rey Niima.”

Rey felt tears pricking at the corners of her eyes. All week she had been on pins and needles, so terrified he was going to abandon her. And here he was, telling her he cared enough to invite her to live with him for the foreseeable future.

“Please?” he added, his voice wavered with his uncertainty as he waited for her answer.

“Yes!” She unbuckled her own belt, diving across the car into his arms. “Yes, of course!”
Ben hugged her back, his braid arms trapping her against his chest as she cried into his shoulder. He held her quietly, one hand smoothing her hair down her back, while the other rubbed soothing circles into her tense shoulder muscles. He pressed a kiss to the top of her head.

“I love you, sweetheart.”

“I love you too,” she squealed it, her words muffled by the fabric of his t-shirt.

She felt foolish for doubting him. Ben wasn’t like the others. He was a good man — a good man who loved her.

After several moments, Rey calmed down. They got situated and back on the road. Ben held her hand over the center console the rest of the drive. They didn’t speak, but they didn’t have to. Rey was filled with so much joy, she didn’t notice how his eyes flickered to his phone every few minutes or how he clenched his jaw with worry the closer they got to the city.

Around noon, he dropped her off outside of Massassi, a high-end designer flagship store.

“Mom will likely be inside talking up the staff,” Ben informed Rey. “Have fun.” He gave her hand a squeeze.

“You’re not staying?” she cried, the content smile falling off her face.

“Nah, I’ve been banned by the Senator from entering. She wants it to be a surprise. Besides, I have to stop by the First Order and shake a few hands,” he explained. “You enjoy your girls’ day.”

“What if she doesn’t like me?” Rey asked, suddenly nervous at the prospect of facing her former employer, who also happened to be his mother and the state Senator.

Ben chuckled. “Sweetheart, everyone loves you. Don’t worry,” he leaned over, kissing her temple. “She’s gonna love you too.”
Rey hesitated, not moving from her seat. Ben reached over, unbuckling her and giving her a playful shove. “Go, before someone calls the cops on me for being illegally parked here.”

Begrudgingly, Rey rose from her seat while opening the door. As she exited the car, Ben tapped her ass.

“Ben Solo!”

“You should be more aware of your surroundings,” he called to her, as she stared at him indignantly.

She narrowed her eyes, but he only chuckled and pulled away so abruptly the door slammed shut due to the force of the Vanquish accelerating. As mad as she wanted to be at him, it was the most like his old self he had been all week. It comforted her to know he had only been hiding a simple question from her. She had started to fear it was something far worse.

However, a new fear took hold of her. The fear of what awaited her inside.

Resigning herself to her fate, Rey trudged into the designer store. It was unlike any shop she had visited before. The most noticeable difference was the lack of clothes. There appeared to only be a few racks with only one of each style of garment hanging. Shoes and handbags were displayed on shelves across the wall and jewelers was set out in a glass case by a pair of slim men dressed from head to toe in black suits.

“Rey!” She spun around to see the Senator approaching her. Regal as ever, Leia Organa-Solo looked as if she had just stepped out of the Capitol building. She was dressed in a smart, flattering pants suit and her hair was pulled back into a large bun on the top of her head. “It’s so nice to see you again.”

“And you,” Rey replied, her nerves buzzing. How had this tiny woman given birth to the giant man who was her boyfriend? “Thank you for taking the time to help me find a dress.”

“Oh, nonsense!” Leia waved her hand. “It’s my pleasure. Let’s see what we can find, shall we?” She linked her arm with Rey’s and led her over to the two men Rey had noticed earlier.

“Rey, this is Kanan Jarrus and Ezra Bridger,” she introduced the men. “They are old friends and will be helping us with your fitting today.”
“Hello,” Rey smiled politely at both men. They each gave her a curt nod in return.

“Are you envisioning anything specific, Senator?” Ezra queried.

“Black would be nice,” Leia remarked, as she scanned the racks. “It’s predictable but it would show unity since she’ll be attending with my son and I know for a fact he will show up in a tux.”

“Naturally,” Ezra nodded.

The three continued to discuss cut, fabric choice and length while Rey gazed down at the accessories held within the glass case. She had never been interested in jewelry. When you couldn’t eat, spending money on heavy metal accents didn’t seem all that important.

But... when in Rome.

There were a few different colors, which surprised her. She had thought silver and gold were the only options, but as her eyes roamed the selection in the case she realized what rose gold was and recognized titanium.

“Oh, yes!” Leia breathed, leaning over the case next to Rey. “You have wonderful taste, my dear,” she praised, much to Rey’s confusion. Then the Senator was waving over the two men and pointing at one of the necklaces. “That one.”

“Excellent choice, as always,” Ezra complimented Leia.

Rey watched in awe, as he unlocked the back of the case and pulled out a gold half-choker with pearls on the ends. He held it out to her, “Would the young lady like to try it on?”

“Oh, I don’t think-.”

“Absolutely,” Leia answered for her, cutting her off. “Here, dear, let me.” She took the necklace from Rey’s hands, slipping around her slender neck. “There,” she beamed proudly. “Take a look.”
Rey turned to the mirror Kanan was holding up. The necklace did look nice, peeking out from under her hair. The pearls caught the light, shining to the point they almost looked liked diamonds. Unconsciously, she reached up, her fingertips tracing the solid gold piece.

“It suits you,” Leia told her, still smiling. Then to Ezra and Kanan she said, “We’ll take it.

Rey blinked. Had Leia just suggested they purchase the necklace? It was beautiful but Rey didn’t need to see the price tag to know she couldn’t afford it.

“Leia, I can’t pay for this. I-.”

“You’re not,” Ben’s mother tutted, “I am.”

“No,” Rey shook her head. Charity was worse. Rey still had trouble letting Ben spoil her. She wasn’t about to let his mother start too. She’d never be able to repay the woman for this level of kindness. “I couldn’t possibly-.”

“You’ll take it and you’ll wear it Saturday night,” Leia said. It wasn’t a question. It was a demand. Rey swallowed, stunned by how fast the petite woman could turn into the imposing Senator she had voted for.

Must be where Ben gets it from, she thought, considering how his mood swings could be just as quick.

“Now on to the dress,” Leia announced, apparently done with discussing the necklace. She began walking over to the racks, Ezra and Kanan dutifully trailing behind her. “I’m thinking something off the shoulder. It will compliment her choice in accessories. Besides, Rey has such gorgeous skin. It would be an asset to show some of it off.”

Rey blushed, a bit uncomfortable with the compliment. It was one thing to have her boyfriend praise her physical attributes. It was quite another to have his mother discuss them with complete strangers.

Rey decided to let them decide on the gown, since she had a feeling her opinion wouldn’t matter where Leia was concerned. She moved toward the shoes and perused the options. They all had
pointy toes and skyscraper tall heels. She prayed Leia wouldn’t select a pair of these for her to wear. Ben would need to carry her all night.

The handbags were less daunting. Rey skimmed her fingers over the various types of leather. There was cow, snake and even alligator. She hadn’t know there were so many options, not that it mattered. Her hemp crossbody bag took care of all her needs.

“Rey!”

She pivoted around to see Leia waving her over. Rey resisted the urge to cross her fingers, as she strolled towards the Senator, Ezra and Kanan.

Kanan was holding a hanger up with a solid black gown. It was held up by a pair of translucent plastic straps since the dress had been designed with off-the-shoulder cuffs. As she got closer, she saw the fabric had a shimmer to it, almost like velvet.

“What do you think?” Leia questioned, inspecting the dress the way some would survey a rare artifact or painting hung in a museum. “How does it make you feel?”

What? How does it make me feel? Rey didn’t even know where to begin. It was a dress. You put it on. You wore it out and then you hung it in your closet for a few years until you had occasion to wear it again, which she probably never would so what was the point?

“It’s… nice.”

“It’s one of a kind,” Leia commented, still staring at the garment. “I think the cutouts are a nice touch.”

Cut-outs?

Rey scanned the dress from top to bottom, noticing the changes in the fabric where parts were, in fact, cut out. There was also a rather length slit up the side, which would show off her legs. For being a high-end designer gown, it certainly showed off a lot of skin. Was that appropriate for a black tie event?
“I’ve never worn anything like that before,” Rey confessed, feeling out of her element. She wanted Leia to be happy but at the same time she was concerned about bearing so much in a public forum. Even if Ben was with her the entire night, it was more skin than she was accustomed to showing off outside the comfort of her home.

“There’s a first time for everything,” Leia winked. “Why don’t you try it on?”

Kanan gestured to Rey to follow him. He led her behind the glass counter into an elegant dressing room. There was a circular couch in the center and four smaller rooms placed around the main room. Each had a full length mirror and could be separated off from the main room by a thick opaque curtain.

Kanan hung the dress on a hook in one of the rooms, drawing the large red curtain shut. “Call if you need assistance, Ms. Rey,” he offered, before ducking out to give her privacy.

Rey stood in the main dressing room for a moment, debating whether or not to try the gown on. She figured if she didn’t, Leia would know. The Senator seemed rather observant, so Rey slipped into the smaller room and began to undress.

The obsidian gown Leia had chosen for her was cut in such a way a bra couldn’t be worn with it. The back had a cut out too. As it was, the bust of the dress had cups sewn into it. With a bit of effort, Rey managed to zip herself into the form fitting dress.

She studied herself in the full length mirror. While different than the black cocktail dress she had worn when she had gone out for Finn’s promotion, the overall effect was the same. The dress enhanced her subtle curves and made her appear more mature. The cut was more sophisticated, adding a sense of allure and grace to her form. Despite herself, Rey found herself loving it.

“Rey?”

“Coming,” she called through the curtain to Leia.

Hesitantly, she stepped into the main dressing room, hoping Leia appreciated the dress as much as she did.

“Oh!” The senator clapped her hands over her mouth, eyes wide as she took in the younger woman.
Kanan and Ezra came running in. They stopped just behind the Senator, appraising her.

“Lovely,” Ezra remarked.

“Stunning,” Kanan agreed.

“It’s absolutely perfect,” Leia’s praise came out as a pleased sigh. “Give us a spin,” she twirled her finger to indicate Rey should turn around so they could see the gown from all angles. She did.

“It fits her like a glove,” Ezra commented.

“We won’t have to do any alterations with the right shoes,” Kanan pointed out.

“Right,” Leia exclaimed. “We still need shoes!”

Rey immediately cringed, fearing they’d select a pair from out front.

“Wait!” Ezra cried. “I have just the ones.” He rushed off, leaving Kanan and Leia to fawn over Rey, as she continued to slowly turn before them.

Ezra was only gone a moment before hurrying back in with a print out of shoes in his hand. “A friend of mine works for Louboutin,” he told the Senator. “These would be perfect, no?”

Leia grasped the sheet of paper. She scanned the image for a second, before muttering a curse under her breath and pulling out a pair of glasses. Once the spectacles were in her face, she looked at the image again.

“Yes!” she beamed. “We need to order these.” She moved over at Rey, showing her the picture.

The shoes were a sharp contrast to the dark material of her dress. They were made of translucent white material with a scattered collection of large glitter sequences across the bottom. Though the toes were slightly pointy, the height of the heels was only a couple of inches. They appeared much more manageable.
“What size are you, dear?” Leia asked.

“A seven,” Rey replied, resisting her instinct to refuse the shoes. She knew full well if she fought Leia on spending more money the Senator would just shut her down. Besides, she’d rather not get into a fight with the mother of her boyfriend, especially given the fact they had very recently decided to move in together.

“Ezra, could you please place a call to the store and have all the items delivered to my son’s apartment by Saturday at noon, please?”

“As you wish, Senator Organa,” Ezra nodded. Both he and Kanan raced off to fulfill Leia’s request.

“I’ll send over my stylist,” Leia told Rey. “I have to be there a few hours beforehand, so she can come to Ben’s apartment to get you ready right after.”

“Leia, I can’t begin to tell you how grateful I am for all of this,” Rey asserted, overwhelmed by the woman’s generosity. “I’ve never had the luxury of… well luxury.”

Leia smiled gently. She took Rey’s hands in her own. It paralleled the gesture Ben had taken on the drive over, but where his grip had felt reassuring and full of devotion, his mother’s grip felt nurturing and compassionate.

“I wasn’t brought up under easy circumstances either,” the older woman confessed. “I can’t say I’d change it though, not knowing what I know now. It made me the woman I am today.”

“So no regrets?” Rey asked, recalling the pitfalls in Leia’s past from her research.

How could she have forgotten? While Leia had been born into privilege, her life hadn’t been simple. Controversy had clouded what should have been a beautiful life, but the Senator had never allowed anything to keep her from her objectives. Perhaps they had more in common than Rey had originally thought.

“None,” Leia’s smile broadened. “Mistakes are learning opportunities. You’re still young. To you, a mistake just feel like an irreversible setback but once you get to be my age, you’ll have a different
“I hope I handle it as well as you have,” Rey let out a nervous laugh.

“You’re already handling things well,” Leia insisted, with a knowing grin.

“What do you mean?” Rey questioned.

“If you’re serious about my son, you must be able to handle a great deal,” Leia remarked. “Ben was never easy to get along with, even as a child.”

Rey started to object when she recalled how harsh he had been during their first meeting at Kanata Kaffeine.“He’s a bit rough around the edges, but he’s a good man,” she told the Senator. “I’ve never been with anyone who treats me as well as he does.”

A delighted grin spread across Leia’s features. “I’m glad to hear it. I was beginning to believe I had lost my boy to that God-awful First Order.”

“It’s not that bad, is it?” Rey laughed again. True, at first glance the fighting organization was rather intimidating but Ben wouldn’t fight for a team who was truly corrupt, would he?

“It’s not far from it,” Leia huffed. “Anthony Snoke is a snake.”

Rey stopped laughing. She could tell from the hard set of Leia’s jaw the Senator was no longer in good humor. The older woman was genuinely concerned about her son’s attachment to the company Snoke ran. Leia dropped Rey’s hands, her body stiffening defensively.

“He never talks about Snoke much,” Rey admitted, “but I only just met his manager and his assistant on Saturday night.”

“Hux and Phasma?” Leia asked, raising a brow.

“Yeah, do you know them?”
“Only by their voices,” Leia grumbled. “She normally takes messages for Ben and Hux… well he’s just an opportunist searching for ways to make money off my son’s talent.”

Rey bit the inside of her cheek. She hadn’t thought either of Ben’s ‘friends’ were particularly warm, but she hadn’t held it against them. After all they were practically strangers to her. It wasn’t fair to judge them based on one brief night out.

“I haven’t met any of his other friends,” she said.

“I don’t think he has any,” Leia shrugged. “He was always a solitary character, plus his temper kept him from forming any lasting attachments.” Her eyes filled with hope. “I trust he’s gotten better with that?”

“Yes, his therapist has done wonders,” Rey responded quickly, before realizing what she had said. “Oh, I mean…I don’t think I was supposed to tell you that.”

“Don’t worry about it, dear,” Leia gave her shoulder a squeeze. “It will be our little secret. Something between just us girls..”

“Thank you,” Rey replied, unclear what else there was to say. “And thank you again for all of this,” she waved her hands around. “I owe you one.”

Leia’s eyes sparkled with mischief and suddenly Rey was nervous again. Ben had worn that same look before. “Actually, Rey, there is something you could do for me.”

Chapter End Notes

A lot of you have sent me encouragement via comments and tumblr messages and I just have to say thank you! Thank you all for going on this journey with me and supporting this story. I’ve fallen behind on replying to comments on all my fics, but please know I do read them all and I appreciate them more than I can convey.

Up next...the Gala!
Kingdom Fall

Chapter Summary

In which Rey prepares to transition out of Tatooine and to her new job at Cloud City while Kylo comes clean about the file...

Chapter Notes

I know I said the Gala would be in this chapter, but there was too much these kids needed to get through before that.

Thank you to my beta, @abyssalspark for turning this chapter around so quickly!

Special thank you to my CaP sister and friend @reysexualkylo who gave me guidance on how to get over my writer's block and continues to support me in every fic I write and to @atchamberlin for helping me plan out the remainder of this fic.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Chapter 28: Kingdom Fall

“She asked you to do what?” Kylo roared as he merged onto the highway connecting Corellia and Tatooine.

When he had picked Rey up from the shop, he had been in a foul mood. Hux’s admission hadn’t been one he was prepared to hear. As soon as the words were out of his manager’s mouth, he felt failure strike him. There was nothing left for him to do but wait — wait for Snoke’s crushing blow — wait for Rey to find out the truth and leave — wait to suffer even more disappointment from his parents.

Then Rey jumped into the car and told him the news. His mother asked her to be part of the charity auction. In a rather outdated and frankly sexist attempt to earn funds, Leia was auctioning off a date
with ten eligible ladies from Corellia. Rey was to be number ten, the lady to close out the evening.

Kylo gritted his teeth, as his grip on the Vanquish’s steering column tightened to the point where his hands were stark white. “ Absolutely not!”

“Excuse me?” She arched a brow at him, her tone icy.

He cleared his throat, reminding himself he wasn’t mad at her, just himself and his mother. “ Rey,” Kylo started again, “ I don’t like the idea of her using you and your body to generate a profit.”

“ Ben,” Rey placed her hand on his thigh, immediately calming when he made his concern clear. “ She asked me to help. She isn’t using me. Besides, it’s all for a good cause. The Resistance does great work all over. If I can be a part of that, I want to help.”

“I know,” he sighed, “ and it’s one of the things I love about you, but my mother-.”

“ Said she asked you to step in but you never called her back,” Rey shot him a look which dared him to challenge her on this point. “ So in a way this is your fault. Not hers.”

Kylo bit the inside of his cheek, as he continued to drive them back so she could teach her afternoon classes. His mother had left a message asking him to help out, which he had indeed ignored, not wanting to play her game. Of course, he hadn’t thought to mention it to Rey before she went inside the store, so in a way, his girlfriend was correct. He had no one to blame but himself.

“ Fine,” he grumbled.

Rey gave his thigh a squeeze. “ You’ll just have to outbid all the other gentlemen if you want a dance,” she teased.

Well, that went without saying. He would absolutely not allow another man to place a hand on Rey. If Kylo had to sell his penthouse, he would, no one else at the gala was going to win a date with his girlfriend.

At least that was one thing he could control.
Rey squeezed his thigh again and he brought his hand off the clutch to hold hers.

How much longer would he have moments like this? How many more drives back and forth? How many more sparring sessions? How many more mornings waking up to see her face? He swallowed against the growing lump in his throat at the thought of her icy tone being the only one she used to speak to him and her vicious glare being the only eyes she ever gave to him. He wouldn’t be able to live like that.

“Are you alright?” Rey asked, instantly picking up on his mood. “Getting cold feet about moving in together?”

“Not a chance,” he ground out, attempting to grin, but he knew it was all in vain.

“Ben?”

“We still need to talk to Luke,” he reminded her, changing the subject. “Lando gave you a few weeks, but we need to start transitioning.”

“You’re right,” she nodded and he was grateful her focus shifted away from him and onto her new position at Cloud City.

“I’ll talk to him when we get back.”

“How did your friends take the news?” Kylo queried, purposefully keeping her mind on the topic.

“Jess and Rose are happy for me, even though I’ll be moving away and we won’t get around to having another girls night out for a while,” Rey informed him. “Of course they were also delighted at the prospect of visiting us in Corellia and partying with Finn and Poe again.”

As she continued talking about her friends’ reactions to her news, Kylo’s mind wandered to how to mitigate his own news.
Rey had been understanding so far. Each time he shared more of his past with her, she had surprised him by listening and ultimately forgiving him for his prior decisions. It had been particularly difficult whenever she asked about Han, since his father was her hero, but Kylo found her supportive of his choices, even if she had permitted Han to stay at the apartment.

In a way, it worked out. Perhaps this would work out too… if he just told her the truth.

“Rey,” he started, interrupting her story about how Jess had shrieked into her ear when she had told the other girl about her offer.

“Yeah?”

“I have something I need to tell you,” Kylo admitted.

She turned in her seat, facing him the best she could with her seatbelt buckled. “Yes?”

“Before we… when we were first at Ahch-To… the day I met you-.”

“When you were an asshole?” Rey questioned, teasingly.

Kylo remembered how he had called Phasma and ordered her to find details on Rey. He recalled his exact words and how he had thought to himself, *She’ll wish she never left Jakku. I’ll destroy her.*

Now those same thoughts made him sick to his stomach. His uncle had been correct. It had not gone the way he thought. His malicious intent had morphed into an odd fascination which transformed into adoration and love. If he could go back in time and tell his former self how critical Rey would become in his life, he was sure he wouldn’t have made the same mistake, but he couldn’t go back.

“I… I’m sorry, Rey,” he apologized, hating how he was forced to do this now, after she finally received what she deserved — a good paying job doing something she loved.

Then he realized how selfish he was being. Kylo was making this all about him again. He was taking away her victory in order to soothe his own suffering. He was too wrapped up in himself. First he had asked her about how her transition was going and next he was asking her to stop talking so he
could rid himself of his guilt. He needed to keep his own pain out of what was to come next and focus on what really mattered — Rey.

“What are you sorry for, Ben?” Rey asked.

“I said things and did things that day,” he confessed, “and I never should have. You didn’t deserve it. I’m sorry I couldn’t see it then.”

“Ben,” Rey gave his hand a squeeze. “Neither of us made a good first impression that day,” she reassured him. “That’s in the past now. We’ve moved past it.”

“No,” he shook his head. “Rey, you don’t understand, I went—.”

He was interrupted by the ringing of Rey’s cell. Her eyes caught his apologetically. “It’s Jyn,” Rey told him. “She told me she’d call today after she and Cassian had time to discuss what they were going to do about Rogue One. Do you mind?”

“Go ahead,” Kylo replied, not sure whether to be relieved or exasperated by the diversion.

Rey took the call, giving him a happy smile which only served to remind him of how she’d likely never smile at him again once she knew the truth.

While she spoke to Jyn, Kylo’s thoughts went to his own manager. Hux had never been someone Kylo considered compassionate, but he hoped after the years they had worked together under Snoke there was some level of respect between them. Apparently not. Hux and Phasma were both concerned with their own careers far more than his.

His ‘friends’ were nothing like the people Rey surrounded herself with. While he could see Rose and Jess eagerly coming to Rey’s aid, he knew without a doubt the first person to show up if she ever truly needed anyone would be Finn. Finn, who was completely right about him. Finn, who was Rey’s true best friend. Kylo sighed, feeling even more deflated.

By the time he pulled into Ahch-To, Rey was wrapping up her conversation with Jyn and there were a half dozen students already assembled in the waiting room.
“I’ve got to change,” Rey informed him, as she tucked her phone in her pocket. “See you afterwards?”

“Of course,” he managed a small smile.

Rey leaned over, kissing his cheek chastely before she was out of the car and bounding up to her apartment.

Kylo inhaled deeply, trying to keep himself together so he could get through the planning discussion they needed to have with Luke and the larger conversation he needed to have with Rey after work.

When he managed to get himself out of the Vanquish, Rey had already re-appeared, dressed in her athletic gear. She sent him a dazzling smile as she passed, entering the studio and popping on her headset with practiced ease. He spared a moment to take in the sight of her, so carefree and happy. If things went south tonight, he wanted to remember her like this, full of light and full of love.

“Ben?” Kylo turned to find his uncle watching him with a confused expression. His gaze flickered from Kylo’s troubled face to Rey then back to his nephew.

“Rey and I need to discuss some things with you,” was his curt response.

“Alright,” Luke nodded, motioning to his office. “Everything go ok with your mother?”

“It was fine,” Kylo huffed, brushing past his uncle to wait inside until Rey’s classes were done.

If Luke was bothered by his briskness, he didn’t comment on it. “I assume she was pleased to meet Rey?”

“She roped her into participating in the charity,” Kylo grumbled. “Typical politician.”

Luke chuckled, sitting down at his desk. Kylo sat down across from him, crossing his arms over his chest.
“Your mother is always running,” Luke reminded him. “Of course, with a girl like Rey, I’m sure she is both excited to show her off as her future daughter-in-law and use her as a way to bring in funds for the event.”

Kylo didn’t react to his uncle’s mention of Rey officially joining their family, mainly because he was certain it wouldn’t happen. Once Rey found out about the file, she wouldn’t want any part in anything even remotely connected to the Skywalker family.

“Did something else happen?” Luke questioned. “Not that I’m uncomfortable with your typical sullen behavior but it has been a while since I had to put up with it.”

Pinching the bridge of his nose, Kylo shut his eyes. Damn his uncle for being so perceptive.

“That bad, huh?”

“You could say that,” Kylo muttered.

“Whatever it is, you two will figure it out,” his uncle replied.

“Excuse me?” Kylo’s eyes opened and he stared Luke in disbelief. “Weren’t you the one who didn’t want me corrupting your new protege?”

“Yes,” Luke nodded, “but unlike you, I admit to my mistakes and I made a mistake with you and Rey. You two balance one another out. You have a healthier relationship than your parents ever did.”

“That’s not hard to do,” Kylo scoffed.

“I suppose not,” Luke chuckled. “Care to help me organize this,” he waved a hand over his cluttered desk.

“Sure.”
Kylo worked alongside his uncle in companionable silence until Rey finished both her afternoon classes. They were just entering the remaining invoices from last month when she walked into the office.

“Hey,” Rey greeted them both as she took the seat next to Kylo.

“How was class?” Luke asked her.

“Great,” Rey replied, smiling in her normal sunshine way. “They are all coming along so well in their training.”

“I’m glad to hear it,” his uncle responded. Then he shifted his attention to Kylo and back to Rey. “Ben mentioned you had some news?”

“Oh, yeah,” Rey dropped her eyes for a moment, clearly uncertain how to proceed with the discussion.

Kylo wanted to reach over, take her hand, tell her she would be ok, but he was frozen in his spot. All he could see was her broken expression from the dreams.

At night, he struggled to sleep and when he did, he had the same dream over and over. In the dream, Kylo found himself in his office tearing through every drawer and cabinet in search of the file, somehow knowing he wouldn’t be able to find it. Then, just as he’d complete his search, Rey would walk in, the folder in her hand.

She wouldn’t say anything to him. She simply tossed the folder onto the top of his desk in front of him and walked out. He tried to follow her — tried to stop her — but he could never move fast enough.

Each time, he woke in a cold sweat, just as she slammed the door shut on him — on them. The imagery wasn’t lost on him. He needed to fix things before it was too late.

But his fear was that it already was too late.
Rey thought Kylo would help her discuss the transition plan with his uncle, but he had a faraway look in his eyes, as if he wasn’t truly with them. Clearing her throat, she told Luke about her offer from Lando Calrissian.

“Figures that scoundrel would steal my best instructor,’” Luke grumbled in a rather un-zen way. Then, as if remembering himself, he smiled at her. “I’m very happy for you, Rey. What a wonderful opportunity.”

“Thank you,” she blushed, hoping he didn’t think she was ungrateful for all he had done for her. “I asked for a few weeks so I can help you transition all the classes over. Ben is going to pick up where I leave off.”

“I can see you two have already planned this out,” Master Skywalker nodded thoughtfully. “I appreciate you both taking the academy into consideration. I’m sure the students will miss you,” he told Rey.

“I’ll miss them,” she replied honestly.

It was perhaps one of the most challenging parts of accepting her dream job. Knowing she was leaving her students behind felt as though she was abandoning them, which made her feel extremely guilty.

“If you could stay on until Labor Day, I think that would be best,” Luke advised. He agreed the timeline would be best if it aligned with the close of their summer sessions. She’d close out her final classes before the children returned to school. “It has a nice poetry to it, don’t you think?” he had asked Rey. “You came to us in the summer and now you’re leaving with the season.”

“Thank you,” Rey said. “I never thought our tour would turn into a job offer. I don’t mean to leave you in the lurch.”

“Nonsense,” Luke waved his hand at her. “I didn’t expect to have you here forever, Rey. You’re meant for great things. You came here looking for something.” His eyes left hers to focus on Ben, then came back to rest upon her face. “I believe you found it.”
“Me too,” she smiled, reaching over to take Ben’s hand. Her boyfriend smiled at her. She tried not to worry about the fact it didn’t quite reach his eyes.

“Well then,” Luke stood up, pushing his chair back. “All that’s left is one last thing then.”

Rey cocked an eyebrow, unsure what he meant.

“Congratulatory hug.”

She jumped to her feet, forgetting all about Ben’s demeanor, as Luke embraced her. She knew one way or another she’d be back at Ahch-To someday. There was something magical about this place. It had opened her up to the world of martial arts, encouraged her to live on her own and brought her Ben. She’d miss being here.

“Your shift starts soon,” Ben reminded her. “We should get going.”

“Alright,” Rey relented, giving Luke one final hug.

As nervous as she had been to discuss her offer with Luke, she was equally nervous about facing the Rogue One crew now that it was official she would be leaving. Jyn and Cassian were supportive of her choice, acknowledging the fact a bartender wasn’t the career Rey had her heart set on.

Like with her students, she felt as though she was letting her friends down. Everyone at Rogue One meant something to her. Baze and Chirrut always offered sage advice. Bodhi continued to suggest the best music. Jyn and Cassian were the epitome of a perfect marriage. And Kaytoo...well, Kaytoo was Kaytoo. Seeing them all was a part of Rey’s daily routine. They were family just as much as Finn and Poe and Rose and Jess. She’d miss them, even Kaytoo with all his snark and sass.

While Ben drove them to New Jedha, Rey contemplated how often she could visit her squad. Maybe she could guest bartend some nights, if they needed an extra hand. It would give her a chance to catch up while spending time in the bar, which had become sacred in her eyes.

She tried to not worry about the fact Ben still appeared to be worried over something. Earlier when he had asked her to move in, it had seemed to pacify him, but now...well, now he was back to brooding. Rey wasn’t sure if it was from all the sudden changes or something else.
He had mentioned needing to tell her something.

Ben pulled into a vacant spot across the street from the club, tucking the Vanquish away from the other vehicles in the lot.

“Are you sure you are ok?” Rey asked, as she took his hand, walking with him towards the bar.

At first he didn’t respond, thinking over her question. Rey waited patiently, knowing how hard it was for him to open up at times.

“Can we talk, when we get back tonight?” he returned her question with a question. “There’s just some… things I need to tell you.”

Rey stopped walking, taking in the serious tone of his voice and how deeply the lines etched in his face suddenly seemed to be. “Ben, If something is bothering you, we can talk about it now. Whatever it is, it’s not worth holding onto, if it’s making you miserable.”

His eyes flickered to the club entrance. “I don’t want to talk about it here. Can we wait until tonight?”

She gave his hand a squeeze. “Of course.”

Rey made for the door, surprised when he didn’t come with. He stood froze in his spot. She turned to him. “Ben?”

“I love you.”

“I know,” she smiled, rising to her tiptoes to kiss him. “I love you too.”

He hugged her. There was a desperation to the embrace, a layer of uncertainty which scared her, but she brushed it off, telling herself it was just nerves.
Those nerves died when she walked into the club. Inside she found her entire Rogue One squad, Kaytoo included, gathered together to give her a champagne toast.

“To our Rey,” Cassian grinned, lifting his glass, “may she remain a beacon of life in all all her future endeavors.”

“You’ll be missed, little sister,” Baze added.

“To Rey!” Jyn cheered.

The group clinked glasses and downed the pastel pink liquid, the bubbles tickling all the way down Rey’s throat. The squad cheered again, all taking turns hugging Rey and telling her how proud they were of her going off on her own to become a star engineer. Even Kaytoo embraced her, breaking his own rules about touching as he got caught up in the champagne haze.

When Rey set her flute down, she noticed Ben was gone. His glass remained untouched at the edge of the bar.

Kylo felt like a shell of his former self. He went through forms with his students, reiterating how the angles of attack needed to be precise and stopping several times to have them start from the beginning until they were able to go through all twelve motions without fault. To them, it was business as usual, but to him, Kylo had never felt less like himself.

When he was a teenager, dealing with raging hormones and his parents failing marriage, he felt lost. When his uncle told him he was becoming destructive and dangerous, he felt lost. When Snoke laid into him, convinced Kylo wasn’t giving enough in the ring, he felt lost.

But the possibility of Rey no longer being part of his life; that left him feeling desolate and alone.

Once his classes were over, he took his frustration out on the bag, throwing punch after punch uncaring if the skin on his knuckles ripped open or if his hands bruised. The bag toppled over more than once from the strength of his hits. Kylo set it back up and continued to deliver strikes, wearing both the bag and himself out.
By the time his alarm went off to remind him to pick Rey, he was practically gasping for air. It had been his choice to leave Rogue One early, unable to take any more of Rey’s concern for him, but every moment they had been apart drove him mad. He broke every speed limit on his way to the club. It was by sheer dumb luck he wasn’t caught and pulled over.

Rey was waiting for him, sitting on top of the bar with her legs swinging back and forth as she chatted with Cassian and Jyn. Her eyes lit up when she saw him, jumping down instantly and waving goodbye to her managers.

“Hey,” she threw her arms around him, kissing him in greeting. She didn’t mind the fact he was covered in sweat and he loved her all the more for it.

He kissed her back, hungry for her lips, her tongue, every part of her. When they parted, Kylo didn’t bother to say anything, pulling her to him, inhaling the scent of her deeply and committing it to memory.

“Ready to go?” Rey asked eventually.

“Yeah, let's go home,” he replied, taking her hand.

He held her hand the entire drive back to Tatooine, needing to feel her to keep himself from falling apart. The academy was locked up and dark, by the time he parked the Vanquish. Luke had gone home before Kylo finished his final class of the night. It was just them, a fact Kylo was thankful for as they ascended the stairs to Rey’s apartment.

She made for the bedroom, but he directed her to the couch in the living room instead. “Rey, we need to talk,” he reminded her gently.

“Is this about the what you started to tell me in the car?” she asked. “What’s been upsetting you all day?”

Kylo nodded and kneeled before her on the living room floor. “Rey,” he held onto her hands, as he started, watching as the smile slowly left her face. The longer he stared at her the more apparent it became that what he had to say was not what she anticipated.
“Before we started training together, before you hit me,” Kylo paused, giving her a smirk as he remembered how surprised he had been by her impressive aim. Rey didn’t smile back, her intuition serving her well. He cleared his throat and continued. “Before all of it, I didn’t want you here,” he admitted.

“Yeah,” she rolled her eyes. “I know. You made it abundantly clear.”

“I did,” he agreed, his hold on her hands tightening. “I didn’t know you. Luke tried to warn me, but I was so angry about the suspension, about having to come back here...about all of it. And I did something.”

Rey searched his face, as if she could determine what it was he had done merely by scanning his features.

“Ben?”

There was no going back now. She’d most likely hate him, tell him to get out and avoid him like the plague after this. But he had to tell her the truth. He owed it to Rey. He owed her everything.

“I asked Phasma to run a background check on you,” Kylo confessed. Rey’s eyes widened and she yanked her hands out of his grasp. “I thought you were trying to take the studio from me,” he hastily explained. “It was the last thing I had of my grandfather, the only thing I had left of the only family who had never abandoned me. Luke knew how important it was to me and I thought he hired you to spite me. I thought it was another one of his mind games. When I found out you had no training, I wanted to know what your motivations were for being here. It was impulsive and stupid and I’m sorry, Rey. I’m so fucking sorry.”

He watched as her chest heaved, her eyes wide and unbelieving until the magnitude of what he did sunk in. Kylo could pinpoint the exact second Rey realized what it meant.

“So you knew? About Plutt? About my parents? You knew he entire time we were together and you — you lied to me!”

Kylo nodded, somberly.

Her hand flew through the air, landing a resounding crack against his cheek. The impact of her palm
burned but it was nothing compared to the pain aching in his chest at the sight of her losing faith in him.

After years of having everyone put in him a box — his mother wanted a perfect son, his uncle wanted a perfect apprentice, Snoke wanted a perfect fighter — Rey had been the first one to see him for who he was. Even if he was broken and terrible at communicating, she had found a way to slip through the cracks and breathe new life into him with her glorious light.

And now it was over.

“H-how could you?” her voice cracked, as her head fell into her hands.

Kylo couldn’t bare to hear her cries. Knowing he was the reason for them was excruciating. Hurting Rey had been his original plan but now he had achieved it and he wanted nothing in the world more than to take it all back. It was the single worst decision of his life.

“I-,” there were no excuses he could give her to justify what he had done.

“So this,” she gestured between them, “this was all so you could make sure the academy passed on to you?”

“No,” he instantly rebuked.

“Is that why you got me the meeting with Lando? So you could get me out of the way?”

His heart plummeted. *No, no, no.* This was spiraling out of control. Not only was he losing her trust, he was losing her. Rey was collapsing in on herself, her insecurities talking control of her as she became overwhelmed by his truth.

“Sweetheart,” Kylo grabbed her hands, holding on despite her attempts to pull away. “That’s not why I took you to see him. I called in a favor because I knew it was your dream.”

“Because you read my file!” she snapped.
Ok, I deserve that, he thought, biting back a response so he didn’t appear to be arguing with her. Fighting with her wasn’t going to solve this. He didn’t want to end up like his parents. He thought of the techniques Dr. Connix had taught him in his sessions and how important it was to remain calm. Kylo quelled his frustration, loosening his grip on her to allow her to jerk away of she chose to.

She did.

He grimaced. “Rey, listen to me,” he begged. “I need you to hear the rest of it and then if you want me to leave, I will.”

Her eyes were burning with fury when she glanced up at him. “Then go, because I’m about ten seconds away from kicking you out of here.”

“Alright, alright,” he held up his hands in surrender. “Can I at least get you a glass of water first? I don’t want you to get a headache.”

Rey nodded, eyes dropping to the floor.

Kylo rose with a sigh and went to retrieve a glass from her kitchen and a box of tissues. The further away he stepped from her the deeper the ache in his body burrowed.

Rey felt as if she was trapped in a nightmare, one which was strangling the life out of her but no matter what she did, she couldn’t wake up.

Ben — Kylo — had known!

He had known everything about her before they had ever started… whatever it was they were doing. No that wasn’t right. He knew what he was doing. He was using her, manipulating her the same way Plutt had in order to get what he wanted. Rey was the one who didn’t know what she was doing. She dove head first into the relationship, despite the warnings from Luke, despite the warnings from Finn, and now… well, now she was going to reap what she sowed.
Stupid, girl, she thought sullenly. When are you going to learn? You’re nothing.

“You’re not nothing,” Ben muttered, kneeling before her. He held out a cool glass of water in one hand and a box of tissues in another.

She must have spoken the words out loud. Shaking her head, Rey grabbed for the water, drinking down the entire glass before handing it back to him. Next, she reached for the tissues, not caring how terrible she looked. It wasn’t as if it mattered anymore.

Ben wasn’t hers. He had never been hers.

“Rey?”

“Talk,” she demanded, holding onto her anger.

If she started to cry again and mourn her relationship, she’d only want him. Her sorrow would overwhelm her. Her need to feel him console her would outweigh her practical thoughts. Rey knew if she reached for him there would be no turning back and that was something she couldn’t allow. Even now, despite knowing what he had done, she wanted him to hold her, to wrap her up in his strong arms and tell her it would be ok.

The survivor in her kept her from making a fool of herself.

“You have five minutes, Kylo,” she hissed. “Speak or get out.”

He flinched at the use of his new name.

There, that was good.

“Would you like more water?”
The concern in his voice sounded so genuine. It was as if he truly did care for her, regardless of his wayward intentions in the beginning. If only that were true.

“Four minutes and forty-five seconds,” she reminded him, hugging a throw pillow to keep herself from focusing on how beaten he appeared.

“Okay,” he sighed. “I never did anything with the file,” Ben continued. “I read it but I never took action. I couldn’t. There was a picture in the file of you, before you went to Plutt’s and I… .” she heard him struggle to come up with the words. “All I could see was this little girl and it made me think of how scared I had been growing up. I saw myself in you. I started to think you’d understand me, understand where I was coming from. It was why I suggested training. I thought I could convince you to join me at the First Order.”

She snorted. They both knew that would never have happened. “So what changed?” she demanded.

“Once I started to get to know you, I stopped reading the file. Then you blacked out and it scared me. I saw the kind of affect Plutt had on you. I didn’t want to be him. Plutt is just like Snoke, manipulative and condescending. I didn’t want to be a monster. So I stopped projecting what I wanted on you. Instead, I focused solely on you. I wanted to know the real you, not the you who was a bunch of facts on paper and a number in the system.”

Rey felt the blade in her heart twist. How could he say such things to her? Couldn’t he see how hard it was for her to hear? Did he want her to be in pain. She bit the inside of her mouth, holding off more tears. Rey reminded herself to remain angry. She had to hold onto her rage, had to let it consume her so she’d be protected.

“The more time I spent with you, the more drawn to you I became. At first I was convinced it was because you were a skilled fighter — the first who had been an actual challenge for me in a long time — but then my fascination turned to... something more and I fell in love with you.”

A sob escaped her lips and Rey clutched to the pillow like it was her lifeline. She couldn’t hear this. Not now. Not ever.

“Rey,” he reached for her and she shrank back. He withdrew immediately, looking stricken. “I do love you. That has always been true. This,” he mimicked her prior gesture, “this has always been real.”
“Then why lie? Why not tell me?” Rey pleaded between sobs. She couldn’t stop the flood of tears once it began.

“Sweetheart,” Ben moved to hold her and she instinctively pulled away. He settled back on his heels, running a hand through his hair, uncertain how to proceed.

“I didn’t want to lose you,” he admitted selfishly. “I couldn’t lose you. You were the first thing in my life I ever truly wanted.”

“Because I’m just another prize?” she hiccuped as the crying worsened.

“Rey, I’m not a good man,” he told her. “I warned you from the beginning. But the thing is, when I’m with you, I want to be a good man. I want to be better. You make me want to be better. You made me believe I could be more than just a fighter in the ring. You made me think I could have a real life, a happy one. You did that. I didn’t deserve you when you gave me a second chance and I still don’t deserve you. I probably never will, but please, know that I didn’t lie about us or how I feel about you. I could never lie about something like that. Not to you.”

She couldn’t even seen him. Her eyes felt like a faucet opened to the max. Tears rolled down her face, dampening the top of the pillow. Her heart felt as if it had exploded in her chest, the initial blast due to his lie and the shrapnel digging into parts of her as he confessed his feelings to be true. It was too much. It was all too much.

“Rey, sweetheart, I am so sorry,” Ben wrapped himself around her. She didn’t have the strength to push him away this time. “God, am I sorry,” his voice cracked and Rey felt hot tears spilling onto her shoulder.

He was crying too.

“Please. Please. Please,” he chanted, as he clutched her the way she was clutching the pillow. “I can’t be without you. All this time, all those years before you I was looking for something. I needed a place to belong but nowhere fit. Nowhere until you. You’re what I’ve been looking for. I can’t lose you, Rey.”

Maz’s cryptic words from weeks ago played in Rey’s head.
There are times when we embark down a path with the best of intentions, but no matter how hard we try, we get lost. We lose our way and our purpose.

At the time Maz has spoken the words, Rey wasn’t sure of the meaning. Now, however, now she understood.

Despite how raw and exposed she felt, Rey allowed herself to sink into Ben’s embrace, her arms leaving the pillow to hug him back. The moment she did, she heard him gasp, his hold tightening until he was nearly crushing her. Her shoulder and neck became soaked, his breathing ragged against her ear. He mumbled words she couldn’t make out, clinging to her with every ounce of his being.

And Rey felt his pain washing over hers.

If we didn’t break apart, there would be no cracks to let the light in, Maz had said.

As if they were dueling tornados, they both spiraled around one another, full of hurt, rage, sadness. The vision of them attacking each other, trying to overpower the opposite gave her an idea.

“Let’s go downstairs.”

Kylo wasn’t sure he had heard Rey correctly. One minute they were holding onto one another desperately, both crying, both breaking open under the weight of his confessions and the next she was leading him down to the darkened studio.

He cast her a wary glance. “What are we doing?” His voice was still hoarse.

“If you meant what you said upstairs,” Rey began, falling into a starting stance, “then prove it.”

This was not what he expected. “Y-you want me to fight you?”
Rey nodded. “We started this on the mat, what better place to work things out?”

*Work things out? Did that mean-*

“And don’t hold back,” she ordered.

*Little minx.*

“Well, for you, sweetheart,” he smirked. “You asked for it.”

Kylo charged at her, impressed when she didn’t flinch or step back from his advance. When he swung his right arm around for a hook, Rey dropped, kicking out her leg. She caught him around the ankle and he stumbled forward, nearly face planting.

“The bigger they are, the harder the fall,” she teased, coming to stand over him.

He kicked out her legs, grinning when she yelled and fell back into her ass. “I recall telling you just this morning to mind your surroundings,” Kylo retorted.

“Touché,” she huffed, quickly getting to her feet.

Moving to strike again, Kylo rounded on her. Rey narrowly dodged his attack, ducking out of the way and rolling forward to put enough distance between them so she could launch a counter-attack.

*Good.*

They lost themselves to the frenzied attack. Rey yelled and snarled like the wildcat he knew she was and in turn he roared back. Any lingering doubt he had about the future of their relationship dissolved the longer they sparred. He could see light coming back to Rey’s eyes, the angry fury morphing into a stubborn determination to win at all costs.

Rey got the first strike, but Kylo pinned her first. He caught her against the mirror, trapping her wrists against the glass as he towered over her. “I think you like this,” he panted, watching her eyes
widen. “I think it turns you on.”

“Maybe,” she replied coyly, before wrapping a leg around him and twisting them so they both fell to the ground. She managed to get out of his hold and pinned him to the floor. “But I know it turns you on.”

There was no hiding his erection, so he tried to kiss her. Rey pulled away smacking her hands against his chest, still angry with him despite her teasing prior.

They went on this way, testing the waters, circling each other with heated gazes and tempting smiles. Sweat rolled down his back and drenched his shirt. He could see droplets running down Rey’s temple, but neither would yield. Their breathing had become labored from the exertion, yet they continued, pushing themselves regardless of the late hour.

“So when you asked me to move in with you, was that real or a cover up?” Rey asked, as she let loose a front snap kick, aimed for his groin.

“Easy there,” he chided, barely blocking her hit. “And yes, it was real. I was planning on asking you before Lando offered you the job.”

Rey straightened up, momentarily distracted. “Really?”

Kylo tackled her to the ground, trapping her arms at her sides. Rey grunted, as she landed on the mat with him on top of her. “Really,” he smirked, before holding stealing a kiss.

“Ben!”

“What?”

“Not fair,” she insisted.

“Uh uh uh, sweetheart,” he made a taking sound at her. “You said we were going to fight this out. All’s fair and all that.”
A mischievous glint appeared in her eyes. “Oh?” Kylo felt her roll her hips, rocking herself up against him.

There wasn’t a single doubt in his mind of what her intentions were. “You’re playing a dangerous game, Rey.”

“All’s fair and all that,” she parroted back at him.

“Indeed,” he growled, before rolling them over so she was straddling his hips. He kept his hands on her hips, making sure she pressed down exactly where he needed her to.

“Mmmmm,” Rey ground down on him, her hands on his abdomen, keeping herself balanced on top of him.

Kylo was fully hard, hearing her moan as she worked herself against him. What was it that people said about make-up sex? It was the best? He needed to test that theory.

“Sweetheart,” his voice came out huskier than he meant. “Let’s go back upstairs.”

He’d be lying if he said he hadn’t thought about taking her in the studio. There was something devious and deliciously wrong about doing it there, which was why it was so appealing. Of course, he hadn’t expected he’d be getting the chance to do it anytime soon, especially not tonight.

“Why?” she whined.

“We can’t do this here,” he answered.

“We can,” Rey nibbled on his lower lip, one hand snaking into her jeans pocket. She pulled out a condom.

“Fuck, I love you,” Kylo grabbed her face, kissing her.
“Show me,” she demanded.

Kylo shifted her in his arms, scooping her up and carrying her over to the counter where Rey normally put her notes out for class. He sat her down, then helped her shuck off her jeans, followed back her panties. “Lean back,” he told her, pressing a hand on her flat stomach. Rey did as he instructed, balancing her weight on her hands, as she arched back, keeping the heels of her feet planted on the edge of the countertop.

He ran his hands up her thighs, pushing them apart, so he could lean down in between. Kylo gave a tentative lick along her folds, earning him a moan, as one of Rey’s hands nestled into his hair. He took it as a sign to continue, lapping at the slickness he found there. She tasted sweet like honey and his tongue eagerly searched for more, delving into her folds. Her body shook at the sensation.

Pressing a finger into her, Kylo thrust gently into her heat. The pad of his thumb applied pressure along her hood, moving in slow circles, as he worked his finger in and out of her. Rey keened above him, both hands carding through his tresses as she cried out his name.

“Need you, “ she panted. “Please.”

Remembering how he had caught her earlier, Kylo picked Rey up, bringing her over to the front wall. “Hands on the mirror, sweetheart,” he guided her, while unbuckling his pants. Kylo stepped out of his jeans and hastily unrolled the condom over his member.

Rey stood facing the mirror, her palms flat against the cool glass. When he had looked down at his cock, she had removed the remainder of her clothes, leaving her bare as the day she was born. Smirking, he ripped his t-shirt off over his head, matching her state of undress. It was only fair.

“Ready?” he asked, one hand on her hip and one hand on his shaft.

“Yes,” she breathed.

Kylo snapped his hips forward, entering her with a sharp thrust. Rey screamed his name, her center clenching around him. He growled, ducking his head down to her earlobe. “You’re so tight, sweetheart. You feel so good.”

“I love you,” she sighed and his heart nearly burst.
She loved him. Despite everything he had done, all the sins he had yet to atone for, she loved him. Whatever higher power that was out there watching over him, he thanked a thousand times over and promised he’d spend the rest of his days showering her with love and devotion, if only to hear her say those three little words again and again.

“I love you, Rey,” he breathed against her neck. He planted a chaste kiss there, before pulling out and slamming back in.

He set a punishing pace, his hips canting to a rapid rhythm. He interlocked one hand with Rey’s watching her expression in the mirror, as she arched back to meet his thrusts. Her pupils were blow, lips parted and her hair was coming out of her buns. She looked disheveled and wild. She was utterly perfect.

“Look at me, sweetheart,” Kylo told her, as he felt himself reaching his peak. The hand which had been on her hip slid down to her clit, rubbing the nub until she spasmed uncontrollably around him. “Look at me, Rey. I want to see you.”

Her eyes snapped to him and the second he caught her gaze they both crested, falling over the precipice and into pure satisfaction. Kylo slapped his hands out onto the mirror, keeping his body upright so as not to collapse on her. Rey was breathing heavily, far more heavily than when they had been sparing and there was a decadent flush covering her skin.

“And you didn’t think fighting would work for us,” she winked at him in the mirror.

“I stand corrected,” he chuckled. “So does this mean you forgive me?”

Rey made a face at him. “I’m not sure. We might have to try that again.”

“Whatever you need, sweetheart.”

Chapter End Notes

Come say hi or drop me a message on tumblr @wewantreylo!

Up next...the Gala! (for real this time)
Chapter Summary

In which Kylo and Rey go to Leia's Gala...

Chapter Notes

Thank you to my beta, @abyssalspark.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Rey woke to the shrill chime of her alarm. With a groan, her hand flopped around reaching for where her cell was. Only she couldn’t. Her body was trapped in a pair of thick warm arms.
“Ben.”

No response.

“Ben.”

Nothing.

“Ben Solo, if you don’t wake up, I’m going to kick you out of this bed!”

“Five more minutes,” he grumbled into her hair, his arms tightening around her.

“No,” she struggled against him. “I have to get up. I have classes to teach and I need my tea before that.”

“Not my fault you demanded three rounds last night,” he huffed.

Rey bit back the smile threatening to overtake her face. It was true they had only gotten a couple hours of sleep due to her insatiable need for him. Once they started having makeup sex, she couldn’t stop craving it. It was as if she was truly alive for the first time in her life. Everything was more heated, more urgent. It was intoxicating.

But she couldn’t think of that now.
“It doesn’t change the fact I still have to get up,” she wiggled around to shove against his chest.

Finally he relented, allowing her to fetch her phone and silence the alarm.

“Come back to bed,” he demanded, his dark eyes watching her as she walked to the bathroom.

“No, you get up and come with me,” she countered. Ben made an exasperated face, but didn’t argue. Smiling because she knew she could hold out longer than he could, Rey shut the door and hopped in the shower.

Neither of them had bothered with showering the evening prior. Just like they hadn’t bothered to get dressed. Rey had scoured the studio floor to make sure they hadn’t left any hints of what they had done. She wouldn’t be able to face Luke if he knew how they had desecrated his academy.

Just as she was lathering up her hair, she felt a pair of hands snake around her hips and over her stomach.

“Ben, what are you doing?”

“Saving time and water,” he replied, reaching around her for the body wash. “Mmmm, vanilla and peaches.”

Rey giggled. “Not your usual scent profile?”

“Not even close.”
As she continued to get clean, she felt his eyes burning into her back. At first, she assumed Ben was trying to figure out if they had time for another round but when he didn’t make a move, she glanced over her shoulder to find him simply watching her.

“Ben? You’re staring.”

“Just waiting for you to come to your senses and leave,” he responded, softly.

Rey turned around, cupping his face in her hands, as the warm water splashed across her back. “I’m not going anywhere,” she promised. “That’s not to say I’m not mad, because I am, but…”

“But?” he questioned.

“But,” she continued, “when you told me about your grandfather and how much this place connected you to him, I understood. I can’t fault you for feeling like Luke ignored you and disregarded your wishes. From your perspective, it must have seemed rather suspicious that I just showed up out of nowhere and that your uncle would let me move in.”

“If I had known then what I know now,” he started, but she interrupted him.

“It was before us,” Rey confirmed. “You aren’t that man anymore.”

“I’m not,” he vowed, taking one of her hands and turning it over so he could kiss the underside of her palm.

“From now on though, we talk about things, alright?” Rey told him. “Even if you think I will be upset, you need to be honest with me.”
He nodded. “Of course.”

“That’s all I ask,” she kissed him gently. “And maybe some more makeup sex.”

“I think I can live with those terms.”

Kylo drove Rey into town, holding her hand the entire way. The air between them was nearly cleared and even though he still had a great deal to prove, he wasn’t consumed by his fear of losing her. They were meant to be. No matter what Snoke and his peons had planned, he’d deal with them. They weren’t getting between him and Rey. He wouldn’t let them.

“Rey?”

“Yeah?”

“About the file,” he began, remembering his promise to be honest with her about all things. “There was a hard copy I kept in my desk at home.”

“Was?”

“Hux and Phasma took it,” he explained.
Rey furrowed her brow. “Why would they want information on me?”

“For Snoke,”

“Your boss?” she asked, confused.

He took a deep breath, steadying himself as he prepared to tell her why it was significant to his employer. “The night of your birthday party, I told Phasma and Hux I was planning on retiring. They didn’t agree with the decision. I think they took the file out of retaliation.”

“Retaliation? What does that even mean?”

“My contract with Snoke is up at the end of the year,” Kylo informed her. “And if I know him and how he works, he’ll try to use you against me to get me to sign another contract and remain with the First Order. He’ll probably be at the Gala.”


He licked his lips, wondering if it was too much to tell her. Be honest. Rey chooses for Rey, he coached himself.

“For you,” he clarified. “I don’t want to be traveling when I could be home with you. The ring, all the promotional events and the training hours aren’t worth it, if it means I’ll never see you.”

“But Ben,” Rey squeezed his hand, “what will you do?”
“I have a plan, don’t worry,” he chuckled. “I’m thinking of reaching out to one of my contacts about starring in a video game.”

“Really?” she seemed surprised by his answer. “Is that something you’re interested in?”

“It is if it pays the bills and keeps my travel to a minimum so I can spend time with you.”

“Ben.” Her tone was unsure, as if she wasn’t pleased by his plan.

“All my life no one has ever put me first, Rey. No one, until you,” he said. “You don’t treat me like a mistake or an obligation. You treat me as a person. And now that we’re together, all I want to do is have the freedom to do the same and prove to you I can be a better man. I want to be there for you, to put you first.”

It was quiet as he pulled the Vanquish into the only available spot by Kanata Kaffeine. Turning the vehicle off, Kylo shifted in his seat to look at his girlfriend. Rey was faced away from him but in the passenger window reflection he saw her tears.

“Sweetheart, are you crying?” He panicked. “Rey, I’m sorry. I should have told you about my plans to retire. I just thought-.”

“No, no, it’s not that,” she interrupted him. “I just...” Rey trailed off, glancing up at him through blurry eyes. “No one has ever loved me as much as you do.”

Kylo’s heart broke for his girl. His sweet, darling girl who gave so much of herself to everyone and who still couldn’t understand how precious she was.

“Rey,” he unbuckled his seat belt so he could reach across the gearshift to gather her up in his arms.
“Sweetheart, I love you so much, more than I can say. You have to know that. Please know that.”

“I do,” she nodded into his chest, gripping onto his shirt. “I know you love me, Ben.”

“Good, that’s good,” Kylo soothed her, rubbing her back and whispering how much he loved her over and over again until she quieted.

“Sorry,” she sniffled, wiping the tears from her eyes.

“We’ve has an intense week,” he told her, tucking an errant strand of hair from her face. “You’re allowed to cry on my shoulder anytime.”

“Thank you.”

“Let’s get your tea, shall we?” he suggested.

They entered Kanata Kaffeine hand in hand, saying good morning to several regulars before standing before Rose and Maz at the counter.

“Good morning,” Rose greeted them cheerily. “The usual, I assume?”

“You assume correct,” Kylo replied, stuffing his usual tip into the jar.

“I assume you two had an interesting evening,” Maz commented, glancing between the couple. Rey went scarlet, while Kylo struggled to keep his own reaction from showing. “Ah huh, that’s what I thought,” Maz winked at them.
She gathered up the dirty dishes from a side counter, taking them to the back, a knowing smirk on her lips the entire time. Once she was out of earshot, Rey faced Kylo.

“How does she know?”

“That woman knows everything,” he responded, shaking his head. “She’s always been that way.”

As if she knew they were discussing her, Maz came back out, wearing the same grin. “So,” she started, eyes on Rey, “Rose tells me you’re leaving us for your dream job.”

“Yes,” Rey smiled brilliantly. “I start at Cloud City after the holiday.”

“Congratulations, child,” Maz smiled warmly. “I’m happy for you, for both of you,” she added, as she took in Kylo’s proximity. “I’m sure your parents are delighted you’re finally speaking with them.”

“Mom is already using Rey against me and Dad seems to have found another fan,” Kylo muttered.

“Mom and Dad, eh?” Maz raised her eyebrows. “Well that’s certainly something I haven’t heard come out of your mouth in a while.”

Kylo didn’t respond. He knew Maz was pleased. She didn’t need to rub it in.

“You two will come to visit, right?” the coffee shop owner asked.
“Of course!” Rey immediately replied. “I told Luke I’d be back to help teach classes every now and then, once we are settled.”


“Thank you, Maz,” they chorused back, taking their leave.

“You can thank me by inviting me to the wedding,” she called after them.

Both Rey and Kylo went red, as the elderly woman cackled and neither one spoke of her assumptions on the drive to Ahch-To.

Maz’s comment wasn’t the only trying part of Rey’s day. Her announcement to her morning classes was received well. Since the early kickboxing session was primarily made up of middle-aged females, they were all delighted to find out Ben would be their new trainer, even if it was only for the next four months. Rey squashed her jealousy by looping an arm around Ben’s waist and eyeing each of her pupils.

He teased her mercilessly about it as they went to her apartment to sleep. They even skipped lunch. By the time Rey’s afternoon alarm sounded, she was feeling much better,

Until Temiri.

When it came to the afternoon sessions, the reaction to her departure was slightly different. Telling her students had been harder than speaking with Jyn or Luke. Her pupils, young and old had become
constants in her life and it was difficult to face their disappointment. Though everyone appeared happy on the surface, she sensed some had reservations about the fact Master Luke’s nephew would be taking over her classes.

Her unofficial favorite student took it personally when she shared her news with his class. While the other students and parents congratulated her on her opportunity to work at one of the best companies in the world, Temiri flared at Ben with pure loathing. The young boy instantly blamed him for Rey’s choice to accept the position at Cloud City. In fact, Temiri made a point of shoving his shoulder into Ben when he left to wait out front for his mom to pick him up.

“He’ll get over it,” Master Luke assured her, as Rey watched the scene.

“I’ll talk to him,” Ben surprised them both by saying.

He followed the boy outside, while Luke and Rey watching curiously from the waiting room. For a few minutes, the two sat together talking. Temiri stiff and not facing Ben. Then, the boy whipped around to look at his new instructor. Rey couldn’t make out what they were talking about, but whatever it was, it had Temiri’s attention. Ben sat with her favorite student until his mother arrived a few minutes later.

When he returned inside, both Rey and Luke were waiting expectantly for him. “Well?” Rey asked.

“I took care of it,” he grinned.


“Sort of,” Ben admitted. “I told him that if he wanted to, he could stay here and do his homework. Then I’ll drive him home in the Vanquish. I figured it would keep him out of trouble and give his mom a break.”
“Ben Solo,” Rey grinned. “You secret softie.”

“Don’t advertise,” he pretended to hush her, as Luke rolled his eyes and walked out to the zen garden. “I have a reputation to uphold, after all.”

“Ok,” she laughed and made a zippering gesture across her mouth.

“Let’s go,” Ben shook his head at her, placing a hand gently on her lower back to direct her upstairs. “You need more sleep before you work at the bar tonight.”

“More sleep,” Rey asked, once they were upstairs, “or more sleep ?”

“Don’t tempt me, sweetheart,” he groaned.

She wasn’t sure when she became so sex crazed, but she couldn’t get the thrill of their activities out of her head. Regardless of all the big changes happening around her, the pleasurable experience was playing on repeat in her brain.

As it was, they did actually sleep. Rey didn’t want to disappoint Leia by showing up tomorrow yawning and requiring more than a normal serving of caffeine in order to make it through the evening. The few extra hours did feel good, not as good as what she actually craved, but still nice. Ben wrapped himself around her, the same way he had that morning. Despite their conversations over his confession, he was still reluctant to give her too much space. Rey didn’t mind.

Rogue One was busy, as it usually was on a Friday night. Word of Rey’s career change had made its way through the regulars like wildfire. She saw dozens of familiar faces and received a massive increase in her tips, as the patrons she had waited on over the last two months gave her their well wishes. It made her decision to leave that much harder. The long hours and chaotic schedule were not hard to deal with when she worked with wonderful people like Jyn and Cassian and when she
had such generous customers.

Kaytoo put things into perspective for her, when he made a comment about her getting tipped for leaving. In his opinion it was because people were glad she was leaving, since he was the superior bartender.

“Let him have this one,” Jyn advised her, shaking her head. “I think he’s going to miss you.”

Rey smiled, agreeing with her manager. Towards the end of her shift, she marched over to the tall imposing blonde, and hugged him.

“Wh-what are you doing?” he questioned, baffled by her show of affection.

“I’ll miss you, Kaytoo.”

“I’m sure you will,” he snarked, peeling her arms off of him. Once freed, he stalked off to the backroom.

“Told ya,” Jyn laughed, shaking her head as she watched the blonde disappear.

“He doesn’t know how to deal with his feelings,” Cassian agreed, chuckling.

“Didn’t you tell him I was planning on coming back to guest bartend?” Rey asked.

“Nope,” Jyn snickered, as she poured the final drink before they announced last call. “And we’re going to leave it that way.”
“You’re cruel, *mi amor,*” Cassian shook his head, closing out a tab.

Baze and Chirrut were escorting the last of the patrons from the dance floor, when Kaytoo finally reappeared. Kylo was sitting in his usual spot, drinking the whiskey Cassian poured for him. When he commented to the blonde bartender about his absence, Kaytoo mentioned needing to check the inventory since the others couldn’t be trusted. Rey, Cassian, and Jyn all knew better.

Once Rey finished up with her end of the night items, Kylo asked, “Ready to go home, sweetheart?”

“Home,” she smiled up at him.

It had a nice ring to it.

The next day was a flurry of activity. From the moment they woke in Kylo’s apartment, to when he was shoved out of his own bedroom by Miia Mali, he was reminded this event was a marathon, not a sprint. The stylist arrived promptly at four o’clock to begin getting Rey prepared for the gala.

Miia had served his mother loyally for years. Despite her rather eccentric personality, she was the best in the business. Like his mother, Miia was short, though she was a bit more on the stout side. Her white hair was piled on top of her hair in a great bun and her lips were always stained blood red. Today she wore a black collared dress with white go-go boots, as though she was about to be filmed for a sixties themed music video.

“You,” she pointed a pale finger at Kylo. “Out! And you,” she turned her attention to Han, who was sitting idly in the living room reading the newspaper. “Get ready!”
“Huh?”

“You heard me, Han Solo,” the petite woman snapped. “Get going!”

“It’s a tux, Miia,” he argued. “Not a ballgown. I can be in and out in five minutes.”

Apparently that was absolutely not what the woman wanted to hear. She screamed at his father and when she noticed Kylo chuckling by the kitchen, she fixed him with a glare. “You too, boy.”

Kylo’s laughter died in his throat when he caught the serious expression the small woman was shooting his way. This time it was Rey’s turn to laugh from where she was peeking out his bedroom door. He assumed the sight of the two Solo men being bossed around by such a tiny woman was amusing.

“Get back in that room, girl!” Miia barked, sending Rey hurrying inside. She leveled her eyes at the men in the living room. “When I get done with the girl, you both better be presentable or we will have words. Capice?”

Han smacked his lips together with a dramatic hand gesture, while Kylo merely nodded.

They went to the guest bedroom, Kylo grabbing his garment and taking it to the bathroom while Han commandeered the space for himself. Kylo tried not to burst into his own bedroom each time he heard Rey gripe or snap ‘Ow’ at Miia. He didn’t need to be hit by two women before the gala.

As he was buttoning up his crisp white dress shirt, Kylo heard a knock at the door. “Son, you decent?” Han grumbled from the hallway. “I need help with the tie. Never could get these things right.”
“Come in,” Kylo told him, shaking his head at his father’s constant inability to deal with his mother’s dress code. Han would have shown up in wrinkled jeans and his old pilot jacket if Leia would permit it. Needless to say, she wouldn’t. Ever.

“Do you know how to do yours?” Han quipped, edging where Kylo’s tie was laying out on the sink counter.

“Yeah, Dad,” he sighed. “I’ve been tying my own for years now.”

“Uh, right,” Han responded awkwardly. Kylo fixed the black tie for his father, stepping back when Han was completely dressed and ready for Miia’s inspection. “Sorry, I was around for this kind of thing,” Han apologized after a long pause between them. “I wasn’t there to teach you how to do things like this, things you might need when you met the right girl.”

“It’s fine, Dad,” Kylo insisted. “You’re here now.”

And surprisingly, he meant it.

If Rey could forgive him for keeping such a huge secret from her, he could learn to forgive his father for leaving. As Rey had pointed out, he wasn’t the same man he had been before. The same could be said for Han Solo. Kylo had never seen him try so hard before. Maybe this was a turning point for both of them.

“I hope Rey is faring better than us,” Han chuckled, quickly changing the subject before things got uncomfortable. “That woman scares me almost as much as your mother.”

“Miia or Rey,” Kylo chuckled.
Han pretended to think about it for a moment before smirking, “Both.”

“Boys,” a shrill cry came from the living room.

“Here we go,” Han rolled his eyes.

Kylo followed his father out but when he reached the end of the hallway he froze. Rey was a vision. She was dressed in a simple black gown, which fell off her shoulders, displaying her tanned skin with a hint of cleavage. Her hair was down in soft curls around her angelic face and her makeup was minimal, only enough to accentuate her natural beauty. And those eyes—

—he could see an explosion of gold flecks across her green irises.

Breathing was difficult when she looked as lovely as she did just standing there smiling at him.

“What do you think?” she asked expectantly.

Kylo couldn’t come up with words to describe what he thought. His mind had short-circuited at the sight of her. All he could think was how much more stunning she’d look in white.

With a veil and flowers in her hands.

Walking towards him.

“Hey, kid,” Han slapped him on the back. “That’s your cue.”
He came to his senses, pushing away the vision. It was too soon for those thoughts. They had to get through the gala and the impending confrontation with Snoke first. Then he could think on their future and how long was long enough to wait before asking his girlfriend to become a permanent fixture in his life.

Kylo went to her, taking her hands. “Rey, you are beautiful,” he told her, instantly knowing it wasn’t enough. No words were enough to describe how she looked.

“Thank you,” Rey flushed, her eyes dropping for a second. “You look rather dashing.” She reached up to straighten his tie, when Miia rushed forward and smacked her hand away.

The growl that escaped Kylo wasn’t missed, but Miia didn’t cower away. She merely adjusted the tie herself before telling all three of them to stop fooling around with sentiments and get to the gala.

“Don’t ruin my masterpiece,” the stylist yelled, as she waved goodbye them.

Han waited for her to disappear before joking, “We all know she’s talking about me.”

Rey had never seen anything like the glamorous ballroom Leia chose for the gala. The chamber was large enough to fit Ahch-To in its entirety though with the lighting design, it still managed to feel comfortable and welcoming. The pink and purple hues were dim, casting an intimate glow about the room. Tables were situated along the back and sides of a wide dance floor, which was arranged by a stage for the auction and band. It was a practical set up, though Rey hadn’t expected any less from Senator Organa.

She turned to ask Ben about where they were sitting when Leia appeared. “Good, you’re all here,” the host for the evening greeted them briskly, as she looped an arm through Rey’s. “I need to steal
“Will do, Princess,” Han saluted her.

Leia rolled her eyes muttering something that sounded like ‘scruffy nerf herder,’ which wasn’t a thing so Rey assumed she heard it wrong. “The bar is open,” Leia grumbled, pointing to the corner of the room.

“That’s where we’ll be then,” Han replied. “Say goodbye to your girl and let’s have a whiskey,” he suggested to Ben.

“See you later,” Ben leaned down, pressing a kiss to her hair.

“I’ll be the one in the dress,” Rey smiled.

“I’ll be the one outbidding everyone else,” Ben promised.

He stared at her until Leia dragged Rey behind a curtain off to the side of the room. Once Ben was gone from her sight, Rey noticed the senator was leading her towards the stage. The entered a closed off area which housed a few dressing rooms and tables. The backstage area had several assistants and nine other women dressed in floor length gowns, like Rey’s, though none of their dressed exposed their midriff or shoulders to the extent Rey’s did.

“Ladies,” Leia called their attention. “This is Rey, my future daughter-in-law. She’s going to be taking up slot number ten to close out the evening.” Everyone gave a curt nod of understanding before getting back to whatever it was they were doing prior to the interruption. “I’ll leave you to it,” Leia squeezed Rey’s shoulders. “You’re going to be great.”
With that, Senator Organa left Rey alone and wondering what on Earth she had gotten herself into.

By the time Kylo and his father had acquainted themselves with the bartender, the gala was in full swing. The room, once empty save for them and the employees, was now bustling with people dressed in their finest. As the guests paraded around, Kylo asked for a refill and excused himself from the bar, which was rapidly becoming the most popular spot in the place.

Han didn’t want to be bothered with introductions and opted to venture off in search of their table. Kylo chose to lean back against a hightop, off to the side of the bar, sipping his whiskey as he scanned the competition. There were several eligible bachelors in attendance, all of whom he assumed would place a bid for Rey and all of whom he’d beat one way or another.

As he surveyed the room, his eyes locked on a familiar duo. If the fiery red hair of Armitage Hux wasn’t an indicator of where Kylo’s managed was seated, the statuesque blonde standing aside of him would have been. Phasma stood taller than normal in heels. When she caught Kylo staring at her across the room, she raised her glass in a mock toast.

Taking her gesture as an invitation, Kylo crossed the room in a few determined strides. “Fancy seeing you two here,” he greeted them, though his tone demonstrated how unsurprised he was. The First Order had somehow managed to not only score invitations to the event, but an entire table.

“And you, Ren,” Hux took a sip of his gin, while Phasma sat down at their table.

“Last I checked, neither of you were on the guest list,” Kylo commented. “Who is your benefactor?”

“Me,” a calloused voice interjected.
Kylo felt the blood in his veins run cold. He pivoted around to face Anthony Snoke, the owner of the First Order and the man who currently possessed Rey’s file.

“Good evening, Kylo Ren,” the older man sneered. “I must say, this is a pleasant surprise. I would have thought you were far too busy with your community service to attend. After all, you’ve been so dedicated to serving your time you haven’t stopped by the gym once.”

Kylo swallowed, hearing the unspoken jab loud and clear. “My mother invited me,” he replied evenly. “She thought it would aid my come back from a PR perspective.”

“Politicians,” Snoke scoffed. “They would know how to manipulate the public eye better than anyone.”

Clenching his fists at his side, Kylo remained impassive. Snoke wouldn’t bring up the file right away. He wanted to draw this out, torture Kylo while he had his undivided attention. It was all a game to him. Kylo needed to wait until the owner spoke of his leverage to understand how to combat the threat.

“Are you here alone?” Snoke questioned, his eyes flitting about the room.

“No.”

“Ah, a date then? Where is she? I’d love to meet her,” Snoke’s lips curled upwards, reminding Kylo of a snake preparing to strike.

“She’s assisting my mother with the auction,” he answered. “She’ll be joining me for dinner.”

“If you win, you mean,” Snoke pointed out.
Gritting his teeth, Kylo felt his restraint wavering. The double meaning of his owner’s words wasn’t lost on him. “It would be foolish for anyone to go up against me.”

“Indeed,” Snoke smirked. “I feel the same. When I set my sights on something, I become utterly focused on it. Take yourself for example,” he explained. “When I found you, I saw what all trainers live to see — raw untamed power and beyond that something truly special, the potential of your bloodline. Now I feel I was mistaken.”

Kylo didn’t respond, seething beneath his carefully schooled mask of indifference.

“Look at you,” Snoke hissed, “ready to give it all up for a girl whose own parents couldn’t even stand. You would waste your talents on pursuing this… this whore. You’d forsake your title and the First Order for her!”

At his side, his fist clenched, itching to let loose a punch, aching to end the man who played with him like a cat toyed with a mouse.

“Yes,” he replied, glaring at Snoke.

The owner of the First Order stood astonished, watching as his prized fighter grinned smugly. Kylo felt his chest swell with pride at the fact he shocked Snoke into silence. Deeming their interactions complete for the evening, he made to leave.

“You are rather sure of yourself, young Solo,” Snoke quipped.

Kylo froze, his back turned to his employer. “If I were you, I’d hope your girl,” he spat the word as if it left a bad taste in his mouth, “is as sure of you as you are of her.”
There it was — the threat he had anticipated since Snoke appeared.

“It would be unfortunate if Ms. Niima was to become aware of your less… honorable actions, wouldn’t it?”

Kylo inhaled deeply, reminding himself Rey already knew his past. She knew about the file, knew about his parents — she knew it all. There was nothing Snoke could divulge that he hadn’t her told her himself.

And yet…

He saw her broken expression as he admitted his sins, heard her voice as she told him she had forgiven him but was still mad. Would Snoke turn her against him? Would Rey lose faith in him the way everyone else had?

Kylo stalked off, needing to put distance between himself and the meddlesome man.

“Have a nice evening, Kylo Ren,” Snoke’s snickering echoed long after Kylo had walked away.

Backstage Rey nervously twisted her hands in front of her. Leia had just completed her introductions, thanking all the attendees for their support and welcoming them to the gala. She reviewed the agenda for the evening, starting with the auction, moving onto dinner and dancing and ending with the winners of the silent auction, which was situated in the back. All the proceeds were going to the Resistance’s newest project in Chandrila.
The other girls were all confident, heads held high as they awaited their turn to take the stage. None of them had given Rey any mind, which hadn’t bothered her in the slightest. These girls were unlike her, posh and polished from head to toe. It was clear they had never worked a day in their lives. They had never felt hunger or wondered if they had a safe place to sleep at night. No, these girls weren’t anything like her.

Despite their differences in status, Rey didn’t feel any disdain for them. They had simply been born into a different life. If she disliked them based on their fortune, it was just as bad as them disliking her for her poverty. The whole thing was childish and served no purpose, so Rey focused on the auction.

Leia wanted her to go last, which sounded good initially, until Rey realized she had to wait idly in the wings for all the other girls had gone.

She watched each girl be called out onto the stage. She heard Leia introduce them, start the bidding and eventually each girl was ushered off the stage to her waiting date for the evening. Seating arrangements were adjusted and the next girl was called up to start the process all over again.

It seemed to go on for hours, but the backstage clock told Rey it was actually less than an hour before Leia finally called her up.

Rey took a deep breath and proceeded out into the audience’s view, begging anyone who was listening to not let her fall in her Louboutins.

Leia gave her an encouraging smile, starting the bidding at one thousand dollars, double the starting price for any of the other girls.

Ben was already on his feet when his mother announced the starting price, raising his hand to confirm his bid. Rey smiled through the haze of the bright spotlights when she saw him. He towered over everyone else, easily sticking out amongst the other men in the crowd.
“Two thousand,” an older gentleman with a white beard bid.

“Two thousand to Governor Ryder Azadi,” Leia announced, beaming at the sudden increase.

“Twenty-five hundred,” Ben parried.

“Three thousand,” a brown-haired man near the back stood.

Rey didn’t recognize him but she did recognize the people he was sitting with. Hux and Phasma were watching her with wary eyes. Aside of them, a man she knew could only be Anthony Snoke sat, his hands folded in front of him as he openly stared at her. She felt a chill run down her spine.

“Three thousand to Yogar Lyste,” Leia declared.

“Thirty-five hundred,” Ben countered.

“Four thousand,” Yogar opposed.

“Five thousand,” Ben glared daggers at his fellow First Order fighter.

“Six,” Yogar continued, unphased by Ben’s agitated state.

Rey watched from the stage as Snoke grinned maliciously. From her conversations with Ben regarding the man’s methods, she recognized his attempt to further unhinge Ben, casting him as an unbalanced fighter and damaging his career indefinitely. She couldn’t allow that to happen. Even if Ben chose to retire, it needed to be on his terms, not Snoke’s.
She wasn’t sure what to do given her position on the stage. Her first impulse was to alert Ben, but the more rational side of her knew he probably was already aware. After years of suffering Snoke’s abuse, Ben would surely recognize the ploy. Still, Rey couldn’t help but glance over at the Senator for assistance.

Leia was barely keeping up with their bidding war, her eyes frantically bouncing back and forth between the two men.

Ben tensed, his body rigid, hands balled into fists at his sides. He appeared ready to strike at any minute and just when Rey thought Snoke had pushed him to the brink, he hollered, “Ten thousand dollars.”

The murmurs which had broken out across the room during the bidding war hushed. Leia went silent, eyes wide as she stared at Rey, then at her son. Yogar glanced across the First Order table to Snoke, who was clearly backing him. Unable to provide direction with so many eyes poised on him, the owner of the fighting club, bowed his head respectfully to Ben, signaling they were pulling out. They did not offer up another bid.

“Ten thousand going once, going twice… sold to B-Mr. Kylo Ren of the First Order,” Leia announced proudly. She hugged Rey and escorted her to the edge of the stage, where Ben met them.

“She’s all yours,” Leia said, handing Rey off to him.

“Hey sweetheart,” Ben smirked at her as he took her hand. “Come here often?”

“I’m here with my boyfriend,” she played along, allowing him to guide her back to where he and Han were seated. His father was messing with a cellphone, brow furrowed in intense concentration as he attempted to learn how to work the device. “What’s with that?” Rey asked, pointing at Han.
“My mother gave him her number and he’s trying to figure out how to Facetime her,” Ben made a face. “Anyway, this boyfriend of yours. Is it serious?”

“I love him,” Rey stated. “So yeah, I’d say it’s pretty serious.”

“You know what else is serious?” he queried, his eyes darkening. “My desire to get you home and-.”

“I believe congratulations are in order, Ren,” Armitage Hux appeared in front of them, flanked by Phasma and Snoke. Rey glanced up at Ben, uncertain how to proceed. Hux held out his hand, but Ben made no move to shake it. “Bad form,” the redhead muttered, moving aside to allow the owner to take his place.

“Ah, young Rey,” Snoke crooned. “Come closer, child, let me have a look at you.”

Rey felt Ben stiffen next to her, his arm around her waist tightening as he subtly shifted her backwards and took a step forward. Snoke pretended not to notice.

“I was discussing with Kylo how disappointed I am with the fact he is throwing his career away for someone of your… standing. I’ve never been one for attachments, you see, so I don’t understand what all the fuss is about, but then I saw you on stage. Your energy, your light… I understand now,” he explained.

She felt another chill. The way he was staring at her made her skin crawl.

“Still, I do not tolerate failure and losing my prized fighter to you is simply something I cannot allow. Of course, once I tell you the truth about Kylo Ren, perhaps you won’t want him any longer.”

“You underestimate Ben and me,” she snarled.
“Closer, I said,” Snoke sneered.

Ben started to put his arm up in an effort to keep her back, but Rey pushed him away, going toe to toe with the owner of the First Order.

“You believe Kylo cares for you. Has he told you why he agreed to complete his community service at Ahch-To? Has he told you my plans for adding the studio to our circuit?”

Rey didn’t move a muscle, glaring at Snoke as he spoke of all the things she and Ben had already discussed.

“Did he tell you about the file he kept on you to ensure you wouldn’t get in the way?”

She remained silent.

Snoke’s gaze flickered behind her to where Ben stood, then back to her. “Did he tell you about his father? Why he hadn’t spoken to Han Solo in so many years?”

This time, Rey flinched. The pain of what Ben had endured, all the blame he had thrust upon himself and knowing how this cruel man held it over him made her sick.

“Ah,” Snoke chuckled darkly. “He is more like me than you are willing to admit.”

“No,” she hissed.
“Yes,” Snoke snapped, but his voice wavered. It was clear he wasn’t used to being defied.

“Ben Solo is nothing like you,” she cried.

“You have the passion of a true fighter,” Snoke commented. “You could join us alongside Ren and become great.”

“Never,” Rey denied him. “Ben and I are done with you.”

“Oh?” Snoke raised an eyebrow, a smug expression on his face. “But perhaps I am not done with either of you.”

Hux stepped forward and Ben immediately moved up to be beside Rey. “Thanks to you inviting us to your birthday, Rey, we were able to capture some of Ren’s more defining moments.”

He held out his cell phone which played a video of Ben punching out the drunken guy who had been harassing Rey. “If Ben chooses to retire from the First Order instead of re-negotiating his contract with us, I’ll have no choice but to release this footage. I’m sure the court would love to see how you’ve been spending your community service hours.”

“You bastard,” Ben shouted, starting after Hux. Rey held him back, pressing both hands to Ben’s chest to keep him from following through on his intention to strike the redhead.

“Your choice, Ren,” Phasma stated. “You can stay employed with us and get rid of the girl, or you can end up behind bars.”

“I doubt that,” a new voice entered the conversation. “Ben won’t be the one behind bars. You three
will be, for blackmail.”

“Mom?”

Rey saw Leia step forward into their little huddle with a diplomatic grin on her face. She angled her phone down so they could all see it had been set to record. Han appeared next to his wife, filming the entire interaction on his phone as well.

“See, Han, I told you it was easy to use,” Leia said conversationally. “All that’s left now is to back-up your video to the cloud, so you never lose it.” She gave the First Order trio a pointed glare.

Snoke, Hux and Phasma all froze, their faces blank as they realized the had been caught.

“Mr. Snoke,” Leia continued, using a sugary sweet voice Rey was sure meant anything but sweet. “While I appreciate your generosity to the cause, I must ask you and your colleagues to leave. Felonies are not something the Resistance tolerates. I’m sure you understand.”

With a huff, Snoke glowered at them all, before he stormed off, the rest of his table following behind.

Turning to face Ben, Rey found him smiling, a real true smile. He looked as if the years with Snoke had been erased from him, the heavy burden removed from his shoulders. “Ben?” she searched his face.

“Excuse me,” Ben said to his parents, “but I believe I owe my girlfriend a dance.”

And with that, he led Rey out onto the dancefloor. The only worry on either of their minds how long they needed to stay at the function before they could go home together.
Chapter End Notes

Come say hi or drop me a message on tumblr @wewantreylo!

The chapter count has been updated. Only a couple more to go...
You Want a Battle? (Here’s a War)

Chapter Summary

In which Rey and Ben prepare to move in together and start new careers...

Chapter Notes

Thank you to @atchamberlin for beta-ing this chapter so I could post before I leave on vacation.

Special thank you to @constellationsinmytea for the gorgeous artwork she made me during inktober for this fic. I squealed like a crazed fangirl when I saw it. You can check the original post out here.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Chapter 30: You Want a Battle? (Here’s a War)

“Ben, we’re going to be late,” Rey chided as she stepped out of the bathroom into the master bedroom.

Her boyfriend was lounging on the bed, still shirtless and still eyeing her as if they hadn’t spent the better part of the afternoon under his sheets. “Come here,” he patted the spot next to him.

Rey laughed, shaking her head. “No, you come here and quit stalling. We are leaving for Maz’s in five minutes. If you aren’t ready, I’ll go without you.”
“On your bike, dressed like that?” he asked skeptically eyeing her attire.

She glanced down at her outfit. Her friends were throwing her a going-away party, even though she was only moving to the city. As summer ended, the humidity began to die off, but the temperatures were still high, even by California standards. Rey selected a simple sundress for the occasion. It was light and comfortable, but as Ben pointed out, not made for riding a motorcycle.

Rey had forgone heels, not wanting to risk twisting her ankle in an attempt to be fashionable. Instead, she chose a pair of flat, strappy sandals. Much to Jess’s dismay, Rey was still no closer to being a true fashionista. The few pairs of heels she did own were carefully tucked away towards the back of her and Ben’s shared closet.

“I’ll take your car,” she flashed him a coy grin, making for the kitchen where she knew the keys were.

“You are not taking the Vanquish,” he growled, before pouncing on her.

Rey landed on the floor, wrapped up in Ben’s arms, shielding her from the hardwood. She burst into a fit of giggles. “You are worse than a child,” she told him.

“At least a child knows I wouldn’t let you drive my car. Temiri knows it. I didn’t even have to tell him,” Ben pointed out.

She raised a brow at him. “Don’t you trust me?”

“With my life,” he nodded, kissing her forehead. “Just not with my car.”

“Fine,” Rey groused, shoving against his chest so she could get to her feet. “Then get dressed.”

“I’d much rather stay undressed with you in bed,” he countered, snatching her wrist to keep her from exiting the bedroom.

“Ben Organa Solo, if you aren’t dressed and ready to go in five minutes I’m calling your mother,” Rey threatened, but he didn’t release her.
“Oh?” His lips curled up into a smirk. “To tell her what, exactly?”

Rey cursed internally. She’d thought he’d be too scared to hear from his mother to call her bluff. Despite Han and Leia’s help at the Gala, Ben’s relationship with his parents was still strained. She believed in time it would get better, but until then she was happy to be his sounding board. Of course, she was also happy to use his parents to her advantage. Her head raced and she blurted out the first thing that came to mind.

“That you got me pregnant.”

*What?*

She cringed, immediately regretting her verbal vomit. Could she have picked a worse topic? Where had *that* even come from? She wasn’t ready for kids. They had only just moved in together. They were starting new jobs next week and Ben was still walking on eggshells, convinced Snoke would come after them again.

When she dropped her eyes to his face, it took her a moment to understand his reaction. His teasing grin was gone. Instead, his face was filled with many emotions — joy, love, but most of all, *hope*. There wasn’t an ounce of fear in his gaze. Unlike the trapped animal she suspected she’d find, all Rey saw as he clung to her wrist was a sense of belonging.

“Are you?” His voice came out so quiet she nearly missed his question.

It was cruel how happy he was over something she had meant as a joke in passing. Rey’s throat tightened as she shook her head.

Something flashed in his chocolate orbs, deeper and darker than the standard caramel hue. Then he was yanking her down on top of him once more. “That makes you a liar, Rey,” he murmured against her throat. He pressed a kiss to her pulse point and she wasn’t able to discern if he was teasing her or legitimately upset.

Until he cracked her ass.
“Ben!”

“What?” his deep chuckle filled the air. God, this man was insatiable.

“Three minutes,” Rey snapped, freeing herself from his arms.

She stormed out of the bedroom, schooling her expression until she was out of his line of sight. She wasn’t going to let him see her smile over his antics.

The apartment hadn’t changed much since Rey moved her items in. Compared to her meager possessions, Ben had more than enough. Her furniture clashed with the overall look and feel of his decor, but he surprised her by setting up the spare bedroom with her items, including a brand new desk he ordered. It was custom made to match the crate furniture she built herself.

“It’s your home office,” he told her when he unveiled it last week.

Now that Han had taken up permanent residence with Leia, the spare room was free. Ben immediately chose to make it Rey’s space, putting the old furniture into storage. The brightly colored area was a complete one-eighty from the rest of the penthouse. Rey loved it, though she wasn’t sure she’d spend much time there. After all, the majority of their day was spent at work. When they finally were home, they usually were in bed to sleep or...not.

The only other room they seemed to spend copious amounts of time in was Ben’s personal gym. Not only was it a safer option than defiling Master Skywalker’s studio, but it was closer to the shower. Ben and Rey tested the time it took to transfer from the gym to the master bath several times already.

She grinned remembering how satisfying it felt to slam him back down onto the mats. Seeing her big strong man reduced to a panting, sweaty mess beneath her would always thrill her.

“Ready?” Ben broke her out of her thoughts.

Rey took in his outfit of plain jeans, a heather gray v-neck shirt and black sneakers. It was casual chic, something he seemed to be able to pull off all the time with absolutely no effort whatsoever.
“Can I drive?” she asked in jest.

“I don’t know. Can you even reach the pedals?” he shot back with a smirk.

“Hey! I’m not short! I’m actually quite tall for a woman,” Rey reminded him.

“Right,” he answered sounding as though he didn’t believe her. “Still...no.”

Kylo forced himself to relax as Rey was swarmed by her friends — their friends, she kept insisting — the moment they entered Kanata Kaffeine. Though the cafe was technically closed, Jess and Rose had convinced the proprietor to let them use the space after hours to host Rey’s going away party.

As pleased as he was that his girl was finally going to start her dream job, Kylo’s mind was a storm of conflict. It had been radio silence from the First Order since the gala. Even when he submitted his retirement intent forms, he was met with no response. The only communication he received in the past three weeks was from HR confirming receipt of his intent letter.

After Snoke’s hostile words, Kylo had readied himself for another altercation. His parents may have intervened on the Rogue One video, but he suspected Snoke would try again. Anthony Snoke didn’t give up, especially when it impacted his bottom line, and Kylo retiring was going to do that in a big way.

So he waited. He anxiously checked his phone, scanned his emails and even went as far as to call Dr. Mitaka about his exit interview and exam. The First Order physician hadn’t been able to release any details to him, claiming he knew nothing about Kylo’s plan to retire.

Whoever said no news was good news hadn’t been where Kylo Ren was now.

If Snoke’s silence wasn’t enough to make him antsy, his family was. Han caught onto his smart phone, using it to call his son at odd junctures in the day to ask his opinion on gifts for Leia and what Kylo thought Han should cook her for dinner. If that wasn’t bad enough, Leia approached him about his grandmother’s ring, suggesting he keep it on hand for when the time was right. When he tried to
argue with her that a proposal was a long way off, she merely rolled her eyes and shoved the ring box into his hand.

Not wanting to propose now didn’t mean Kylo didn’t want to propose at all. He did. Oh, how he did, but he wanted it to be special. He wanted it to be a moment Rey never forgot, one she’d tell their children and grandchildren about for years to come. Of course, that would only happen if he had the perfect ring.

Kylo hadn’t yet decided if he wanted to use his grandmother Padme’s ring or not. Part of him appreciated the sentimental value it held and how it would surely serve to make Rey feel a part of their family. It was an heirloom of the Skywalker line, one she was destined to be a part of.

Part of him wanted to get Rey her own ring, something as unique and bright as she was. She was the first person to see beyond his darkness, to reach past his exterior persona and find the man behind the mask. Someone as singularly beautiful — inside and out — as Rey deserved a symbol of her worth, of what she meant to him so she could be reminded every day.

Padme’s ring was in his sock drawer, hidden under a pair of charcoal gray ones he rarely wore. Regardless of not knowing if he’d prefer to use the Skywalker heirloom or not, Kylo felt the presence of the ring every time he walked into the bedroom. His nervousness manifested in one of two ways. Either he could barely function, eyes drawn to the drawer as he debated when would be a good time to propose or he ravaged Rey as if it was their last night on Earth.

Something about the idea of her wearing a ring made him incredibly aroused, but nothing prepared him for her comment from earlier. When Rey mentioned being pregnant, Kylo felt all the blood rush out of his head and run due south. He was convinced he died for a moment as he stared up at her flushed face. It was obvious she hadn’t meant to say it, but she couldn’t take it back and Kylo found he didn’t want her to.

Suddenly the acceptable timeline to propose wasn’t a concern. Instead, Kylo’s mind was racing with fantasies of seeing Rey with a ring on her left hand and running said hand across her swollen belly. His cock twitched in his jeans at the thought.

Was being together for a couple months too soon to get engaged? His parents had only been together for a couple of weeks before Han suggested they go to the Justice of the Peace. Leia hadn’t allowed it, but they had been married within a year.

Of course, his parents weren’t great role models for a stable marriage so...
“Ben!” Poe patted a hand on his back, jarring him from his thoughts. “How are you?”

Kylo faced the other man, forcing himself to smile.

“Hi,” he greeted her friend.

Since Rey moved in they all began calling him by his real name, mostly because Rey insisted on it. He didn’t fight it. When he was with her, he felt more like himself than ever before. Perhaps he was still Ben Solo, deep down. Once he left the First Order, there would be no place for Kylo Ren. He’d merely be a voiceover in video games, a made up character for a made up world.

Glancing around at the collection of Rey’s friends, including Maz and his uncle, he realized how genuine they all were. This was real life. The life Rey made for herself was solid and true, a clear family even if it was in name only. And she invited Ben to be part of it. Maybe being Ben Solo wasn’t such a terrible thing.

“How’s the move going?” Poe asked, offering Kylo a beer.

Kylo shook his head. While beer was alright once in awhile, he preferred whiskey. It appeared the crew was happy with wine and beer, everyone else already holding red plastic cups in their hands as they chatted.

“We’re nearly done. The last few things are there as a convenience in case we don’t have time to run back to the city to shower or need a quick nap,” he explained. “Jess brought her truck last week and helped us move all the big items.”

“Rey told us,” Poe chuckled. “Don’t worry, man,” he patted Kylo on the back again. “She’s always been stubborn like that.”

Poe was referring to the fight Kylo and Rey had gotten into when he suggested hiring a moving company to safely transport her belongings to his apartment. To say she’d been displeased with him was an understatement. In the end though, it worked out. Whoever said make-up sex was the best kind of sex had been right. They christened his personal gym quite effectively.
Kylo hoped Rey hadn’t mentioned that particular detail to her friends, especially Finn. While Poe’s boyfriend was kinder towards Kylo, there was still a distinct lack of trust. Kylo remained polite in Rey’s presence, but unlike her other friends, who he texted or called on occasion, he and Finn never spoke more than a handful of words to one another.

“Rey mentioned you two are going back to South Africa,” Kylo stated.

“Yeah,” Poe beamed. “We had such a great time, we’re going to try to go every year on our anniversary. Finn loved it there. He learned so much at the facility and I enjoyed all the food, as you can tell,” Poe patted his stomach.

To be honest, Kylo couldn’t tell. Poe always appeared to be in shape, but he made an understanding face and nodded in response.

“Ben,” Rey called and he walked across the room to where she was standing between Maz and Rose. The women were all flushed from their wine and he saw Rey sway a bit. “Can you take a picture of us please?” she asked, handing him her phone. “I’m going to put it on my desk at work.”

“Your mornings won’t be the same without my tea,” Rose pointed out.

“She can make her own tea,” Maz reminded her barista.

“Yeah, but it’s nicer when someone makes it for you,” Rose insisted.

“Alright,” Kylo took a step back to center the frame around the three women. “Settle down now and say cheese.”

“Cheese!”

He snapped a couple before signaling them that he was done. Rey moved towards him first, snatching her phone up so they could fawn over the image.

“Can you humor an old man and take one with me?” his uncle came over.
“Master Luke, of course!”

Rey shoved her phone back into Kylo’s hand as she looped an arm around his uncle’s waist. Luke threw an arm over her shoulders and the two smiled at the lens.

“Well the left side of the picture looks good,” Kylo muttered, winking at his girlfriend.


Rey laughed, snuggling up against Kylo as she watched them bait each other. He wrapped an arm around her, glad to have her back at his side. Since she moved in, he’d gotten worse, wanting to be with her every minute of every day, as if he’d miss a crucial Rey moment if he wasn’t right next to her.

She was the best — and worst — kind of drug, suffocating his senses and overpowering all reasonable thought. His girl was his light and watching her shine was all he wanted in this life she had given him.

The party was exactly the type of affair Rey enjoyed. It was small, intimate and best of all an excuse to get Ben out of the apartment so he could focus on something other than the First Order.

Rey loved him, but the man acted as if she was made of glass. Ever since Snoke’s threat, Ben was more protective than normal. His recent behavior even rivaled the days when he escorted her back and forth for fear Plutt would return.

While part of her wanted to sneak up behind him and pop a balloon just to see what he’d do, another part of her was terrified he’d break before they had a chance to start their new lives together. She knew how dangerous unchecked anxiety was. Like a poison, it would slowly eat away at someone, eroding all reasonable thought and weakening one’s resolve. She had suffered in such a way after Plutt. Rey didn’t want to see Ben reduced to that state.
Jess passed her another glass of wine, before walking over to Master Luke. Rey suggested last week that Jess be trained. With her spitfire attitude and youthful persistence, Rey believed her friend would be a fine replacement for her at Ahch-To.

Luke worked with her a couple of times this week, convinced she needed more training but ultimately agreeing Jess had a knack for martial arts. Rey felt better about her transition knowing Jess would be working a more rewarding job and that Luke wouldn’t be alone when Ben’s sentence was up.

Smiling to herself, she sipped her wine. Life was funny that way. Things just seemed to work out.

“Hey Peanut.” Rey turned, just as Finn looped an arm around her shoulders. “Congrats again.”

“Thanks, Finn,” she gave him a one armed hug around his waist.

They both noticed Poe and Ben talking. Out of all of Rey’s friends, Ben was at ease the most around Poe, probably because they were closer in age. Of course, the fact Poe fanboyed over him had nothing to do with it. Not at all.

“I was wrong,” Finn told her suddenly, his head angled down and his voice low. “He’s a good man and good for you.”

Rey felt her heart expand with gratefulness. “Finn-.”

“Peanut,” he shifted and took her hands in his own, “you’ve never needed anyone to look after you, but I wanted to. Poe and I both did. You were always so full of smiles and cheer, even if other people weren’t. I always thought it was your biggest gift. You’ve worked miracles with Ky- Ben.”

She beamed at him. “You called him Ben.”

“It’s his real name, isn’t it?”

“Yeah,” Rey nodded. “It is.”
“Then that’s what I’ll call him from now on,” Finn promised.

“Thanks, Finn.” Rey pulled him into a hug, just as the subject of their conversation came over.

“Congratulations,” Finn said to Ben. He released Rey to shake the towering man’s hand. “Not many people choose to leave the First Order.”

“It was the right decision,” Ben replied, tentatively shaking Finn’s hand.

“I admire you for breaking away,” Finn added. “And I owe you an apology.”

“For?”

“For making assumptions,” Finn admitted.

“Well you know what they say about when you assume, right, Finn?” Rey asked, stifling a giggle as she felt the rush of wine hit her.

Her best friend rolled his eyes. “Thanks, Peanut. Really helpful.”

“She’s got a point,” Ben agreed with her. “But I appreciate your apology.”

“So are we cool?” Finn questioned.

“We’re cool,” Ben nodded.

“Awwww,” Rey grinned at both of them, pretending to wipe tears from her eyes. “That was a Kodak moment.”
Ben scrunched his face. “How do you even know what that is? Were you even born then?”

Rey smacked him.

As the party died down, Kylo took in the remaining guests. His uncle retired about an hour earlier and Maz followed not long after. Poe and Finn had just swung over to say their goodbyes. All that was left were the two giggling girls Rey befriended in this little town.

The three females were lounging on a couch in the back corner of the coffee shop, Rey sandwiched in the middle. Kylo could tell all three had had way too much wine, but he could hardly be mad. Rey deserved a night like this and if it meant she’d fall asleep on his shoulder while he drove them home, he’d deal. It was a small price to pay for her happiness. Besides, he liked feeling her slumped against him.

Kylo started to clean up the leftover beer bottles and plates from the counter. There wasn’t much to tidy up, but it gave him something to do while he pointedly ignored the girl talk going on. He wasn’t sure how the words ‘Christian Gray,’ ‘snakes,’ and ‘fluffernutter’ were related, but he caught those exact phrases coming out of Jess’s mouth before he decidedly ventured across the room.

It was probably safer if he didn’t know what they were discussing.

As he tossed away the last of the trash, the bell above the entrance chimed. Glancing over his shoulder, he saw trouble.

Jyn, Cassian, Bodhi, Baze, Chirrut and even Kaytoo all sauntered in. “Congrats, Sunshine!” Jyn hollered, lifting up her arms. She was holding two unopened bottles of top shelf whiskey. Jess, Rose and Rey jumped up from their seats, cheering as they raced up front to greet the new arrivals.

Kylo swore under his breath.

Rey was definitely going to fall asleep on his shoulder.
The Saturday before Rey started at Cloud City found her and Ben at Ahch-To saying goodbye to where it all began. Her apartment was completely bare once more, not a single detail left from her time living in the space. In contrast, her heart was full, filled with contentment and joy.

When she was drawn to the academy, Rey never expected her part-time job to lead her to the family she always wanted or to the love she never believed she’d have. This place had worked a magic over her, giving her more than she ever thought possible in such a short span of time. It was difficult to leave, knowing she wouldn’t be returning in the morning.

Unlike her though, Ben would be back on Tuesday. After Labor Day, he was set to finish out his last four months of community service, while Rey would be traveling to Bespin for her first day at her new job.

“That’s the last of it,” Ben informed her, as he shut the trunk of his Vanquish. “Ready to go?”

Rey gave one last longing glance over her shoulder at the darkened studios and her vacant apartment.

“Hey,” Ben wrapped his arms around her, stepping up behind her so his chest was flush against her back. “You can come back and visit whenever you want.”

“I know,” she sighed, before laughing a bit at herself. Her sentimental streak was beginning to become a real problem. If she wasn’t careful Ben really was going to think she was pregnant.

She needed a diversion, a way to concentrate on the good times they had here instead of focusing on saying farewell.

“Wanna go for a run?”

“Now?” Ben asked, dropping his chin on top of her head.
“Yeah,” Rey answered, pulling out of his grasp. “Down to Maz’s and back.” She sidestepped him, moving towards the street. Ben’s eyes followed her. “Last one back here has to stomach with the winner’s Netflix pick for the night.”

Ben raised a brow at her, but before he could accept or reject her terms, Rey took off.

“Hey!”

Laughing, she ran hard, relishing the feel of her feet pounding the pavement as she fled. Ben’s strides were longer than hers, but Rey wasn’t one to be beat. Despite how often they used Ben’s personal gym for a special kind of work out, she also spent a fair amount of time training with him and running. Whenever he went to see Dr. Connix, Rey spent the time he was away running, working up her stamina.

It was paying off.

Though her strides were shorter, she was quicker, racing far enough ahead of him to remain out of his grasp. Rey entered Tatooine’s main town center first, darting down Main Street past Kanata Kaffeine, hitting the stop sign with her hand then jetting back the way she came.

When she passed Ben, she leapt away from his outstretched arms, barely escaping his attempt to trap her. He chuckled, low and deep like the rumble of thunder over the desert. Rey tossed him a wink, as she ran backwards for a pass, then resumed her breakneck pace, determined to win.

Competition was good. It was something both of of them enjoyed and it kept them from overthinking things. For Rey it was leaving Ahch-To, but for Ben it was the phone calls he’d received starting yesterday afternoon. Both Phasma and Hux had been calling his cell non-stop. They left voicemails and sent text messages too. They’d even gone so far as to send emails. Ben deleted them all without a second thought. He never even opened a single message up.

Rey was unnerved by their sudden interest in him. After nearly three weeks of silence, the overwhelming influx of communications triggered Ben’s anxiety and hers by extension. Ben had gone so far as to call Dr. Connix and fill her in on the situation. His therapist was the one to suggest severing old ties, calling his former colleagues toxic and not productive to the healthy lifestyle he chose to pursue away from the First Order with Rey. While at first, Dr. Connix’s advice worked, Rey noticed Ben’s phone continued to vibrate for the better part of the morning. She was glad he left it in the car when they finished packing up her belongings.
At the thought of the car, Rey grinned, spotting the academy’s sign ahead. *Take that, Solo*, she thought smugly. *We’re watching Pride & Prejudice tonight.*

“How!” Rey squealed with joy the instant her feet hit the gravel of the academy parking lot. “Beat you again!”

Ben came jogging up alongside her, panting as he took in her wide grin. “I let you win.”

She wiggled her eyebrows at him, playfully. It was cute how he attempted to lie to her, but as usual his ears were an alarming shade of red, the same color they were when he was embarrassed. It was his worst (or best, in Rey’s case) tell. She approached him, wrapping her arms around his neck and staring up at him. “Oh, really? The undefeated Kylo Ren let a girl beat him?”

“Not just any girl, Sweetheart,” he told her, his hands resting on her hips, as he smiled at her.

“Good answer.”

“Are you going to claim your prize?” he asked, leaning down, but not quite kissing her.

Rey hummed, nodding before she rose up to close the gap between them. Their competitive streak had not dulled in the time they had been together. If anything, their developing relationship turned their battle of wills into a battle for dominance when it came to kissing, among other things. Things they spent the better part of their evenings together in his apartment pursuing.

It was a surprise to both of them, when a voice called out to them.

“Is this who you’ve been shacked up with, Rey-girl?”

As if someone had doused her in ice water, Rey yanked away from Ben to face the owner of the voice — a voice she knew all too well.

“Plutt.”
She could feel Ben tense behind her.

The blob of a man left the confines of his truck, to waddle across the parking lot to them. Rey remained rooted in her spot, unable to turn her gaze away from the man who had terrorized her for years.

After the cops hadn’t been able to locate him and neither him nor any of his usual cronies appeared, she thought — more like hoped — it was finally over. She believed she could have her own life, a life filled with good friends, her adopted family at the club, and Ben. She should have realized Plutt would never let her go. He would never let her have freedom.

Unkar eyed her up, before turning his attention to Ben, who was still behind her. He hadn’t uttered a word since Plutt interrupted their embrace. His restraint surprised her. Had her ex-guardian shown up in this manner before, Ben would have surely beat him the way he annihilated his competition in the ring. As it was, Ben remained close to her — close but not touching — as if he knew it would rile up Plutt.

“You must be the one this whore’s been spreading her legs for. Offer to keep her safe, did you? Well, she’s mine. She belongs to me.”

Rey felt her stomach churn at his words. It wasn’t the worst thing he had ever called her — not by a long shot. That particular word had never been a term Plutt used. He preferred more vulgar phrases. Still, it brought back memories of the times she hid in the junkyard or slipped away to Finn’s dorm in college to avoid any altercations. She felt the familiar fear taking hold of her, sucking all reason and resolve from her system.

Ben wasn’t affected by the other man’s words. “Rey,” He handed her his keys, calmly instructing her. “Get in the car and call the police. Lock the doors.”

She moved to the Vanquish, when Plutt grabbed her arm. “Let go!” She hissed.

“I don’t think so, Rey-girl. Get in the truck. You’re coming back with me, where you belong.”

“Get your hands off her,” Ben snarled.

“What are you going to do about it, boy?” Unkar quipped. “You have more to lose than I do... Kylo
Ben’s eyes widened, and Rey’s heart sunk as she understood the trap they had walked into. Plutt chuckled, darkly. “You were suspended from the league for fighting outside the ring, weren’t you?”

“If you know I was suspended, then you know why. I’d advise you to leave before you end up like him.”

Plutt paid no attention to Ben’s threat. “Wonder how the press would feel if you attacked a man and his daughter?”

“Rey is not yours. She’s never been yours,” Ben barked, but she heard the tremor in his voice. Any further violence could cost him his new position with the video game developers and land him in a heap of trouble with the courts. Unkar Plutt knew it and he knew how to manipulate the situation to benefit himself. Ben had been labeled as a hot-headed menace and cast off once already. Would they really be mercifully if he came back a second time?

“You think because she let you fuck her that makes her yours?” Ben had no rebuttal for that comment. His body was taut with aggression he was unable to release, as he warred with his instinct to attack the man before him. “The mighty and powerful Kylo Ren,” Plutt jeered. “You’re pathetic.” He spit on Ben’s shoes, his grip tightening on Rey’s arm possessively. Ben caught the act and for the first time, Rey saw true fear and self-loathing in his deep brown eyes.

Something inside her snapped. It wasn’t the same zen-like flow of energy she fell into when she sparred with Ben, or even the reactive strikes she had completed against Master Skywalker the first time he had brought her inside the academy. This was different. This was something born of pure hostility and burning rage.

She wind-milled her arm out of Plutt’s grasp, while simultaneously shooting out her other hand to land a palm strike to his face. Tossing the keys back at Ben, she stepped behind Plutt, kicking her right foot down into the back of his knee. Her hit forced him to land in the gravel, cursing as his hands caught the small stones to break his fall.

“I don’t belong to anyone,” Rey asserted. “Least of all you, Unkar Plutt.”

The man clambered to his feet, a look of shocked terror on his face. In all her years under his thumb she had never spoken to him in such a tone, with such resounding defiance.
“You don’t want me as your enemy, Rey-girl. I have friends everywhere. You will live to regret this.”

“No.”

“No?”

“No,” Rey declared. “You are going to regret what you did to me. I’m going to get a lawyer and tell them about the nights you denied me food, the drunken stupors you got into when you needed a punching bag, and how you didn’t pay me for any of the work I did at the junk yard because you said it was me earning my keep, while you accepted payment from the state for being my foster.”

She took a step towards him, never once blinking or shirking away from him. Her fear had been replaced by an overwhelming anger at having been his victim for far too long. She would never let it happen again — to her or anyone else.

“You will regret what you did to me for the rest of your miserable life.” Plutt stared at her, livid at first, before the fear trickled into his eyes. “Get out of my face,” she hissed, taking a step towards him, the prey becoming the predator.

Plutt scrambled backwards, running to his truck.

Ben immediately came to her side, crushing her to his chest as he clung to her. “Sweetheart,” he gasped, his lips brushing against her ear. “I’m so proud of you. That was amazing, Rey.”

“You taught me,” she whispered, hugging him back. “You made me believe I could do it, Ben.”

“I should have-.”

“No,” she cut him off, leaning back so she could cup his face and stare into his eyes. “No, this was my fight. I had to face him. It was the only way I could ever really be free.”

He nodded solemnly. “Let’s go home.”
“Home,” she smiled.

They turned to get into the black sports car, when a click startled them.

“You can’t report me if you aren’t around to see it.”

Rey and Ben both whipped around to see Plutt with a handgun pointed at them. Rey felt Ben’s hands clench around her, digging so hard into her she was sure he’d leave bruises. Before she could react, Ben shoved her aside, diving for the gun the same way he had shown her in defensive weapons training.

Everything happened in slow motion. Rey felt her body crashing towards the ground. She saw Ben duck his head, saw him grab Plutt’s wrists and saw Plutt wrestle against the assault. Rey heard the crack of the bullet as it shot out of the chamber, like an explosion into her heart. Then she smelled the powder and the fear in the air. The next thing she knew, time was back to it’s normal pace and she was screaming.

“No!”

Ben was on one knee, holding his left side, while Plutt stared down at him in apparent shock, the gun still in his hand. Rey lunged at her former guardian, barreling into him with such force she managed to tackle him to the ground. She kicked the gun from his hand, hearing it clatter against the stones of the lot, before she was throwing fist after fist at him.

A small part of her was aware she’d broken his nose and was well on her way to removing all of his teeth from his face. The rest of her didn’t care how she left Unkar Plutt. He deserved his fate.

It wasn’t until someone grabbed her under her arms Rey realized the man was unconscious and bleeding profusely.

“Rey.”

She glared down at him, hating him with every fiber of her being.
“Rey.”

He didn’t want her to be happy. He didn’t want her to be free. He wanted to control her, cage her, lock her up. That’s all he ever wanted but he went too far this time. He hurt Ben.

“Rey!”

She snapped her head to the side, surprised to find Master Luke holding her up.

“I…I,” she couldn’t form a sentence.


Her stomach lurched and in the next second she was sprinting over to his side, slamming down on her knees, not caring about the gravel or the pain. He was paler than normal, the blood from his wound seeping into his shirt and pants. His breathing was labored and his eyes were squeezed shut.

“Ben,” Rey reached down, helping him sit up. “Ben, baby, look at me.”

His eyes flashed open.

“We’re going to get you help, ok? You’re going to be fine.”

“Rey-.”

“No,” she hushed him. “Don’t talk. I’ll call 911 and you’ll be fine.”

“Take the car,” he pushed his keys back into her hand from where they must have fallen in the commotion. “I trust you...” he smiled weakly.
“...With my life.”

Chapter End Notes

Only two more chapters to go...

I've been loving all the thoughts on how this will go down and predictions people have placed in my inbox. Thank you! I'm woefully behind on responding to comments because I've been focused on finishing this story, but good news. All final chapters are done and with my beta. I should be posting the rest once I get back.
Chapter Summary

In which Rey processes everything at the hospital and Kylo receives some visitors...

Chapter Notes

I'm back from vacation with updates for this fic, Love After Death AND Two Truths & a Lie.

Thank you to @atchamberlin for beta-ing this chapter and the epilogue!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Pain.
He was in excruciating pain down his side. It leaked through his veins, into his organs, making it difficult to breathe. Kylo hissed as he took in a ragged breath, the harsh smell of disinfectant fulfilling his nostrils. There was an incessant beeping off to his right and murmured voices nearby. Slowly, he opened his eyes.

The stark white walls were a clear indication, if his other senses hadn’t already put it together.

He was in a hospital.

“Ben!”

Turning his head hurt and he winced at the pain in his neck from the odd angle he’d slept on. Rey was there, clutching his hand. Her normally happy face was pale except for her cherry red nose and red rimmed eyes, which were full of tears.

Suddenly his pain was of little consequence. Seeing her raw and aching would always hurt worse than any physical wound.

“Oh my God,” she gasped, hugging his arm. He could feel the hot tears hit his skin, as she openly sobbed into him. “Oh my God, you idiot. You stupid, stubborn man! What were you thinking?”

Kylo swallowed. His throat tightened knowing he was the reason why she was crying. He hadn’t anticipated Plutt being able to wrangle the gun free. After years of practicing that move, he was convinced he’d be able to disarm the overweight assistant before he got a round off.

But he hadn’t.

He’d failed, just as he failed at everything else in his life. Everything but the beautiful woman crying
at his bedside.

“Sweetheart,” he choked, hating how dry and rough his voice sounded.

“No,” Rey reared back, tears streaming down her face. “Don’t. The doctor will be back in a minute and your parents are here,” she informed him.

He tried to tell her he didn’t want to see them, but Rey was already up and moving across the room to the doorway. The murmured voices became clearer until he recognized Leia, Han, and even Luke. One by one they filtered inside, crowding around his bed. Rey resumed sitting next to him, her hand slipping into his the second she sat down.

“Ben Organa Solo,” his mother was the first to break the solemn silence. “What the hell were you thinking? Common sense gone, no thought of self-preservation! You could have died! You could have been paralyzed.” Oh good, at least his mother had her priorities sorted out. She turned to his girlfriend. “Of course I don’t blame you, Rey.”

“He came after my girl, mother,” he grumbled. “He’s the one you should be threatening.”

“You better hope all I do is threaten you, Ben,” Leia huffed, hands on the rail at the end of his bed.

She glared at him, then straightened up back to her perfect politician demeanor.

“Come on, Rey,” Leia called, “Let’s see if we can find something edible for dinner. The boys must be hungry.”

“But-” Rey’s eyes were frantic as she looked at him.

“We aren’t done talking, Ben,” she told him, narrowing her eyes at him. She was downright terrifying when she wanted to be. “When you get out of here you and I are going to have a long talk about all of this.”

“Sure thing,” he smirked. “Until then, care to give me a goodbye kiss? I did save your life.”

Rey rolled her eyes, but stood up, leaned over and kissed him fully on the mouth. “You’re a right wanker when you want to be, you know that?”

He chuckled, despite the pain it caused to bubble up in his ribs. “And you’re cute when you’re mad.”

Shaking her head she joined his mother, the two went off in search of food, shutting the door behind them.

Kylo waited a moment to be sure they didn’t come back before he asked the main question on his mind. “Where is he?”

Luke sighed looking to Han, but Ben’s father shot the same look back at his brother-in-law, “The police have him in custody,” Luke began, “He was brought here first to-.”

“He was here?” Kylo roared.

“Rey did a number on his face,” Han stared proudly. “Pretty sure his nose will never look the same. Probably a good thing. It was never nice to begin with.”
“Han,” Luke swatted his arm.

“What? The cretin deserved it.”

“He deserves to be in prison,” Kylo growled from where he was confined to his bed.

“The evidence against him is enough to make sure he gets a life sentence,” Luke confirmed. “Mon Mothma told me herself.”

“Ah, the White Moth still reigns, huh?” Han questioned, “Good for her.”

Ignoring his brother-in-law, Luke continued. “Plutt was taken to Mustafar Maximum Security.”

Kylo’s eyes widened. Mustafar was where his grandfather had been obtained for a time. His family didn’t often speak about it, but Kylo knew from the articles he’d read about his grandfather’s life outside of the ring that Anakin was a bit unpredictable later in his life, to the point where he borderlined on dangerous.

“He won’t be able to afford a good lawyer,” Luke added. “And San Tekka has agreed to come out of retirement to represent you and Rey at the hearing when they sentence him.”

“Lor will be there?”

Kylo could hardly believe it. He hadn’t seen the old man in years. The last they had spoke hadn’t been under the best circumstances since he was going to the First Order. Kylo was surprised by the man’s willingness to help. Then again, it was probably more for Leia and Luke than it was for him.
Leia was owed a great many favors by people. It was one of the things which made her such a good politician.

Han spoke next, scratching the back of his neck, a nervous habit Kylo knew he'd picked up from his father. “The police want to interview you and Rey. I managed to hold them off until you were out of surgery and awake.”

For the first time since he woke, Kylo glanced down at his wound. He couldn’t see behind the bandaged area, but if the searing pain was any indication, the hit was a deep graze. Carefully, he pulled the sheets aside, searching the rest of his body. There were bruises formed around the area, a likely side effect from the toll of the trauma and the resulting surgery.

A knock on the door alerted all three men of the arrival of Kylo’s surgeon. Dr. Kalonia was an older woman with streaks of gray in her hair and a no-nonsense attitude. She was accompanied by a nurse, who looked as though she couldn’t be min older than Rey.

“Good evening, Mr. Ren,” Dr. Kalonia greeted him. “How are you feeling?”

“Like I could use a morphine drip,” he replied with a roguish grin.

“Hmmm,” she glanced down at her chart, reading through something on the tablet before she responded. “You are a professional fighter with the First Order?”

“Yes.”

Dr. Kalonia smiled confidently back at him. “Then I believe you know MMA league regulations forbid the use of any and all narcotics.”
“I’m retiring,” Kylo informed her.

She checked her documents once more, before furrowing her brow. “Are you under the care of a Dr. Mitaka, Mr. Ren?”

“He’s the First Order’s physician, yes,” he confirmed.

“Ah, well then,” she handed the tablet over to her nurse. “He has marked your medical records with a note about your addictive personality and has cautioned all prescribing physicians to take this into account.”

“What?” Kylo hollered, shifting to sit up straighter. He winced, the ache in his side flaring with the movement.


“My son was shot!” Han reminded the doctor.

“I understand, Mr. Solo. And Mr. Skywalker. I do understand your concern, but as a medical practitioner I took an oath to do no harm, in any form that may be. Until I’ve ruled out the likelihood of Mr. Ren being an addict, I need to take precautions.”

“Bullshit!” Han shouted, throwing his hands up in the air. “This is a bullshit scam by Anthony Snoke.”

“Mr. Solo, I assure you-..”
Kylo rubbed his temples, suddenly less angry with the doctor and her refusal of a stronger pain medication and more annoyed with his dramatic family. He tried to tune out their bickering.

“How long is the recovery period?” he interrupted.

Dr. Kalonia appeared relieved to give her attention back to her actual patient, instead of his overzealous relatives. “Bullet wounds typically take about six months to fully recover from,” she explained in a calm, clinic all manner. “Yours was a graze, not a through and through, so as long as you follow our protocols for wound care and limit your physical activity, you can expect to be back to normal in about four months.”

“Four months?” Kylo groaned. He was not a sedentary individual. Four months of bedrest and ‘taking it easy’ felt like a death sentence.

“Mr. Ren,” Dr. Kalonia fixed him with her stare. “May I remind you that you are lucky to be alive. Had the bullet been a through and through it is unlikely we would be having this conversation.”

All three men were silent.

“Now, this is Tallie,” she introduced the nurse, “and she’ll be checking on you every few hours to make sure your wound stays clean and you aren’t suffering any complications from the surgery. Do you have any other questions?”

“When can I go home?”

The hospital cafeteria was what one could expect. To Rey the setup was adequate, the attendants were kind and the food was mediocre. Having only had what she could provide for herself up until
recently, Rey looked upon the place with gratefulness, but Leia wasn’t satisfied.

“He’s a big boy. He needs protein and better nutrition,” she insisted, getting into an argument with the chef not even five minutes after they stepped foot into the room.

Rey bit her lip, attempting to ignore the curious stares the Senator was earning. “Leia,” she placed a hand on the older woman’s arm. “It’s fine. Let them do their job. I’m sure Ben will like whatever we bring him.”

The chef stared at them both, then with a sigh, he started, calmer, “Ladies, if your loved one is a patient here, his meals will be delivered based on his care team’s reports. I can’t in good conscious give you a meal for a patient. It may set him back from the plan they’ve designed for his recovery.”

Leia’s nostrils flared and Rey was reminded how Ben’s temper came from both sides of his family. “Come on. Let’s see if we can find something for Luke and Han, alright?” Keeping her hand on Leia’s arm, Rey guided her away from the kitchen to the line. The chef gave her a thankful nod once she managed to drag Ben’s mother away.

The last several hours felt like a dream, a terrible cruel nightmare. Every time she closed her eyes, Rey saw the blood, heard the gunshot going off, and felt Ben go slack in her hold. He’d passed out on the drive to the hospital. Rey had been holding his hand and when she felt him go limp her heart nearly stopped. Panicked, she floored the Vanquish, not even bothering to properly park when they arrived.

She had pulled directly up to the Emergency Room entrance, putting on the hazard lights and rushing around to the other side to help the staff load Ben onto a stretcher. Once they had him strapped in, an ER nurse began asking her questions, until they were interrupted by another employee asking her to move the vehicle.

By the time Rey returned, Ben had already been wheeled upstairs for surgery. The nurses told Rey it was a graze, but they cautioned her that it was deep and even for a man his size, he’d lost a lost of blood. With shaking fingers, she dialed Leia.
It had been the worst phone call Rey had ever made. The only solace she received was the fact both Han and Leia already knew. Luke called them as soon as he was able. They were already on their way.

Rey had sat alone in the waiting room, trembling, crying and ultimately blaming herself for Ben’s situation. If she hadn’t defied Plutt, he never would have put himself in front of her. She could have gone with Plutt. There was no legal way he could keep her forever. Rey had broken free once before, she could have done it again. Instead, she’d tried to be a hero and she wound up getting Ben shot.

Oh God, her heart felt as if it was being torn apart. What if he was paralyzed? What if he didn’t make it out of surgery? Tears burned her eyes, blurring her vision until all she could do was choke down air and hug herself to absorb some of the blinding pain.

“Rey! Oh dear, Rey, come here now.” It was Leia who had touched her first, pulling her into her chest and rocking her like a small child. Rey lost track of time, between her break down and being passed between all three members of Ben’s family.

She hardly remembered Luke arriving or how he informed them all how Plutt was behind bars. Those details didn’t matter to her, not when Ben’s life was hanging in the balance.

At some point, her adrenaline rush from the shock dissipated. Exhaustion hung over her, dark and heavy, but Rey didn’t succumb, unwilling to sleep until she knew Ben was alright.

It was hours before the surgeon came out with an update. All four of them rose, eager for news but simultaneously wary of what the woman would say.

“Good evening, I’m Dr. Harter Kalonia. Are you the family of Kylo Ren?”
“Ben,” Leia immediately corrected. “His name is Ben.”

The woman glanced down at her chart, then lifted her eyes with a soft smile, “Birth name Ben Organa Solo. Senator, it is a pleasure. I’m sorry we have to meet under these circumstances.”

“Thank you,” Leia whispered, one hand clutching Rey and her other clutching onto Han.

“Mr. Ren... Ben is a fighter,” Dr. Kalonia started, “He took a serious hit to his left abdomen. The bullet penetrated your lower torso and hit a major artery. We were able to stop the bleeding and repair the damaged tissue.”

“Thank God,” Leia gasped, closing her eyes and squeezing Rey’s hand.

Rey felt her throat tighten as more tears threatened to be released.

“My team is closing him up now. It may take a bit for him to wake up. We had him heavily sedated,” Dr. Kalonia explained.

“Will he be alright?” Rey asked, unable to keep the question inside.

“Yes, of course,” the doctor confirmed. “He’s lucky he arrived when he did. We were able to get the bleeding under control and decrease the risk of infection.”

Relief flooded through Rey, so great she staggered over to her seat. She sunk into the chair, barely able to feel her own body.
He was ok. Ben was ok. It was all ok.

She repeated the words in her head over and over again, trying to console herself as the doctor continued to speak with his parents and Luke.

The moment the nurse had come to alert them Ben had been moved to a room in the critical care unit, all four of them marched upstairs.

When Rey walked in and saw him, paler than normal and with a mess of bandages along his side, she fell apart all over again. They hadn’t eaten since breakfast and she was convinced by now all the liquid in her body had come out as tears. She didn’t know how she could possibly cry anymore. But she did.

Leia, Han and Luke circled around Ben’s bedside, allowing her to take the chair next to him. With shaky hands, she held onto him, hating herself for being the reason he was lying in a hospital bed in the first place, but also unable to let him go.

When Ben woke, Rey was a storm of emotions. She was elated he was alive, scared he’d be upset with her, and furious with him for throwing her to the side. Her reaction was a half-laugh, half-threat as she greeted him.

His attitude had survived along with the rest of him. It was only once she was sure he was himself that she could be pried away from him.

Which was how she came to find herself in the cafe with Leia, rooting around prepackaged salads, wraps, sandwiches, and other options in an attempt to bring dinner back upstairs.

Despite not having eaten in over twelve hours, Rey had no appetite. Leia wordlessly grabbed a couple of everything, handing over her credit card before Rey could object.
“It’s not your fault, you know,” Ben’s mother told her softly, as they rode the elevator up to his floor. “Ben has always been reckless.”

“If I hadn’t said those things to Plutt maybe he wouldn’t have-”

“Unkar Plutt is the worst kind of scum,” Leia interjected, her tone leaving no room for argument. Not that Rey would defend the man. “His choices were his own.”

Rey hung her head, biting her inside of her cheek. No more tears, she willed herself. Ben was awake now, she couldn’t fall to pieces. She needed to be strong for him.

“If anything, you’re the reason Ben’s alive,” Leia continued. “You heard Dr. Kalonia. If he hadn’t arrived when he did, the risk would have been far greater. You saved him, Rey.”

“Can it be considered saving if I’m the reason he got shot in the first place?”

“Oh, Rey,” Leia opened her mouth to say more, when the elevator doors chimed, delivering them to the critical care unit.

Before Ben’s mother could justify the situation, Rey took the tray from her and carried it into Ben’s room, handing out the various options to Han and Luke. Leia came in behind her, selecting one of the salads. Rey didn’t touch anything, returning to her seat next to Ben.

“You aren’t eating?” he asked concerned.

“Not hungry,” she shrugged.
“Sweetheart, you have to eat,” he told her.

“Later,” Rey promised. “Just not right now, ok?”

“Alright,” Ben nodded, sliding his hand over towards the edge of the bed. Rey wasted no time in placing her hand in his, relishing the spike in warmth his body now offered. It was a sign he was better.

The nurse brought in dinner for Ben while his family sat along the back wall munching on their meals. It was all liquid — soup, jello, tea, and pudding. He complained the second the nurse left, while Rey rolled her eyes.

“Just eat it,” she commanded.

“I’ll make you a deal,” he smirked. “I’ll eat if you do.”

“Ben Solo,” she snapped. “You are in the hospital. You are in no position to be making demands.”

“Alright, well when the doctor comes back in here, I’m going to tell her I can’t eat until my girlfriend does. It will be all your fault,” Ben responded without missing a beat.

To her side, there was a round of stifled laughter. When she glanced over, Leia, Han and Luke were all oddly busy with their food. Narrowing her eyes, she turned her attention back to Ben.

“Fine,” she relented, reaching over to grab a wrap, “happy?”
“Ecstatic,” Ben smirked.

His parents and uncle left not long after dinner, being chased out of the room by Tallie. She would have forced Rey out too, had it not been for the fact her boyfriend was a huge fan of Kylo’s and he agreed to sign all the merchandise she brought in.

“You know, if we were married this wouldn’t have been a problem,” Kylo commented, feigning nonchalance while Rey made up a cot bed aside of him.

She stilled, back rim-rod straight as she shook out the blanket Tallie had provided her. “Come again?”

“Or engaged,” Kylo mentioned. “She couldn’t kick you out if you were mine.”

Rey shook her head, but kept her back to him. “I am yours and you’re mine. Married or not.”

Kylo grinned. It was exactly what he wanted to hear. If he was reading the tension in Rey’s shoulder correctly, she was hiding her blush from him. He was reminded by her slip up about being pregnant. Maybe he wasn’t the only one making plans for their future.

“We could do it, you know,” he suggested. “They have priests here, you know for last rites and all that, but I’m sure if we paid enough one of them would.”

Rey whirled around, “Let me stop you right there, because if you think I’m going to marry you in
some hospital after you just got out of surgery you have another thing coming to you, Ben Solo.”

He chuckled, loving how flustered his idea made her. “I was only saying it’s an option.”

“I’m going to give you a free pass since you’re on painkillers and clearly not thinking straight,” she dismissed him.

Even on the low dose of painkillers the doctor was able to prescribe him, Kylo recognized the difference between what the drugs felt like and what he felt like. Wanting to marry Rey was real, probably the most real thing he ever wanted.

Of course, proposing in a hospital probably wasn’t the best idea, but could anyone blame him? It wasn’t as if he hadn’t already considered asking Rey to marry him.

Kylo watched as she finished making up her bed, turned away from him once more. He considered pushing her buttons a bit more, if only to determine what her answer would be when he did officially ask. He decided against it. Like him, Rey had been through a lot today. Even though she chose to say, he sensed her drifting away.

“Sweetheart, aren’t you going to kiss me goodnight? I’m kind of stuck over here,” he gestured to his position in the bed, surrounded by tubes and wires.

Rey padded over, leaning down to press a chaste kiss to his lips. Kylo reached up, tangling his fingers in her hair as he kept her in place to deepen the kiss.

“Ben!” she shrieked, pulling away.

“What?” he chuckled. “Can’t blame a guy for trying.”
“You were shot today! You had abdominal surgery! Contain yourself,” she snapped, but there was no real heat behind her words.

“I love you,” he stated matter-of-factly. “There’s no containing that.”

Something shifted in her eyes and he watched the specks of gold fall back, as the emerald shone brilliant and strong. “Ben...,” her voice was soft and small. “I’m sorry.”

Kylo’s smile fell from his face immediately. “What are you sorry about, Rey?”

“It’s my fault,” she admitted, a tear rolling down her cheek. “You shouldn’t be here. It’s all my-.”

“No,” he hissed, sitting up to grab both her hands. “No,” he repeated. “Don’t say that. Don’t even think that. How could you possibly believe this was your fault, sweetheart?”

“If I hadn’t hit him, maybe he wouldn’t have-.”

“Stop right there, Rey,” Kylo growled, furious she’d even consider anything that happened had been a result of her defending herself. “You needed to do it. You told me yourself and I’m proud of you. I’m so incredibly proud of you, Rey.”

“But you’re here,” she waved at the bed, more tears falling.

“Because you got me here,” he reminded her. “And you didn’t even wreck my car,” he added, trying to make her laugh.
The hint of a smile played across her lips. “Hey,” he cupped her chin. “I love you, sweetheart. I want to be with you the rest of my life. It’s just you and me. Nothing else matters, alright?”

She nodded silently.

“Alright, Rey?”

“Alright,” she breathed.

“Good,” he kissed her chin, because it was all he could reach. “Now go to sleep.”

Rey deposited one final kiss to his lips, before crawling onto the cot.

“Oh, and Rey?”

“Yes, Ben?”

“Once I’m out of here, we are revisiting the marriage discussion.”

She let out a snort in disbelief. “Right,” she replied sarcastically.

He fell asleep with a huge grin on his face. Rey could think he was joking all she wanted. He’d prove her wrong when he got down on one knee and showed her the ring.
Had it not been for her state of pure exhaustion, Rey knew she wouldn’t have slept a wink after Ben’s admission. It was just like him to throw something so life-changing it there and then go to sleep. Obviously it was a Solo trait.

He was still asleep, she noted thankfully, when she awoke. Tallie, his nurse, came in to check his vitals. The noise roused Rey, who immediately ducked into the bathroom to inspect her morning hair. Tallie had been kind enough to give her an extra pair of scrubs to sleep in the night before and Rey had to admit despite the sterile look they were comfortable.

When she emerged, Ben’s eyes were on her. “Morning, sweetheart,” he greeted her, while Tallie entered her notes into his chart.

“All good?” Rey asked, moving to stand across from the nurse on Ben’s other side.

“Yes,” Tallie confirmed. “There are no signs of infection or complications from the surgery. If he continues like this, you may be able to go home after the holiday.”

“That soon?” Rey questioned, concerned about the aftercare. Here, Ben was restricted. Back at the apartment, she was certain he’d try to help her cook, clean and whatever else he thought necessary.

“He’ll still need to follow the routine outlined by Dr. Kalonia,” Tallie responded. “And no fighting,” she added, narrowing her eyes at Ben.

“How about training?” he smirked at the nurse before winking at Rey suggestively.
She swore he was getting more and more like Han every day. Last night he had been so forward. She blamed it on the drugs. That was the only reason he could be so calm about something as serious as getting married, right?

“No major physical activity,” Tallie argued.

Ben’s attention snapped back to the nurse. “Not even-.”

“Nope,” she replied, knowing exactly what he was about to ask.

Rey watched his face contort into a frustrated scowl. “I’m gonna kill him,” he growled. Tallie shook her head, ignoring his threat while she finished typing away on the tablet. “For how long?” Ben interrupted.

“Two weeks,” Tallie informed him.

“Damn it,” Ben hissed.

“After discharge,” she amended.

“Fuck.”

Rey took his hand in hers. This was not the conversation she planned on having this morning. Already they were off to a tense start. She’d have to shelve her curiosities about his wayward proposal until he calmed down.
“Mr. Ren,” Tallie began, using her best bedside manner. “You suffered a gunshot wound to your left abdomen. Due to the severity of the graze, it would be unwise to practice any major activity until the wound has fully closed to lower the risk of infection and long-term impact to your health.”

“Fine,” he mumbled, squeezing Rey’s hand. She queried back, leaning down to kiss him on the forehead.

“Two weeks isn’t that long,” she comforted him. “We waited longer than that before. We can do it again.”

“I don’t want to,” he mumbled petulantly.

Smirking, she rested her lips against his ear, “There are other things we can do, Ben.”

The grip he had on her hand tightened until it was nearly painful. “Right,” he coughed, suddenly growing red in the face. She looked up at Tallie, who pointedly ignored the couple’s discussion to finish her work.

“I’ll have breakfast brought in for you both,” the nurse said. “Visiting hours don’t start for another ninety minutes, so if you could both remain in here, I’d appreciate it.”

“Thanks, Tallie,” Rey smiled.

“When you’re on break, bring your boyfriend by,” Ben instructed. “I’ll sign whatever he wants.”

“Thank you, Mr. Ren.”
“You can call me Kylo, Tallie,” he offered.

“Thank you...Kylo,” she nodded and then she was off, heading out to see the other patients on her rotation.

“How did you sleep?” Ben asked her.

Rey rounded his bed, taking her seat from the day prior so she could be closer to him. “Fine. The cot was surprisingly comfortable,” she replied.

“Any good dreams?” he pressed.

“Define good.”

“Ones with me in them,” he smirked.

“You’re funny all doped up,” Rey laughed.

“I’m not.”

“What?” the smile fell from her face, as she stared at him.

“I’m not doped up,” Ben clarified. “Dr. Mitaka put a note in my file. Harter wasn’t able to give me a standard dose, just enough so I can function.”
Rey felt all the air leave her lungs as her mind struggled to process what this meant. If Ben wasn’t on painkillers had he meant what he said last night? All the teasing and all the playful jokes were not a result of his medication but of his own will?

“Sweetheart,” he picked up her hand. “I meant what I said last night. I want to marry you. I’d marry you right here, right now if you’d let me.”

“Ben!”

“I have the ring at home,” he continued. “So before you start over-analyzing this and tell me no because you think I’m proposing since I’m in this bed, let me ease your conscious. That’s not it at all. I want this, Rey. I want you.”

“Ben,” Rey bit her bottom lip, unable to articulate anything beyond his name.

The last twenty-four hours were tumultuous. She hadn’t had the time to fully digest what occurred. Between Plutt showing up, the fight, the gunshot and rushing Ben here, Rey hadn’t had a free moment to do anything more than worrying about her boyfriend. Despite the fact Plutt was behind bars, she was still scared, fearful what would happen at trial.

And now Ben was telling her he seriously wanted to get married.

As soon as he mentioned the ring, Rey felt a bit dizzy. When had he had the time to go ring shopping? How long had he been planning this? Should she have known? Was it bad she wanted to say yes? Was that crazy?

“Rey?” She stared at him, throat dry and head spinning. “Say something, sweetheart.”
She opened her mouth, but as the words finally came, so did their breakfast.

Ben’s focus shifted away from her face momentarily. He glowered at the kitchen staff as if the poor guy knew what he interrupted.

“M-Mr. R-Ren,” the kid stuttered. He couldn’t have been more than eighteen. If coming face to face with MMA royalty wasn’t enough to startle him, the death glare Ben was issuing sure was.

“Thank you,” Rey stood up, helping the nervous guy assemble Ben’s bedside tray and laying out the breakfast items.

“Thank you, m’am,” the kid responded, his hands shaking as he set down each item carefully.

Ben watched, silent as his anger radiated around him, pulsing like a hot beacon of energy.

“This looks great. Doesn’t it, Ben?” Rey nudged her boyfriend. He shook his head, the heat of his frustration lessening. She gestured to the kitchen staff, who was backing away.

“Thanks, kid,” Ben managed. Rey crossed her arms over her chest, shooting him an expectant look.

“Hey, um, you want a selfie together to show your friends how cool your job is?”

“Oh?” Instantly the guy’s demeanor changed and Rey beamed at her boyfriend proudly.

She stepped around, allowing the boy to stand over Ben and snap a couple pictures. He thanked them both profusely, darting out of the room, his face buried in his phone.
“That was nice of you,” Rey commented.

“You’re making me soft,” he feigned annoyance.

“You were already soft,” she grinned. “You just forgot it was there under all the brooding.”

“I don’t brood,” he argued.

“Right,” she rolled her eyes.

They enjoyed their breakfast wordlessly, his earlier question hanging in the air between them. Rey ate quickly, her hunger undeniable after not eating much the day prior. Ben followed her example, pleased to be able to eat solid food now that he’d gotten a clean bill of health from Tallie.

As they finished, Rey shifted to sit on the edge of his bed. Ben slid the trays away, all else forgotten.

“Ben, I-”

A knock interrupted her for the second time. Ben slammed his fist down, knocking the trays and all their breakfast remains to the floor. Rey jumped up from her seat, startled by his outburst. “What?” he roared.

“K-Kylo?” Tallie peeked into the room.
“Shit,” he muttered, running a hand through his hair. “Sorry, Tallie. What can I do for you?”

“You have two visitors,” she announced.

“Can you ask my parents to give us a minute, please?”

“We’re not your parents,” a familiar clipped voice corrected. Phasma and Hux walked into the room.

“Get out,” Ben growled, sitting up as far as he was able. Rey instantly pressed a hand to his shoulder, a physical reminder he needed to rest. “I have nothing to say to either of you.”

“That’s fine,” Phasma replied. “We’re not here to talk, so just listen.”

Once she made sure Ben was settled, Rey marched over to the two. “You have a lot of nerve coming here,” she snapped.

“Almost as much nerve as pissing off the First Order?” Hux quipped.

Before she even realized what she was doing, Rey’s hand flew across the space between them. There was a resounding slap of skin against skin as she struck the red-head across the face. Soon his cheek matched the color of his hair. He gaped at her, a hand coming up to cup his heated skin though there was nothing to help his bruised ego. Phasma didn’t even flinch. She merely watched the spectacle before clearing her throat.

“Would it make you feel better if you hit me too, Rey?”
Narrowing her eyes at the statuesque blonde, Rey shook her head. “No,” she hissed. “I think you should both leave. Visiting hours are for family and friends. You are neither.”

Phasma’s eyes went over her head to where Ben lay. There was a flicker of pain in her ice blue orbs, before she sighed and glanced back down at Rey. “We tried to prevent this. Whether you believe that or not, we did try,” the taller woman confessed to Rey. “I must have left thirty messages for you,” this she said to Ben.

Rey’s stomach churned with realization as the underlying message of Phasma’s words became clear. She stumbled back until her knees hit the chair and she collapsed into her seat. “Y-you knew?”

“It wasn’t supposed to be Ren,” Hux insisted, taking a step towards them.

His reply played over and over in her head, as Rey come to an even more sinister understanding. Suddenly the scrubs didn’t feel comfortable. They felt restrictive and heavy, weighing her down. Her body burned beneath the itchy material as the temperature in the room increased. She remembered thinking it was odd Plutt had a gun. She remembered wondering why he called her a whore. He’d never used that word before, but she knew someone who did — someone who had used the word in reference to her, in fact.

Snoke.

Never before had she been hated. Abandoned, yes. Looked down upon, sure. But never hated, never despised so deeply that someone actually wanted her dead. It was a chilling thought to know someone out there had such little regard for her life.

“What the fuck!” Ben shouted.

In the tiny logical part of her brain which was still functioning, Rey knew she should tell him to remain calm. He was less than twelve hours out of surgery. It wouldn’t do him any favors if there was a spike in his blood pressure.
“Ben.” Her hand found his, even though she wasn’t looking at him.

Her eyes were focused on the floor.

“What the *fuck* did you do?” Kylo demanded, his hand wrapped completely around Rey’s as she sat in a nearly catatonic state at his side.

“We didn’t do anything,” Hux spat, his lips curled up in a sneer.

Phasma stepped between them, not that Kylo could do anything. He was confined to his bed. “I can’t begin to tell you,” his former assistant paused, glancing over to Rey, who hadn’t moved an inch, “either of you, how sorry I am. If I had known how far Snoke was willing to go-.”

“Don’t pretend like you don’t know what he’s capable of, Gwen,” Kylo snarled. “You’ve worked for him longer than I have.”

“Exactly,” Hux surged forward. “That is exactly why we sided with Snoke. If you leave the First Order, that’s it! We’re done!”

“What are you talking about?” Kylo asked.

Sighing, the red-haired man pinched the bridge of his nose. “We’re not profitable without you. The revenue the company makes from your fights, your royalties, and everything else is what keeps us hitting our forecasted profit margins. Hell, over sixty percent of our endorsement deals are only
because you signed with them first. If you go, they will all pull out. We’ll be in the red upwards of five million dollars! And that’s just the first year.”

Kylo reeled at the information. He knew Snoke was a shady businessman, but he hadn’t considered the old man would gamble everything on the career of his prized fighter.

“Hux and I owe you more than an apology,” Phasma acknowledged, “which is why we’ve come. As soon as we found out what he was planning, we tried to warn you, but-”

“You didn’t pick up your bloody phone,” Hux inserted.

“I didn’t want to speak to you,” Kylo reminded him.

The two men openly glared at each other, tensions rising. Phasma looked to Rey once more, but his girlfriend remained silent and unmoving. Her lack of response was beginning to really worry him, but he needed to finish with Hux and Phasma first.

“As I was saying,” the blonde glared at both men. “Snoke got Rey’s information from the file I took out of your office. That’s how he found out about Plutt. He figured with Plutt’s history of violence, it would go down without question.”

“He didn’t figure on me,” Kylo growled.

“No,” Phasma agreed, “he didn’t. You weren’t supposed to get caught up in it. Snoke paid Plutt to ‘deal with Rey’ because he believed if she was gone, you’d come back and resign your contract.”

“Bastard,” Kylo seethed.
“But we got him,” Hux produced a flash drive from his pocket. He handed it over to Kylo, who studied the small device curiously. “I found the financial transactions and made a copy. It links his dealings with Plutt to one of Snoke’s lesser known accounts,” he explained.

“And I may have been recording our last few meetings with him,” Phasma mentioned with a devious grin.

Kylo quirked a brow, looking between his former colleagues. “Why? Why do this for me?”

“You were the best boss I ever had,” Phasma conceded. “When you said you were going to retire, I was angry with you. I thought you were throwing your future away. You had a choice, the choice I never got. I had to give up that life. You were choosing to give it up,” she shared with him. “I was so mad at you that I thought the only way I could save my job and your future was to align with Snoke. But after the gala…,” she trailed off, looking to Hux.

“Snoke made threats as soon as we exited the ballroom and we knew,” Hux took over. “I started doing some digging, all while under the guise of still being in his pocket. Turns out there are more unhappy employees at the First Order than happy ones, including Dr. Mitaka. Still, we didn’t believe we had enough to go to the MMA board until he got it in his head he was going to have Plutt go after Rey.”

Hux swallowed, looking rather uncomfortable. “For what it’s worth, I am sorry.” He said this to Rey, but she didn’t appear aware of his apology or the conversation in general. Her gaze was fixated on the floor.

It struck a nerve for Kylo. He had dealt with Snoke for years. None of his abuse came close to this. No, the old man had crossed a line and now Kylo would cross one too.

“I’ll kill him,” he vowed.
Kylo jolted, startled by the sound of Rey’s voice. Throughout the conversation she was silent, motionless and distant. Suddenly he saw fire in her eyes, the gold flecks nearly bronze with her rage. “We are the spark that will light the fire that will burn the First Order down.”

“No.”

“Sweetheart?” It was terrifying and arousing to see her this way.

“He came after me,” Rey replied, looking over at him. “He came after us, Ben.”

Suddenly, everything became clear to him.

“I know what I have to do.”

Chapter End Notes

Can't believe this story hit 2,000 kudos and you are all still here for it! Thank you so much!!!!
Home (Epilogue)

Chapter Summary

4 months later...

Chapter Notes

Thank you to @atchamberlin for beta-ing this and getting me over the finish line!

To all those who are celebrating, Happy Thanksgiving! Here's my special gift to you all!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Four months later…

Bringing the First Order down wasn’t the epic drawn out battle Rey expected. In fact, the whole situation was rather anticlimactic though no less rewarding when she and Ben watched as Anthony Snoke was carted off in handcuffs like a common criminal.

Though some of what Phasma and Hux provided to the Corellia Police Department and the MMA League officials was considered admissible in court, the allegations alone were enough to end the fighting club and put a freeze on all of Snoke’s personal finances.

Once they had all provided their testimonies, it was a unanimous vote to give Anthony Snoke a life sentence. His lawyer had appealed it, of course, but the damage to his reputation was irreversible. The story was all over the news for months. While the lawyers duked out the specifics of Snoke’s sentencing and the appeal in court, Rey was happy to return home with Ben.

After her boyfriend was released from the hospital, Rey fell into a daily routine. She’d wake up before dawn to go through the checklist Dr. Kalonia provided them at discharge. Rey made sure all his meals were prepared, even going as far as to put sticky notes on the containers in the fridge to identify a dish as breakfast, lunch or dinner. She also listed out which medications were to be taken with each meal.

From there she’d grab a shower, dress for work, and drive the Vanquish out to Cloud City. Her first day had been delayed due to Ben’s condition. Even if Lando hadn’t been a family friend, he wouldn’t have kept Rey from the hospital. Ben’s situation was public information. Between the mobs of his fans and people fighting against domestic abuse, she and her boyfriend were hounded non-stop since the story got out. All of the attention made Rey uncomfortable, so she was more than glad when she was able to start full time in Bespin.

Throughout the workday, Rey would step out of her lab to shoot Ben texts, making sure he followed the strict schedule outlined by the doctor. Most of his responses were complaints. He didn’t want to eat kale for the third time this week. Would it really be so bad if he hit the bag a few times? Or her ultimate favorite — why had she hid the whiskey from him?

By the time she arrived home in the evening, he was usually finishing up physical therapy with Sabine Wren. Dr. Connix had recommended her and Rey had been relieved to find out Ms. Wren
did house calls.

Often she invited the woman to join them for dinner, wanting an update on Ben’s progress. She didn’t trust him to be completely honest with her. Despite her radical hair color, Sabine was a methodical and direct therapist. Unlike Dr. Connix, who could be blunt when aggravated, Sabine had a no bull-shit policy, which Rey adored and Ben couldn’t argue with. As much as Ben pretended not to like the woman, Rey could tell he enjoyed having someone to talk to during the day while she was gone, especially someone who wouldn’t back down when he threw something….like a chair.

Of course, Rey’s favorite part of her new routine was later, after Sabine had taken her leave for the evening. Ben and her would cuddle up in bed, or at least the best they could considering his wound.

Dr. Kalonia informed them Ben would have the scar for the rest of his life. It hadn’t bothered him. However, Rey teared up at the news. Despite their victory against Snoke, she still felt partially to blame for Ben’s injury and no amount of him telling her she wasn’t would persuade her otherwise.

Tonight, as they laid together in bed, Ben told her about his role in the latest release of EA’s MMA video game. He was expected at their recording studio next week to begin dialogue work. It was too far away to commute, so he’d be staying over in a hotel for the week, or longer, if they needed him.

Rey was proud of him. She knew it drove him mad to be trapped in the apartment all day, especially since she had forbidden him to use the home gym. Ben hadn’t done any exercises others than those authorized by Sabine, which Rey contributed to his glowing reviews from Dr. Kalonia. Each time they went in for a check-up, the doctor gave him a clean bill of health and reminded him to keep up the good work.

As they neared the four month mark, Rey was looking forward to the prospect of them officially beginning their new lives together. While she had been moved into their apartment since he got discharged, it hadn’t feel real, mostly because Ben was so restricted.

The only activity he had been fully cleared for was in the bedroom. After the first two weeks at home, he called Dr. Kalonia’s cell requesting she tell Rey it was fine for them to go back to normal. Of course, he didn’t mention to his surgeon that normal for them was working up a sweat fighting on
the mat before they ended up naked and on top of each other. Rey also chose to leave out those particular details.

Gunshot wound or not, Ben was as insatiable as ever. He kept her up some nights until near morning hours, resulting in her need for two cups of coffee before she left for work, but Rey never complained.

Ben didn’t do anything small. It wasn’t in his nature.

Interestingly enough, given the nature of what transpired with Snoke and Ben’s role in securing Rey’s safety, the MMA chose to decrease his community service sentence and reinstated him as a proud member of the MMA. They were shocked when he announced he was retiring, as was the rest of the former First Order. Everyone except Rey, Phasma, and Hux were baffled by his sudden decision to leave the professional fighting world behind.

As soon as they got through the door that night, Rey was on him, intent on proving to him how impressed she was.

He continued to impress her when he offered to host a holiday gathering at the apartment for their family and friends. Rey, who had only ever celebrated Thanksgiving by working, was surrounded by a home filled with food, friendly faces, and fun.

Leia brought enough wine to get the entire apartment complex drunk. Han brought equal amounts of whiskey. Phasma and Tormund brought the main event, the giant beast of a man surprising everyone with his culinary skills as he masterfully cooked up two insanely large turkeys.

Poe and Finn arrived with an assortment of homemade desserts they had spent the better part of the week making, such as pumpkin pie, pecan pie, chocolate cupcakes, and brown sugar cookies.

Hux actually worked up the nerve to ask Rose to be his date to the party. She called Rey to ask if she thought it was a good idea to get involved with Ben’s former manager.
At first, Rey hesitated. Her concerns about Hux lingered, but since he came clean to her and Ben at the hospital he had been nothing but kind to her. He sometimes dropped by to bring them groceries or offered to pick up Ben’s medicine at the pharmacy so Rey didn’t have to go out of her way on her drive home.

Ben called it overwhelming guilt, but Rey was beginning to believe that Hux viewed Ben as his only real friend. So she gave him her blessing and he and Rose enjoyed the holiday together. Strangely enough, he stopped doting so much on Rey and Ben after Thanksgiving and began to turn all his attention to Rose.

Jess arrived with Luke, Maz, and Chewie, who Rey gushed over for a solid ten minutes, before she realized she wasn’t sure what the apartments policy was on pets. Ben told her not to worry about it and she resumed giving the pup a belly rub.

The Rogue One crew came with tons of food. Like Tormund, Cassian and Baze enjoyed cooking. The three kicked Phasma out of the kitchen, working together until it was time to serve their feast. Somehow they had managed to produce more food than Rey had ever seen in her life, including all those expensive restaurants Ben insisted on taking her to.

Jyn hung out with Jess, Rose and Rey while Chirrut and Kaytoo played a round of chess. Somehow, even though he was blind, Chirrut won. His victory led to the blonde bartender sulking in the corner the rest of the night, until Ben brought him a round of whiskey for a change.

Even Lando joined them. Rey’s new boss brought champagne to prematurely toast the success of Lobot, his latest release which she helped with. While he hung out with Han, Leia, Luke, and Maz discussing the ‘good ‘ol days’, Rey and Ben mingled with the rest of the guests.

Rey’s position at Cloud City was going well, so well she constantly wondered if she was going to wake up one morning to find this had all been a dream. Some nights Ben would find her staring off, her mind consumed with doubts about her position. He’d pinch her, chuckling when she’d swat him in retaliation, then hold her close as he promised over and over again that she deserved this life.
Not matter how many times he told her, Rey still liked to hear it.

“So, what do you think?” Ben asked.

“Huh?” Rey glanced over at him, suddenly snapping back to the present.

“See,” he laughed, “I knew you weren’t listening.”

“Sorry,” she blushed.

“Something on your mind, sweetheart?”

“Just thinking.” Rey replied.

The holiday season and New Years had passed in a blur and she had been sure Ben would propose. He hadn’t. Rey knew with the trial, the GA launch at her job, and rehabilitation they were busy. Yet, she couldn’t help the nagging feeling in her gut that Ben might be second guessing his choice to ask her, even if the hospital hadn’t a real proposal.

“If you’re worried about the first quarter numbers for Lobot, don’t be,” Ben reassured her, wrapping an arm around her shoulders to pull her closer. He pressed a kiss to the crown of her head. “It’s only been a month.”

“Right, right,” she nodded, only half listening.

“Rey?”
“Hmmm?”

“You want to tell me what you’re really worried about?”

“It’s nothing,” she insisted.

“Sweetheart, I know the last few months haven’t been easy so if something is bothering you, tell me.”

“I’m just tired,” Rey lied.

Ben pursed his lips, but didn’t push her. He kissed her goodnight, told her he loved her and rolled onto his back to go to sleep.

As she laid awake in the darkness next to him, Rey wondered if she would have preferred an argument to his silence.

Kylo — well, he went by Ben now — cursed himself as he nearly missed the exit for EA Studios. He had been struggling to concentrate since he left the apartment earlier. Due to traffic, Ben woke before Rey and slipped out after kissing her goodbye. She’d barely roused long enough to tell him she loved him, before her soft snores filled the bedroom.

She had been off for the last couple of weeks. At first he worried it was because Plutt’s final sentencing was coming up, but when he mentioned it to her, she appeared to have forgotten all about
Lobot was doing exceptionally well in the market and Lando was giving all those who worked on the project a bonus, so it wasn’t work related.

Last week he asked if taking care of him was becoming too much and suggested hiring a nurse. Rey had vehemently shot his idea down. “You took care of me before, Ben. Please let me take care of you now.”

He couldn’t argue with her. At the same time, he couldn’t understand what had his girl so down.

His trip couldn’t have come at a worse time. Ben felt as though their relationship was unraveling. Like a spool of yarn unwinding before his eyes, he saw the signs of it but he didn’t know how to stop it. If only she’d tell him what was wrong.

Ben spotted the parking garage for the studio and pulled the Vanquish into the first available slot. He took a moment to text Rey, letting her know he arrived safe. Ben had the urge to call her but he knew she’d be in her lab by now. He didn’t want to disturb her.

Next week was his final exam with Dr. Kalonia. He had been planning on taking Rey out to dinner to celebrate and then for a surprise afterwards. Valentine’s Day was fast approaching and though he didn’t want to be a cliche, he felt he’d waited long enough.

At Thanksgiving, Ben had pulled Finn and Poe aside, asking them for their permission to marry Rey. After her reaction at the hospital, he realized he was forgetting some crucial steps in making the proposal perfect. Having her friends’ blessing was a new twist on the old tradition, but it was one he knew she’d appreciate. It had been his sole reason for having everyone to the apartment for the holiday. It served as the perfect diversion so he was able to speak man to man with both Finn and Poe without raising any suspicions from his girlfriend. His parents were already in the loop and fully supportive of his decision.
Now the only one he still needed to speak to was Rey.

Ben decided he didn’t want to propose while he was in recovery. Rey had been waiting on him hand and foot. Even as he got cleared to do more and more on his own, she insisted on doing meal prep and other tasks to make his days easier. He didn’t want her to feel obligated to say yes, so he held off. When Rey said yes, he wanted it to be because she wanted to, not because she felt she should.

He knew she loved him. It wasn’t a matter of that. Ben trusted Rey and trusted in her love of him. He only wanted to afford her the opportunity to accept his proposal on her own terms.

As he strolled up to the studio entrance, his cell rang.

“Hello?”

“Hey!” His girl’s voice greeted him, instantly bringing a smile to his face.

“Hi, sweetheart. How’s your day going?”

“Good. I wanted to catch you before you went in so I could say good luck!”

“Thanks. I love you,” he replied, feeling warmth surge through his body. It felt good to know she was thinking of him. “I miss you already.”

“I miss you too,” she sighed, sounding smaller than she had before.

He fought every nerve in his body demanding he get back in his car and drive back home.
“But it’s only a week, right?” Rey questioned.

“Right,” Ben confirmed. “Then I’m all yours.”

“Promise?”

“I promise, Rey. I’m yours and you’re mine.”

“I’m yours and you’re mine,” she echoed back to him. “Good luck, Ben.”

“Thank you, sweetheart. Love you.”

“Love you.”

They disconnected after that. Ben sighed. A week had never felt so long.

“Are you sure about this, Rey?” Rose asked.

“Yes.”
“I think it’s pretty badass,” Jyn commented, as the four women walked into E.G. Landis Jewelers in downtown Corellia.

“You would,” Jess rolled her eyes. “You proposed to your husband.”

“I had too,” Jyn shrugged. “Cassian loves to play the slow game. If I hadn’t taken matters into my own hands we’d still only be dating.”

The girls all broke into a round of laughter, all except Rey who was peering into the nearest case. Houses beneath the thick layer of glass were dozens of ring options ranging from titanium to stainless steel to white gold and traditional gold. Her eyes skimmed over each, looking at the width, overall design and color choices. There were nearly as many varieties as there were for women.

“When does Ben come home?” Jess asked, joining her.

“Tomorrow night,” Rey answered. “He’s driving home after he finishes his final session.”

“Are you going to do it then?” Jyn questioned.

“No,” Rey shook her head. “We’re going to see Dr. Kalonia on Monday. Afterwards, he’s taking me to dinner to celebrate. I figure I’ll ask him then. I don’t want to spring anything on him before they check his blood pressure.”

“Probably for the best,” Rose agreed.

Rey spotted a black Tungsten Carbide metal ring with a pair of red bands through the center. She flagged down an attendant, pointing to the ring. “May I see this one, please?”
The jeweler brought the ring out for her to see. Rey felt the weight of it, heavy and large in her palm. As she studied it, she decided the coloring was wrong. Red and black were the colors of the First Order and of Kylo Ren. She didn’t want to marry Kylo Ren, the prized MMA fighter. She wanted to marry Ben Solo, the man who taught her how to fight, the man who had taken care of her when she was sick, the man who had given all of himself to her. That’s the man she loved. That’s the man she was going to ask to marry her.

“Would you like to see a different option?” the attendant questioned.

She nodded, selecting a different ring. Her second choice was an obsidian titanium band by David Yurman. The main band was dark gray with the black encircling the middle section. It made her think of all the darkness in Ben’s past, parallel to the darkness within her own past and how they had come out on the better side of it…together.

“This one,” she decided, nodding to the attendant. “I’ll take this one, please.”

“He’s going to freak,” Jess commented.

“Probably,” Jyn agreed, “but then he’ll get over it.”

“Did Cassian?” Rey asked.

“Yeah, of course,” Jyn laughed. Then after a pause, she added, “By the time we reached our third or fourth anniversary.”

“Wait! What?!!”
Ben’s final exam with Dr. Kalonia was a success. Both Harter and Tallie were impressed he managed to follow their plan to the letter. They thanked Rey for her obvious persistence and sent them both on their way. It wasn’t until they left Dr. Kalonia’s office, Ben realized he had forgotten to transfer the ring from his sock drawer to his pocket.

“Do you mind if we stop off at home before dinner?” he asked, as he drove them back to Corellia.

“Why?” Rey furrowed her brow.

“I forgot….my wallet,” he lied.

Rey raised an eyebrow at him. “It’s in your back pocket. You gave your ID to the nurse at check-in, remember?”

“Right,” Ben nodded, internally scrambling for another reason to go back to the apartment.

“Ben?” Rey reached over and took his hand. “What’s going on?”

“Nothing,” he replied quickly. Too quickly.

“Oh,” she withdrew her hand, crossing her arms over her chest. “Is this about Dr. Kalonia?”
“Sorry, sweetheart,” he feigned guilt. “I miss the mat.”

Her face broke into a genuine smile. “I’m sure we can manage a short pitstop.”

Though he managed to bypass one potential set-back, Ben still had to work to keep his breathing regulated. His palms were sweaty and he was sure Rey could hear his heart hammering away in his chest all the while they made their way up to the apartment.

Once they were inside, she headed into the bedroom and began changing. Ben followed her lead, prolonging his actions to wait her out so he could grab the ring, but Rey waited for him in the doorway.

“Are you coming?”

“Yeah, I’ll be right there,” he told her.

She gave him a look, but then padded barefoot into the home gym.

Ben dug in his sock drawer pulling out the small velvet case and dropping it into his training pants. He envisioned a spring wedding, a time for rebirth and new things. It would officially mark the rebirth of him as Ben Solo and the new life he chose to live with Rey. They could leave the rest of it behind — Plutt, Snoke, their former loneliness. All of it was in the past. Rey was Ben’s future.

Joining her in the gym, he saw her stretching in the corner. When she noticed him, she stood up, falling back into her stance. He charged, aiming for a quick take-down but the months on bedrest and in physical therapy had slowed his reaction time down. Rey sidestepped him, kicking out his knee.
Ben barely managed to get away before her next strike came down on him.

Rey kept on him, sparing him no mercy as she pressed forward. Ben had rarely fallen back on defensive tactics, but he found in his weakened state he was unable to match her with his normal power. His girl was as deadly as she was beautiful. He was too busy admiring her handiwork as she attempted a spinning snap kick that he missed her follow through. She knocked him to the ground. With a grunt, Ben fell onto his back.

“Ben!” Rey dropped to her knees at his side. “Are you alright?” she asked, leaning over him.

“Yep,” he smirked, grabbing her by her forearms and flipping them over so he was on top of her.

“Good,” she narrowed her eyes, before wrapping her legs around his torso and flipping them again so she was straddling his hips. “That was sneaky,” Rey pointed out.

“Almost as sneaky as this?” Ben asked, as he plucked her head off his chest to show her the ring he was holding. Rey’s eyes widened. She stared at the ring, then at him and then back at the ring. Then she nodded.

His uncle had said Rey leaving Ahch-To at the end of summer was poetic. To Ben proposing at the start of their lives together was poetic. They were both leaving their old selves behind, starting new careers and taking their separate lives alone and merging them into one shared existence. What was more poetic than making it official with a ring?

He decided since they were merging two separate lives, he would merge his two separate ideas for a ring. With Leia’s permission, he had the stones taken from his grandmother’s ring. A jeweler from Chandrila created a custom band for Rey, setting all the stones within it to make one unique set — an engagement and a wedding band which fit together — two halves of a whole. Just like them.

And when he slipped the ring onto her finger and it was a perfect fit, there was no denying how utterly poetic — and perfect — the moment was.
Rey had tears in her eyes as she stared down at him. He cupped her face in one of his hands, lifting up just far enough up off the mat to kiss her.

“Are you sure you can handle being part of the Skywalker clan, sweetheart?”

Rey flashed him a coy grin. In a surprise twist, she pulled out a ring from her training pants and slipped it on his finger.

“Hit me with your best shot.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all for sticking with me through my hiatuses and the cliff-hangers! I love you all for your support. Ending this fic is bittersweet for me, but I can't say thank you enough to all of you who have been with me through this journey. Thank you all so much!

Since a few of you have asked, I have a couple of things in the works that I'm finishing up over the next month or so. The next big fic I'm planning is for RebelRebel and it will be a Reylo/Labyrinth cross-over. (Yeah 80's babies and Bowie fans!!!!) Also I'm going to try my hand at an A/B/O. It will be called "The Chemicals Between Us" and Panda already made me some gorgeous artwork for it.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!