Brace for Impact

by DarkCellar

Summary

After the events of Starkiller, Kylo Ren has managed to overpower Rey, and bring her on board his ship, preparing to take the girl to his Master, Supreme Leader Snoke. But en route to Snoke's ship, Kylo and Rey have an accident that leaves them temporarily stranded on a cold, foreign planet.

The two have to put aside their differences and work together to survive, but, little do they know, the REAL survival begins once they are 'rescued'.

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Chapter 1

Rey sat up, feeling sick to her stomach and dizzy, as she tried to remember where she was.

She had no idea how long she had been unconscious, but it appeared she was in -- a ship? Of sorts? A small one, judging from the looks of the controls in front of her.

She put her hand to her head, and winced at the small painful bump that she could feel had been raised on her forehead.

She looked over to her left, and if she wasn't still in such a daze, she would have shrieked in fear.

Kylo Ren sat next to her, slumped over in his seat, unconscious.

Kylo Ren.

The man who had forced her onto the edge of a cliff just a short while ago, and gotten her to submit to him as his prisoner. The man who had nearly killed her.

The man who had marched her through the woods, lightsaber pointed at her back, towards the burning base, where he commandeered a small ship with a promise to take her right away to his Master.

He had spoken via holo to another man, a General of some sort, telling him that he was alive, had retrieved 'the girl', and was going to meet them at what he referred to as "B-2".

But something had happened, hadn't it?

Yes, thought Rey, the memory slowly creeping into her foggy brain. One of the Resistance fighters had observed the small First Order ship taking off, and had opened fire on them, damaging the engines and forcing them to make an emergency landing on a small, cold planet just a little away from the former Starkiller.

The impact had knocked them both unconscious, and Rey was the first to wake up.

Behind her, there was a 'floomp' sound, and a creaking, and Rey knew that it was only a matter of time before the damaged engines combusted.

I could escape, she thought to herself.

I could leave him here, and, while he's burning, I could get away. Hide. Maybe find other people, get some help. Get back home.

Yet even as she thought the words, she knew that she couldn't do that. Captor or not, he was still another human being, and she couldn't just leave him to perish.

She grabbed hold under his arms and pulled as hard as she could. For a second she panicked, because he was so heavy that she didn't think she could move him. And then slowly, slowly his body budged just the slightest bit, allowing her to drag him along and out of the ship.

She pulled him a safe distance away from the wreckage, just as the cockpit caught on fire.

She laid him flat on the ground as gently as she could, and took a look around.
Wherever they were was cold, and dark. It appeared as though the sun had just set, the sky showing faint traces of pink in the white clouds. It was snowing, too; not hard enough to be concerned about, but enough to take notice of.

She took her pack off of her back and crouched down, rummaging through it until she found the spare cloak she kept, for those freezing cold nights on Jakku.

She also found the portable shelter that she had bought, on a whim, the last night she had been on her own planet. Or maybe it hadn't been on a 'whim'. So much had happened since that night, the biggest thing of all being her discovery of her latent Force abilities. Maybe her "powers" had been at work even then, compelling her to buy this shelter-stand before she had any real use for it.

But Rey didn't like to think of that.

All of this was part of something that scared her.

So she pushed it out of her mind and began to set up the walls of the kit. It wasn't very big, but it would serve as a refuge from the worst of the wind and snow, and provide enough covering to build a fire.

A faint sound behind her made her turn around.

He had regained consciousness, and gotten to his feet. One arm was wrapped around his side, hugging himself--and the other was holding his lightsaber, ignited and pointed at her.

She quickly took the saber from her own pocket and held it out towards him, her arm shaking just the slightest bit.

Neither spoke for the space of a few moments; then Rey lowered her saber an inch, and looked at his face.

He was in a great deal of pain, that much was obvious. But something else was there, too, deep down in his soulless black eyes. He was--scared? Worried, at the very least; although whether more worried about HER, or their situation, wasn't clear.

"I don't want to hurt you," Rey said loudly, not taking her eyes from him for a second. "But I will, if you don't put your weapon down."

He narrowed his eyes and glared at her. "That lightsaber--is mine," he growled out at her through gritted teeth. "I'm going to take it, and YOU, back to my Master."

"How about we worry about that, IF we survive this?", she asked him, her saber still held out defensively in front of her. "If we don't get some kind of shelter up before nightfall, we'll die. And, I'm sorry, but I don't exactly trust you. I'm keeping this saber until I see that I can trust you not to kill me."

He wavered a bit, still holding the blade out in front of him. He lowered it when he got a look at her eyes, and saw that she was being serious about their precarious situation.

Finally he switched his saber off and clipped it back into his belt. She did the same with hers ((his)). Wordlessly he began helping her assemble the shelter, and when it was done, the two crawled inside, and Ren lit a small fire in the center.

She watched him for a few moments, then said, softly, "You're still bleeding."
He touched his hand cautiously to his face, looking at the blood that stained his fingers.

She tore a long strip of her tunic off, and started to inch towards him with it held out in her hands. He immediately backed away, suspicious.

"I'm fine, I don't need that," he said, trying to lace his voice with an authority he didn't really feel. In truth he was standing on the edge of exhaustion, the pain from his injuries and the mental stress of the day wearing him out.

"Can you please just cooperate with me?", she asked, irritated. "I'm not doing this for you, I'm doing it for me. I can't stand the sight of blood."

It was almost surreal, having her touch him. Being so--so CLOSE, in a non-threatening way. Especially after what had transpired between them, a mere few hours ago.

Bizarre, as well, that she should be patching up the injuries that she, herself, had given him.

Her small hands were capable and firm, and she wrapped the cloth tightly around his face, stopping the worst of the bleeding. There were several points when he was completely vulnerable, and it would have been easy for her to draw out that saber of hers ((his)) and stab him with it.

But she didn't.

He reached out to probe her mind, and found that she was singularly focused on helping him--which, in and of itself, was horribly odd.

He noticed that she was avoiding looking him directly in the eyes; however eventually their gazes did cross, and what he saw there--the deep, uneasy fear of him--helped to put him at ease, just a bit.

When she was done, she tore several other strips from her tunic, longer ones.

"I need you to take off your robes, please."

"What for?!"

She gave him an exasperated look. "Your side. You were shot, and its most likely still bleeding out."

He seemed about to argue further, but stopped himself, and complied. The blood from his side was much worse, soaking his pale skin running down his leg into the ground below him.

She bound the strips of her tunic tightly around the very worst of the gash, but that was about the best she could manage for him. At any rate the blood flow was considerably slowed.

He grimaced as he pulled the robes back over his body.

"This doesn't change anything, you know," he said in a quiet voice. "I'm still taking you back with me."

She nodded, knowing that it would be useless to resist. Whether she was "strong" in the Force or not, HE was the one who was skilled and trained, here. He had already thrown her into a tree, and had very nearly killed her during their lightsaber battle. She thought that when ((if)) they got to wherever Ren's base was, THEN she could plot an escape.

In the meantime, she was exhausted, and thought she could use a rest.

She took off her cloak and spread it over herself like a blanket, laying her head down on her pack.
"Do you promise not to murder me in my sleep?", she asked, looking at him through eyes that couldn't stay open much longer.

"Do YOU promise the same thing?"

"Yes."

"Then, yes."

So Rey closed her eyes and drifted off to sleep. The last thing she saw was Ren, watching her from across the fire.
Kylo woke up the next morning slowly, hardly able to open his eyes. The sun was shining down on the intolerably white surface of the snow, making everything unbearably bright.

He sat up and touched his side. It was sore, but the bleeding had stopped thanks to the girl's makeshift bandaid.

Wait—the girl.

Where was she?!

He looked around the little hut, but she wasn't there. Cursing to himself, he hauled himself out of the small shelter and outside, looking quickly around him in the snow.

She must have woken up before him with intent to escape him, before he could find a way to bring her back to Snoke.

Looking down, he could see the tracks her boots had made in the snow. They looked relatively fresh. He ignited his saber and prepared to give chase—when he heard footsteps crunching up behind him, from the opposite direction.

He whirled around, and was thoroughly surprised to see the girl, her arms loaded down with firewood.

She looked at him as she got closer, frowning.

"You're just looking for any excuse to kill me, aren't you?", she asked grimly, gesturing to his saber with a nod of her head. He said nothing but switched it off, feeling foolish that he had overreacted as such.

"Thank you," she muttered. "Now can you give me a hand, please, before I snap my arms off?"

Without moving from his position, he used the Force to levitate all the pieces of kindling from her arms, and float them neatly to the center of their hut.

She raised an eyebrow at this, saying nothing, but her thoughts betrayed her.

"When I bring you back to my Master, I'll teach you how to do that," he said, quietly. "Other things, too."

"There's nothing you could teach me, that I want to know," she replied, sitting and warming herself by the fire he had started. "I didn't want this. I don't want any part of this."

"You mean, of the Force?"

She nodded.

"I'm afraid you've got no choice, Scavenger. It's strong in you, and the more you choose to ignore it, the more painful it will be in the long run."

She had a thousand things she wanted to reply with; but she picked the one that was the least damaging to talk about.

"Don't call me 'Scavenger'."
"Well, you never gave me your name, so--"

She sighed, looking into the fire.

"Rey," she said after a few moments, very softly. "My name is Rey."

Now she looked up at him. "Seeing as I'm your prisoner, here, what do I call you? Lord Ren?"

He smiled a little at the ire in her voice.

"That anger you have--do you have any idea how powerful you have the potential to be, once you learn to utilize it?"

When she didn't answer, he relented a bit, and said "You can call me Kylo."

"Fine. Then, Kylo, I hope you have a plan to get us off of this--this wherever we are."

He nodded.

"We wait."

"We wait? For--?"

He pointed to a small rectangular object on his belt. "I have a tracking device on me. It'll take a few hours, considering they likely have to get together a ship after the accident at Starkiller, but someone will come for me."

"Are you positive of that?"

"Yes."

She drew in a shuddery breath. "Okay. I'll trust you, then. In the meantime, though, have you got any food? I'm starving."

He chuckled and reached into his pocket, holding out a protein supplement bar to her.

She took it cautiously, and looked at him.

"This isn't your only one, is it?"

He shook his head, pulling another from his pocket. "No. Why?"

"Because I would feel bad, taking this from you if it was your only one."

She began to eat, making a face at the taste. He watched her before saying "You need to work on that, Rey. Your appalling concern for others."

She shifted her eyes to his face as she continued eating.

"Odd you should say that, because if I didn't have that 'appalling concern', YOU would be dead right now. I would have left you unconscious in the ship while it caught on fire. Instead of berating me, MAYBE you should thank me."

"You're quite combative, do you realize that?"

"A moment ago I was too nice. Now I'm too combative. Please make up your mind," she said grumpily, taking another bite of the bar. She scrunched up her face. "Not to belittle the gift of food,"
but what IS this?"

"It's a protein bar. Contains all the essential nutrients for survival."

"Well, it tastes awful."

"Don't worry, Rey," he said, throwing a few more sticks into the fire. "The food back home is much better."

She folded up the remaining half of her bar and put it in her pocket. Then she took her water jug out of her pack and took several long swallows, before replying.

"Don't refer to it as 'home'. It's not MY home, it's yours. My home is Jakku."

He frowned at that.

"Jakku. Come, Rey, you can't honestly sit there and tell me that you miss that--that land of nothing?"

"It's not 'nothing', or at least it won't be when my family comes back for me."

"Rey," he said, very softly, "You know, in your heart, that . . ."

"What I know in my heart is that I'm cold, and tired, and I'm going to take a nap, if his Lordship approves," she said, quickly cutting him off.

He frowned. "I'm not sure I do; what am I supposed to do while you sleep? Stare at the wall?"

She reached into her pack and dig out a small, worn book, obviously read many times before.

"Stare at this," she said, before turning over on her side, facing away from him. "Assuming you can read, that is."

He just smiled at the anger in her voice, and began reading the little story book she had thrown to him.

A few hours later, she had woken from her nap, hungry once more. Kylo contemplated out-loud the idea of hunting an animal with his lightsaber . . .

. . . when a loud noise made them both turn their head. It was coming from the northeast, and hearing it made Ren smile, just a bit.

"I told you they'd come for us," he said, somewhat smugly.

Rey watched as a large ship began descending on the tiny field. The heat from the engines blew bits of snow and ice all around them, making the air temporarily blurred with most.

Now was her chance. If she was going to run, it would have to be now. While Ren was distracted, and before the 'rescuers' had stepped off the ship.

She slowly shifted her stance towards the south, planting her feet to get traction--when suddenly, her entire body locked up, from head to toe. It was all she could do to shift her eyes in Ren's direction, who was looking at her with that infuriating smirk on his face.

"I already told you, Rey, I don't intend to just let you go. I can't disobey my Master, I MUST bring you back with me."
She struggled to free the hold on her muscles, but the most could do was loosen her mouth, to say "You're a monster."

"Yes," he said, calmly. "Yes, I am."

The ramp to the ship unfolded, and at least a dozen troopers poured out and surrounded Rey. Kylo had released his hold on her, but she nevertheless stood stock-still, knowing it was futile to run.

"Lord Ren," came a voice from the ship. Ren lifted his eyes and looked at General Hux, who was viewing the scenery around him with his usual disdain. "You survived. And you've made a friend!"

"Of course I did, you idiot. It took you long enough to find me."

Hux smiled in that cold way of his. "Do forgive me; we had quite a lot of things to attend to, considering SOMEBODY'S mother and her team of miscreants managed to obliterate Starkiller Base."

Ren narrowed his eyes, and before he could stop himself he held out his hand, lifting the General into the air, slowly strangling him.

"Don't forget who you're talking to, General," Ren said as he slowly approached where Hux was dangling and struggling for air. "My patience is not so tempered as you're thinking, injuries or not."

He dropped him back into the snow, and several stormtroopers went to his aid, helping him back to his feet.

"As impetuous as ever", Hux said once he could breathe again. "I don't have time for your magic, Ren, so please get on the ship."

He turned to two of the guards.

"You two, take the girl and put her into a holding cell on board."

Each moved to take one of Rey's arms, but the moment they touched her they flew backwards several hundred feet and hit the trees with loud crunches.

Ren went to stand in front of her, holding out his arms to back off the other troopers.

"Her name is Rey, and she isn't going into a holding cell. She is our guest and will be treated as such. Is that understood?"

"Yes, Sir!" said the troopers, simultaneously. Hux, however, was shaking his head.

"Ren, you can't be serious. She is a prisoner that we're bringing to Snoke, I'm not going to have her roaming about unrestrained on my ship! She--""}

Hux was cut off, again, by a set of invisible fingers tightening around his throat.

This time when Ren let him go, he came and stood directly in front of the redhead, crouching down beside him.

"She isn't going into a cell, and she can be trusted."

Hux glared at him with eyes full of bile, and stood up slowly, straightening his clothes. Without another word he motioned for the troopers to get back on the ship, and then he boarded himself, leaving Ren and Rey temporarily alone in the snow.
"After you," Ren said, making a sweeping gesture with his arms.

Rey hesitated, then brought out her((his)) lightsaber from her pocket, and held it out to him.

"No," he said, shaking his head. "Keep it. For now."
“You’re much younger than I expected, child.”

Rey stood, trying her hardest to control her trembling,

Upon landing at Ren’s base, everything had been a fast whirlwind of activity. She had been taken by what she assumed to be servants, into prep chambers, where she was treated to the first warm shower of her life, and given new clothes to wear. Dark gray and black, silky and flowing, her outfit was a far cry from the tattered rags she had shown up in. Her hair had also been taken out of her three vertical buns and brushed out, shining and soft, over her shoulders.

“Why all the fanfare, to meet someone who’s going to kill me?”, she had asked sarcastically to Kylo, as they took the elevator to see his Master. She had been put into handcuffs, and they were rather tight on her, which likely accounted for her surly demeanor.

“He isn’t going to kill you, Rey,” Kylo had answered, standing behind her as the elevator continued its upwards journey. “You have to understand, how rare it is to find someone imbued with the Force, in a galaxy where one had assumed that nearly all Force-users had been wiped out. He’s, well, curious.”

“Curiosity killed the cat,” she responded glumly. “It appears I’m the cat, today.”

Kylo just sighed. Talking to such a stubborn, strong-willed person was wearing him out. He had a small moment of time to wonder if this was how OTHERS felt, when speaking to HIM.

“Just so we’re clear, I’m not bowing before him.”

“I’m fairly certain that he doesn’t expect you to.”, he had answered. And then then door slid open.

Dark, and shining. Large. Everything in this room was either in a reflective red, or black. There were no windows, no natural sources of lighting anywhere other than two firepits he had on either side of his throne, which was a large, metallic seat that extended from floor to ceiling. 6 red-suited men, huge and hulking, all holding blue-flamed spears, were places in a half circle around Snoke. Rey took these to be Snoke’s guards.

Kylo had taken hold of her arm and moved her forward, until she was a few feet from Snoke. “Master, this is Rey, the scavenger, as promised,” he said, before leaving her and dropping back a few paces, kneeling on the floor.

“Well done, Ren. I had my doubts that you would be able to obtain her, but now my confidence in you as been restored.”

“Thank you, my Master.” Ren replied, bowing his head.

Rey was unsure, exactly who she was looking at. Or WHAT. Snoke was a tall, thin, gnarled being, dressed in flowing gold robes, sitting hunched over on his throne. His skin was a transuscent white-gray. His head, bald, was adorned with a series of scars and wrinkles. His eyes, tiny glittering black-blue jewels, were focused on her own. He spoke in a deep, slow, confident tone of voice. Was he human? Alien? She wasn’t sure.

Snoke lifted a finger, and Rey’s handcuffs fell off of her, and to the floor. She rubbed the soreness out of her wrists, slowly.
“Come closer.”

Rey didn’t budge. Suddenly, she felt herself being lifted gently off her feet, and floating across the room, until she was directly in front of Snoke.

“You have a stubborn streak, it seems,” she said slowly. He reached out to touch her face, and she cringed away from the touch. “You’re more like Kylo Ren than I would have thought.”

She was floating back now, and she breathed out a sigh of relief.

"You'll fit into my plans most nicely, I'm sure. And you should be proud; you and Lord Ren are going to usher in the greatest period of power that this galaxy has ever seen."

"What do you mean?", she asked him, warily. Behind her, Kylo was looking at his Master with a quizzical expression on his face. He had no clue what Snoke meant by that, but, judging by his tone of voice, whatever he was about to say would be a drastic change in the lives of both him, and Rey.

"Lord Ren, you have been lobbying for years, for me to disregard the troops that General Hux has trained so thoroughly, to institute a clone army, have you not? Such as the one in the times of your Grandfather?"

"Yes, Master."

"And all this time I have denied your request, on the basis of believing that no clone could have the finesse, the intelligence that my current men and women do. But now, seeing that you've brought the girl to me, my mind has been changed. Picture it: a child, born of two parents, both possessed of an unnaturally raw, untamed talent in the Force. Picture how strong that child would be, how unstoppable. Can you see it, my apprentice?"

"Master, I don't understand what--"

"Picture that single child, multiplied. A hundred, a thousand times over. ALL possessing that same raw, untamed strength. Picture them being uniformly trained to work as a cohesive unit. Would any living army, in all the galaxy, be able to withstand such a force?"

Rey was quicker to understand what Snoke was suggesting, and her face paled, her knees feeling weak.

"Surely, you are not implying . . . "

"A baby. A baby, male or female, borne of yourself, and my apprentice."

Kylo understood now, what Snoke meant, and his face paled as well.

“Think of it, Lord Ren; an entire army at the First Order’s disposal, made entirely out of the cloning of your seed. Strong, fast, fierce, and powerful. No opponent could dare stand in our way, nobody would be able to defeat us.”

“Please,” Rey pleaded, from her place on the ground, “Please, I can’t be subjected to this. I can’t be expected to breed with Kylo Ren, the way one would breed animals. I’m not an animal, I’m a human being. Please.”

Snoke looked at her with that same small, cold smile on his face.

“Perhaps you’re right, child. Any offspring of yours should have proper parents, joined together in a
respectable, legal way.”

He turned to Ren and said, firmly, “To put her mind at ease, as well as your own, you will marry her, Ren.”

“M-marry?”, he asked, feeling lightheaded. This entire conversation had spiraled out of control so quickly that he wasn’t sure which end was up, anymore.

“Yes, marry. Marry, and then, young lady, you shall have a time period of two years, in which to produce a child for me. It should not be hard for you; you’re both young, and fit. You should . . .”

Before anyone could react, Rey had force-pulled Kylo’s lightsaber from the floor where he knelt, and turned it on. Snoke’s guards responded immediately, their stances all changing into ones of aggression as they moved to surround the girl. But Snoke held up his hand, holding them off. She had turned the lightsaber towards herself, the fiery, glowing tip pointed directly into her own face.

Kylo tried, and failed, to force pull his saber back into his own hands, but to no avail. Rey, was STRONG. Stronger than him, even. Snoke saw this failure of his apprentice, and it made him smile to himself.

“Don’t be foolish, child. Surely ending your own life isn’t a better reality than the one I am suggesting.”

“I am NOT a child!” she told him, her voice low and steady. “My name is Rey, and I will not be forced into this choice, by you, or anybody else.” Now she turned the saber from her neck and pointed it towards Kylo. “I will kill him, and YOU, and as many guards as I can take down.”

“Rash, and foolish. You are Ren’s counterpart in more ways than one, my dear. But seeing as your mind is unsettled, what about if I made you a deal? An offer, of sorts? You agree to this, to producing me a child for my army, and I give you something in return: your freedom, and something else. Something you’ve dreamt about for years.”

“What are you—”

“Your family. You and Ren give me a child, and I reunite you with the family you’ve been waiting for, for 13 years.”

He had found it, the one weak point in her resolve, the thing she would give up anything, DO anything to get back: her family. Slowly, she switched off the saber, and dropped it to the ground.

“Very well,” she said in a small voice, looking to the floor. “I will marry Lord Ren, I will have his child. But after that, I have your word, your promise, that you will reunite me with my family? That I can leave here?”

Snoke nodded. “You have my word, Rey.”

He looked at Ren, as he continued to address the both of them.

“Then, as long as that’s settled, your wedding shall be in one week’s time. In the meantime, child, you are free to come and go as you please, within the grounds, of course. This is now your home; it would do you well to familiarize yourself with the area, and with the many people you will be seeing. You may not realize it now, but there are many benefits to being here, in The First Order. I shall also take it upon myself to begin your training, until such a time as Lord Ren is fit to train you on his own. Now, you may go. Ren will show you to your temporary chambers.”
As soon as the elevator closed behind them, Kylo turned to Rey in a panic.

“Rey, I swear, I did NOT know that his intentions were—”

Rey cut him off with a vicious (and surprisingly impactful) blow to the face. Her balled-up fist struck him right in his still-healing scar, which opened up, causing blood to pour down his cheeks. While he was preoccupied with that, she kicked him as hard as she could in his crotch, and he went to his knees, uttering one breathless scream of agony. He managed to pull himself back up as they reached the ground level floor, and stagger out of the elevator, at her side. Those in the hallway turned to look at the new girl, and Lord Ren walking beside her, quiet, bleeding and in pain.

So began Rey’s life, in The First Order.
Kylo opened his door to find Hux standing there, looking more disgusted than Ren could ever recall seeing him before.

“Whatever it is, General, I’m not in the mood right now.”

It was the day before Kylo’s “wedding”, and he was a basket of nerves. These past two weeks, he had been trying (and failing) to get in Rey’s good graces, or at least get her to hold a conversation with him, but to no avail. He saw in her mind that she was going to go through with this scheme of Snoke’s, her spirit singularly focused on Snoke’s promise that her doing so would bring her back the family she had been waiting for, for so long. But she wasn’t intending to make it easy on Kylo.

There ceremony was intended to be in the morning, tomorrow. Rey was brave enough to speak up to Snoke and say that she preferred that not a lot of people be present, to which he had complied. Therefore, those attending would be Snoke, General Hux, a dozen or so of Hux’s top officers, and the “happy couple” themselves. That was it, but still. An officiating droid would marry them, and afterwards, there would be a fancy dinner, attended by those that were in the wedding.

After, Ren and Rey would go ‘home’, home being the new, somewhat lavish chambers that Snoke had designated they live in. Kylo had been there multiple times as the maintenance crew was setting it up, but Rey had declined to go with him, to see.

Hux was, understandably, very irritated, at the thought of what Snoke intended to do, once Rey had a child. A clone army was something that he had been fighting against for years, and now, like it or not, it was going to happen. But he was appeased slightly, when Snoke promised him that he would be instrumental in giving the clones instruction and training, as he did with his own troops now. And as for his own men and women, the current army, they wouldn’t be ‘disposed’ of, as Hux had feared. They would be retrained in more specialized forms of combat, which Hux could see the benefit of.

Still, his contention for this very rapid change in his preferred way of life was not taken lightly by the General, and he avoided the person who he felt was the cause of this change, Kylo Ren, as much as he could. Seeing him now, standing outside his personal chambers, was the first time Kylo had seen him in nearly a week.

"Snoke ordered me to come and speak with you, so here I am."

"About?"

For some reason, the General’s face turned a quick, bright red. He marched past Kylo into the room, cleared his throat and sat himself down on the edge of Kylo's sofa.

"I didn't give you permission to come in, nor to sit."

"Okay, look, Ren. You're getting married tomorrow. The girl... Snoke expects you to reproduce with this girl."

"Yes--?"

A deeper red.

"Snoke thinks that, er, perhaps you might be, er, unfamiliar with what that entails. Now, I'm going to go out on a limb and assume your uncle advocated the Jedi rule of celibacy, while
you were under his tutelage?"

Kylo nodded, and his own face suddenly became bright red, as he understood what Hux was driving at.

"The Supreme Leader thought it might be beneficial to you, if I went over some of the basic schematics with you, in regards to -- to -- to the female body, and sexual productivity," Hux finished as quickly as he could.

If Kylo had taken out his lightsaber at that moment, and held the blade up to either of their faces, the colors would have been near-identical to one another.

Not knowing what else to say, or do, Kylo simply sat down beside him, head bowed, staring at the floor.

"If you ever, tell anybody, at all, about this . . ."

Hux nodded. "Understood."

Sighing, he pulled his datapad from his pocket, and pulled up the holos and articles he had prepped for this extremely unwanted talk.

"So, the first thing . . ."

--

Hux’s talk, while helpfully detailed, was incredibly awkward. Kylo was genuinely surprised, at how much he didn’t know, about the opposite sex. Although he wouldn’t say this to Hux, he felt a solid panic encase him, making it difficult to breathe. He didn’t see how he was going to be able to DO all of the things that Hux said went into making a child, or just plain being intimate.

And besides the basic physical details, Hux, being the thorough person he was, took it upon himself to speak to Ren about some other aspects of a “healthy” relationship, extending beyond physical means.

One of the (many) things Hux had spoken to him about, that Kylo actually appreciated, was the concept of gentleness.

"You are heavily built, and she's quite a small girl," Hux had said, in his usual calculating way. "Not to say that she isn't physically strong, because clearly, she is. But many women, they like to be treated softly. Don't crush her hand, hold it. Don't attack her if you kiss her, press your lips to hers gently. When you're with her, laying next to her or . . . you know, be conscious of that. Do you understand what I mean?"

Ren nodded.

"And something else, something important. You two -- you don't know each other so well, yet. GET to know her, as much as you can. Don't be so quick to speak, listen. And she may be your wife, but it's important to ASK, before you do anything to her physically. Even a kiss. You have a tendency to be very aggressive, and that can come across as threatening to a person you are trying to initiate intimacy with. Do you understand?"

"I do."

“Now, as a warning, once you start doing this, it’s likely going to be something you want to do, all
the time. But women, sometimes they don’t want to do it ALL the time. So don’t be angry, don’t be pushy. Remember, if she says no, there is no shame in, er, ‘taking care’ of yourself.”

Kylo stared at him, feeling lost again.

“Taking care of myself? Do you mean, like, showering? Or combing my hair?”

Hux blushed redder than before. Dear kriff, was Ren really THIS sheltered? He was in his 30’s, for Force’ sake. Had he never explored his own body? If not, it was no wonder he walked around so tense and angry all the time.

“No, Ren, taking ‘care’ of yourself. When you feel aroused, but Rey is unreceptive, you can take care of yourself.”

Kylo still looked confused. Sighing, Hux reached over and yanked Kylo’s lightsaber off of his belt, standing it straight up on the table.

“Okay, I think this is a fairly decent representation of your, er, you know. Now, watch my hand . . .”
"Well. It looks clean. And bright. In the daytime, the lighting from those windows must be wonderful."
She was speaking mechanically, in the tone of someone eking out words simply for the sake of keeping calm.

Kylo and Rey's vows had gone much quicker than either had anticipated, and for that, both, being nervous, were grateful.

Kylo had chosen to wear an elegant dark blue overcoat, adorned with beautifully sculpted buttons and fancy ties, complete with black pants and shoes. And he had put two braids, small ones that started separately then wove together, in the very center of his hair. He would not have told anyone this, and nobody knew, but the braids were a traditional hairstyle on Alderaan, for grooms. It signified two lives, two people joining together as one. A very small, secret way of making sure his mother was present on this occasion.

Rey had looked amazing, and Kylo had a very hard time keeping his eyes off of her, as she stood quietly beside him. She had on a simple dark blue dress, that perfectly complimented the color of Kylo's overcoat. The top was smooth but the bottom fell in pleated whirls over her hips, accentuating her lovely curves. Her hair had been brushed until it shone, a chestnut waterfall bouncing off her shoulders.

When the droid pronounced them married, Kylo was at a loss, at what to do. Everybody, including Rey, was looking at him expectantly. Finally Hux, who had been standing at Kylo's side, nudged him, hard, with his elbow, and hissed at him "Kiss her, you idiot."

Kylo blushed, and then hesitantly bent his neck towards Rey, closing in on her lips. At the very last second, she turned her head just the slightest bit, giving him the tiniest corner of her lip, and the bottom of her cheek. Nevertheless, he remembered Hux's warning from the day before and gave his kiss softly, gently.

Everybody had politely clapped, and Snoke had given a long speech about what their union meant to the future of the First Order.

Dinner had been a blur, as well. All around them everybody talked, laughed, and ate, but Kylo and Rey sat stiffly side by side, merely picking at their food. The chefs had gone to a lot of effort to create spectacular dishes, but, to Kylo at least, everything tasted like sawdust in his throat.

Now they were "home", and Rey, it being her first time here, was busily looking around.

The living room consisted of a sofa and several chairs, sitting on top of an imported ewok-fur carpet. The colors of this room were done in a sophisticated-looking gray and white, and everything was very shiny, as if it had been scrubbed by hundreds of hands.

The kitchen was small and cozy, with a conservator, a sink, a stove, and one small rounded table, with two chairs placed on opposite ends.

The refresher boasted a very large tub, and Rey spent a few moments there, simply staring at it. On Jakku, she had always bathed in the river. Seeing the tub was a luxury that she appreciated, more than anyone could understand.

The large bedroom had been furnished with a huge bed, weighted down with several heavy-looking
blankets and a multitude of pillows. There was a single, wide window that looked out on the grounds below. To the left of the bed was a closet, in which both of their sets of clothing had been neatly hung and organized, and, next to the closet, another door.

Rey opened it curiously, and found that it led into another bedroom of sorts. It hadn't been decorated like the larger bedroom. There was an empty closet, a few chairs, and a bed, much smaller than the other room, just big enough for one person. The door on the opposite side of that room led back out into the living room.

"Is this supposed to be a guest room?", Rey asked, mostly to herself.

"I think so. For now, anyway."

She turned and looked at him.

"For now?"

"Well, uh, in time, I believe Snoke intended for it to be a, um, a baby room."

With those words, the overwhelming magnitude of the past few days came crashing down on Rey, and she began to cry, sinking to the floor and covering her eyes with her shaking hands.

Kylo was alarmed. She had been so calm when they had been stranded, so brave during all that had followed; and to see her now, finally, break down was unnerving. It had been so long since he had been around someone who expressed pure, raw feelings like that, that it scared him. Should he yell at her? Give her water? Hug her? He was at a loss for what to do.

He settled for sitting down cautiously beside her, and patting her timidly on the back. She shrank away from his touch and cried harder. He wanted to hug her, but felt that the gesture would scare her more than comfort her.

"Rey--it's okay. I know this is all a big thing to get used to. We--uh, until you're used to me, I'll be more than okay with sleeping in that bedroom myself."

She was still crying, but now she slowly lowered her hands from her eyes. "You'd--you'd do that for me?", she asked with a little hiccup.

He nodded.

"You've been forced into an awful choice, and I'm sorry. I'll try to do everything I can to make this easy for you, I promise."

She gave a long, shuddery sigh, and straightened out her hunched shoulders.

"I'm sorry," she said, her voice husky with tears. "I didn't mean to lose control like that. I didn't mean to--to scare you."

He patted her back, again, and this time she didn't shy away.

"Are you hungry?," he asked, concerned. She seemed so fragile, so thin and breakable. "I can call down to mess staff and have them bring you something."

She shook her head. "I'm just--I'm just tired. I think I'm going to go to sleep."

"Alright," he replied, backing away. He went to the closet and took out a pair of pajamas for himself
to change into. "If you need anything, I'll be right in here, okay?"

She nodded, and walked to the door. When she got there, she paused and turned around, facing him.

"Thank you," she said quietly, her hand on the door button. "Goodnight."

"Goodnight."

Kylo stared at her closed door for a few moments, then set to work straightening out the little bedroom where he would be staying.

So, their first night together hadn't gone as well as he'd hoped. Apparently, there would be none of what Hux had spent hours showing him holos of. Still, they had made it this far, and that was something. Separate bedrooms seemed to relieve her mind a little bit, and calm her down; and for that, Kylo was grateful.

Even so, he could hear her crying, softly, far into the night.

---

"I can't believe this," Kylo muttered to himself, teeth chattering. He removed the panel on the heating console and fiddled with the dials hopelessly, but to no avail.

"Kylo? What's wrong?"

He turned around. Rey stood in the doorway of her bedroom, wrapped in a blanket. She had heard Kylo bumbling around his room, and, it being so late, she wondered what he was doing.

Things between them had settled into a calm, if empty, cadence. She was no longer near-hysterical as she was that first night; rather, she showed very little emotion at all, in regards to everything.

They left their quarters together at around the same time every day, each to their own separate activities. Kylo would more often than not be assisting General Hux on the Finalizer, or going on the odd mission.

Rey was sent to train with Snoke, for hours each day. The Supreme Leader was fixated on his newest young apprentice, and did everything he could to develop and strengthen her amazing raw Force powers.

Rey never said much to Kylo about these sessions, when she saw him at home, but really, she didn't have to. After all, Kylo had been training with him for a good many years, now.

When asked, she WOULD show him what she and Snoke had been working on; and no matter what it was, from levitating the smallest of objects to pushing into his mind, Kylo was encouraging and praising.

He just wished things weren't still so strained between them.

She had revealed early on that she preferred to cook herself, when she had time, rather than order the questionable meals from the Mess Hall staff. So Kylo had their conservator stocked with a variety of ingredients, for her to use, as well as a number of brand-new cooking utensils and vessels.

That last part had legitimately excited her, and put an expression on her face other than smooth compliance. She had actually thanked him, and given him an awkward (but pleasant) hug.

And she was an excellent cook, at that. Seeing as how they were both normally gone the entire day,
the only meal she usually cooked was dinner; but Kylo was grateful for this nonetheless.

She still wasn't very vocal with him, so, as she cooked, Kylo would sit and talk to her. He'd tell her bits about his day, or jokes that he had heard from the Officers on the ship, anything to get her to respond. Most of the time she would only nod, or "mmm hm", or, on rare occasions, laugh; but Kylo took this as progress. It was better than silence, or tears.

He looked at her now, standing in the darkened doorway that connected their two bedrooms, her pale body wrapped in the big, silky-looking blanket. He was amazed at how pretty she looked, even being half-asleep, her hair messy and her face tired. So pretty that it took him a bit to remember why he was standing there in the first place, and give her an answer.

"The heating system is down, I think," he said, turning to the panel and giving it one last frustrated shove. "It must be; I can see my breath when I talk."

"There's no nighttime maintenance staff you can call?"

"No," Kylo said, shaking his head. "There USED to be; but ever since Starkiller, the General and Snoke have been cutting corners all over the place, to improve the budget. Nighttime staff was one of the first things to go."

"Is that the only blanket you have?", she asked, nodding to the thin blanket Kylo had on his bed.

He shrugged. "I'll be fine; once I fall asleep, I won't notice the cold."

She bit her lower lip, and appeared to be struggling with herself, to say something. Finally her face cleared and she said, calmly,

"I have lots of blankets on my bed. And it'd probably be warmer, sharing. If--if you want, you can come sleep with me, tonight."

He cocked his head and regarded her with unease. "Are you sure?"

She nodded. "I'm sure."

She turned from the door and walked back to her bed, crawling beneath the heavy covers. After a few hesitant moments, he followed.

He slowly came further into her room, and sat down on the opposite edge of the bed. He was intensely uncomfortable, and it was only the biting cold that made him push past that awkwardness to swing his feet up into the bed, and pull the covers up to his chin. He sat that way, cross-legged, and tried to warm up.

After a few silent moments, she said "You're shaking."

He looked at her and nodded. "I feel like I'm on Hoth," he said, attempting to make her smile

It worked.

Barely.

"If you think this is cold, you should try sleeping on Jakku."

Kylo laid all the way down now. He turned towards her and frowned.

"Why's that? I mean, isn't Jakku a desert planet? Aren't those boiling hot?"
She also lay down, and faced him. This close to her, he couldn't help but notice how good she smelled. So sweet, and clean, with a vague floral undertone to everything.

"In the daytime, yes," she answered his question. "But when the sun goes down, all the heat is completely robbed from the air. I'd wager that it's actually worse than Hoth; not that I'd want to go there to make comparisons."

In the moonlight streaming in from the window, her face looked so soft, so lovely. He wished he could reach out and touch it, but declined to ask. He didn't want to make her any more uncomfortable with the situation than she probably already was.

"Listen, Rey," he said, after taking a deep breath. "I just--I just want you to know, how sorry I am. For everything. But I promise I'll try to be the best husband possible to you, take care of your needs, and respect your space."

"I don't know if you'll ever feel for me, what most wives feel for their husbands," he continued in a low voice, "Given the circumstances, I wouldn't expect you to. But I would like it, very much, if we could be friends, at the very least."

"Friends?", she mused in her gentle, lyrical voice, looking at him. "I don't know; I've never really had any friends before."

"Neither have I. So how about we start now?", he asked, timidly stretching out his hand across the bed towards her.

After a few long moments, she laced her fingers together with his, giving his hand a light squeeze.

"Okay, friends," she said shyly, before letting go. She yawned and turned over on her side, curling into a ball.

"Goodnight, Kylo."

"Goodnight, Rey."
Chapter 6

About a week after that, Ren moved into Rey's room and slept there, permanently. There was no big discussion about it, no fanfare. She merely stood in her doorway one night, looking at him reading in the living room, and asked if he was coming to bed soon.

That was it. Painless, casual, and simple.

Of course, they had yet to sleep together in that other way, but Ren found that he didn't mind at all. Sleeping next to Rey was lovely, and warm; warm in a way that had nothing at all to do with actual temperature.

He found that he could talk to her, and open up in a manner that he had never done so with anyone before her. She was an attentive listener, and she gave solid advice that would rival his mothers'; and that was no small feat.

She was even understanding about--the helmet.

Not Kylo's, but his grandfather's.

He had put off talking to Darth Vader's helmet as long as he could, after he and Rey moved in together. He thought that it would scare her, and he didn't want to do anything that would make her regret her situation even more.

But eventually he started to again, quietly, either before Rey woke up or after she had left for the day, if she happened to leave before him.

Talking to Vader's helmet was as much a part of Kylo's routine as getting dressed was, and it had been hard for him to abstain as long as he had. It was centering to him, and soothing, and helped him reset all of his emotional dials throughout the course of the week.

The first time Rey had walked in on him speaking softly to the charred remains, Ren paused mid-sentence, fully expecting her to run from the room screaming.

But she didn't.

Instead, she knelt beside where he was sitting cross-legged in front of the pedestal, and asked him serious, thoughtful questions about his grandfather. And he was more than happy to answer, never having been in the presence of someone (other than Snoke) who thought his meditative commune with the physical embodiment of Vader's spirit was perfectly natural.

And, as she was on all other subjects, she was easy to talk to about that.

More than talking, however, he preferred to listen. He asked her countless questions about her life, her childhood, anything he could think of to get to know her better. She was guarded at first, but with time she began to share more and more with him, allowing him an unfiltered look into herself.

It got so that their before-bed talks became Kylo's most looked-forward to part of his day. Slowly, but surely, they were indeed becoming friends, just as he had wanted. And as they got to know each other, their initial awkwardness and uncertainty gradually faded away, making it more pleasant to be around one another.
Sometimes, though, it was difficult for Kylo to keep himself from desiring, fantasizing about -- more.

She seemed hesitant to explore any physical connection beyond the very briefest of hugs, and Kylo tried to be accepting of that, and not push her past her boundaries until she was ready to go there with him.

But, oh, it was hard.

Her being beautiful didn't help matters any.

Whenever they were out together in public, he was acutely aware of all the people who stopped and took notice of the petite, attractive young woman. There were several times in the past months that he had passed by the courtyard where Rey was engaged in physical training with Snoke, and he had caught Stormtroopers finding any and all excuses to hover near the area, in order to ogle his wife.

Sadly, most of those men always ended up in Med Bay due to extensive, 'mysterious' injuries.

And it wasn't just the lower ranking individuals who liked to look.

Back in the beginning, Kylo had taken Rey to be introduced to General Hux's Lieutenants. They had each shaken the girl's hand and nodded respectfully, but their minds were steaming hotbeds of lust and desire.

Even Rey, as new as she was to the concept of hearing thoughts, could pick up on the men's fantasies, and she was disgusted. She had been polite, but once they had left the company of the others and headed back to their quarters, she was quiet and sullen.

"Do you think Snoke will allow me to build a lightsaber soon?", she had asked as they walked the halls, her eyes full of dark anger.

Kylo glanced at her. "When you're further along in your training, yes. But it shouldn't be that long for you; Snoke says you're a fast learner. Why?"

"Because," she said, through gritted teeth, "I want to see whether those men still think it'd be easy to 'tie her to a desk and ravage her' when 'her' has a lightsaber pointed at their necks."

Kylo frowned and shook his head. "No one would ever actually do that, Rey. And even if they tried, do you think I'd just sit back and let them?"

She had stopped and faced him, looking him full in the eye, as she said, "I really don't know WHAT you would do or not do. I barely know you, Kylo Ren."

The words had stung him, more so because he had known it to be the truth. She didn't know him, or he, her.

"Well," he had said, as they continued walking, "If you know nothing else about me, know this: I would never let anybody hurt you. Ever. Alright?"

She nodded, not looking at him.

That had been weeks ago, and, thankfully, they had moved past that tense uncomfortableness to where they were at now: friendship.

But Kylo, little by little, was craving MORE.

Rey was unbelievably gorgeous to him, and it seemed that she wasn't even aware of how stunning
she was. One time, he had been sitting and reading in the living room before bed, and he happened to look up. The bedroom door had been open, and Rey had been getting changed.

He knew it was wrong, but he couldn't stop watching. Her soft skin, her curves, the way she twisted and bent out of her clothes --

Getting into bed with her after that had been difficult, made more so by the fact that, as she slept, she had unconsciously burrowed against him, her firm backside sliding back and forth against him.

He had had to get out of bed, go into the bathroom, and 'take care of' himself for nearly an hour, afterwards.

But he had no idea how to say this to her, how to move forward. She seemed so happy with their friendship that he felt like a heel, thinking of telling her he wanted to rip her clothes off and kiss every freckle on her body.

So, one night, very late, he got out of bed and made his way to the chambers of the one person he felt he could go to for advice on this subject.

"You DO realize it's 2 in the kripping morning, yes?", Hux had asked him as he begrudgingly let him in.

"I don't care, Hux. This whole thing is unbearably frustrating, and you're the only one I can talk to!"

"More frustrating than having someone you hate coming to your quarters late at night to complain about how he can't seal the deal with his own wife?"

Kylo scowled at him.

"In all technicality, General, this is as much your problem as it is mine. The future of your army is at stake, here."

Hux sighed, got up and went into his kitchen. He found a bottle of Gin high up in the cabinet, and pulled it out, along with two glasses. He brought it back into the living room, and poured a generous amount into each glass.

"I'm failing at this, I know," Kylo said, toying with his glass. "Even Vader is disgusted with me."

"Please don't tell me you're still talking to that rusty old thing, or, if you are, Rey isn't watching you do this. Because if she is, I think that's part of the problem."

"Rey doesn't think it's odd! She's even sat with me when I talk to him!"

Hux rolled his eyes and took a sip of his drink. "Well, I suppose the fact that she didn't run from the room screaming would indicate she's worth keeping."

"She's worth a LOT of things, Hux. I just wish I knew how . . ."

"Have you tried being seductive at all?"

"Seductive?"

"Seductive. Attractive. Sexy. Showing off your body any?"

Kylo shook his head, taking a hurried sip of his gin. He made a face; it burned down his throat.
"How would that make her want me, Hux?"

Hux rolled his eyes, and tossed off the rest of his drink in one gulp. As he poured himself another, he said,

"Has she seen you, yet, unclothed?"

Kylo shook his head. "No. I always change in the other room, so I don't make her uncomfortable."

"And what about when she changes? Do you look at her?"

"No. I either turn my head or leave the room."

"Well, that's the problem, then. You're treating her as if she's your sister, and she's not. She's your WIFE, you moron. Start doing things for her. Bring her flowers, bring her candy. Compliment her on little things, like her hair, or if she smells good. And, once again, I cannot stress the importance of showing some skin."

"But --"

"No buts. Look, I have an assignment for you, okay? Tomorrow, when you get home, take off your shirt, and leave it off. Don't offer any explanations. Leave it off, and make it a point to hold at least one conversation where you're standing or sitting close to her. Just try it, see where it goes. Okay? Understand?"

Kylo nodded.

"Good. Now get out, please. I have to be back on the bridge in less than 3 hours."

He watched as Ren shambled his way down the hall, and sighed to himself as he closed his door.

"If I'm going to be a marriage counselor here, too, then Snoke needs to raise my salary much, much more," he grumbled, making his way back to bed.

---

Rey watched as a squad of Stormtroopers practiced hitting objects in the shooting range. Shot after bright-bolted shot went whizzing through the air and towards the field of robotized, moving targets. It was loud, but it was also soothing. The constant babble of the men talking below reminded her of the marketplace on Jakku.

She had just come from another training session with Supreme Leader Snoke. As much as she didn't want to admit this, being taught by the intimidating-looking man (alien? she STILL wasn't entirely sure) wasn't as bad as she had feared. He was patient with her, and she could notice a distinct difference between the way he interacted with HER, versus how he dealt with Kylo. He wasn't sure if the gentleness he showed her was due to her being much younger than Ren (she was at least 10 years his junior) or because she was a woman, but whatever the case, she was appreciative of it.

Life in the First Order wasn't all bad. During her time here, she had made more friends and acquaintances than she had ever had on Jakku, among them the woman standing next to her now, watching her men go through their training exercises.

Captain Phasma was possibly the tallest woman Rey had ever encountered in her life. Although she had yet to see them stand side by side, she would have wagered that Phasma was taller than Kylo, even. But Phasma wore her height with confidence, and she was an incredibly strong individual.
Rey had struck up a conversation with her once, on her way back from Snoke, and the two had developed a lovely friendship since. Phasma was easy to talk to, and gave the kind of good, solid advice that Rey would have equated with that of a parent. Rey trusted her enough to put her in the know about her two year baby deal with Snoke, and today she was here for guidance on the -- the problem.

"I just don't know what to do. We need to hurry this process, so my sentence here can be over. But it's like he doesn't even SEE me as his wife. We've become friends, and that's good, but friends isn't going to create this baby that I need for my freedom."

"Have you tried being forward with him? Businesslike? Because in all reality, that's what this is: a business venture. The two of you are creating a product together intended for mass duplication. Simply sit him down, and say "Ren, we need to have sex."

Rey blushed, looking down at the floor.

"I couldn't do that, Phasma. I couldn't just say that; I'd die of embarrassment!"

Phasma sighed. "Well, if directness isn't your thing, you're going to have to try your hand at seduction."

"Seduction? That's -- I don't think I could do that, either."

"Honestly, with men, you don't have to do all that much, dear. The way you talk, the way you smell, how often you touch him, all of these things can count as seduction, if you do them right."

"But what if he just doesn't want me, like that? He never looks at me when I get undressed, HE goes into another room to take off his clothes. If he touches me at all, it's a hug. And kissing? He'll kiss me on the cheek, on the forehead; once he actually kissed my nose! He must think my body is hideous!", she said, bowing her head.

"I'm sure he wants you, Rey. But maybe the problem is that he doesn't think that YOU'RE willing to go to the next level with him. Now, Lord Ren is brilliant in a lot of ways, but in this department, I'd bet the lives of every person below us right now that he's just an inexperienced as you are."

"Do you really think so?"

Phasma nodded. "I'm positive. Okay, now, when you go home tonight, here's what you need to do . . ."

---

Rey walked into her chambers with a renewed determination and vigor, after her talk with Phasma. She was a bit surprised as she opened the door; Kylo was already home, and sitting in the chair, watching her.

She had been going to hug him, but she stopped, confused.

His shirt was off.

She had never seen him with his shirt off, before. And she could see no reason for it, now; it wasn't like it was hot in here. If anything, it was rather chilly.

And it appeared Kylo had taken it a step further, by slathering a high amount of oil on his chest, to make it glisten.
So instead of the hug, she opted for a kiss on the cheek, instead. It was a small gesture, but she felt she had to ease her way up to the more aggressive steps.

"Come sit with me in the kitchen while I make dinner," Rey drawled, using the 'sexy' voice that Phasma dictate she use.

Kylo followed her in, frowning. "That sounds painful, Rey. Do you have a cold?"

She sighed and then immediately put her own voice back on.

"Er, no. I guess I just had something caught in my throat, there, for a minute."

Ren started to talk to her about his day, as she prepared dinner. She wasn't sure if it was her imagination, but it felt like every single time her eyes came into contact with his chest, he was flexing.

Rey had to get something from a high shelf, but instead of asking Kylo to get it, she stood on the step stool and reached up into the cabinet, pooching out her behind like Phasma had suggested, so that it was angled at Kylo's face.

Unfortunately, she pooched just a bit too far. Her feet pushed over the stool's edge and she ended up falling off and hitting the floor.

Kylo jumped up from his chair in a panic.

"Maker, Rey, are you alright?"

She nodded, her face a bright red. "I'm okay. Help me up, will you?"

She took hold of his arm to pull herself up--but the excess lotion that was covering his skin caused her hand to slip right off, sending her back to the floor. In a panicked attempt to keep herself upright, she grabbed at his pants (as he wasn't wearing a shirt) and managed to pull him down with her.

They looked at each other, and then Kylo started to laugh. He laughed so hard that he couldn't breathe. He tried to get up, and he made it to his knees before doubling over again, unable to control his mirth.

And it was contagious. Rey started to laugh, too, tears rolling from her eyes, shaking helplessly on the cold kitchen floor.

At some point, the laughing stopped, and the two sat, looking at each other.

_Say it, Rey, just say it._

_Be a man, Kylo, SAY IT._

At the same time, they both blurted out, "We should have sex."

"Is that why your shirt was off?"

"Is that why you had your behind in my face?"

More laughter, and then Kylo took Rey's face between his hands and kissed her. REALLY kissed her, full on the lips. For being the first 'real' kiss of either of their lives, it wasn't all bad. A bit clumsy and a bit awkward, for sure, but warm and sweet regardless.
He pulled back to look at her, to gauge her reaction, and was met with the most beautiful smile he had ever seen.

So he leaned back in and kissed her again.
The next morning, Kylo Ren terrified nearly everybody he encountered, with his lack of terrifyingness.

Mask off. Fluid, confident gait. And smiling. Dear Maker, the Dark Lord was actually smiling at everyone he passed, on some occasions even adding a tiny wave to his greeting.

He sat through three meetings, at Hux's side, and for the first time in years, Hux didn't have a single thing to reprimand him for. He didn't interrupt, he didn't flip chairs or scatter papers. He didn't even get angry when a pale-faced, shaking lieutenant came up to timidly inform him that repairs on his ship were taking longer than expected, and it wouldn't be fixed until tomorrow.

"No hurry, Lieutenant," Kylo had said in a light, dismissive tone of voice. "Take all the time needed, to ensure that a proper job is done. And be sure to thank the engineers on their efforts, for me."

"Y-yes sir, m-my Lord," the man had stuttered, quickly turning and leaving before Ren could change his mind and toss him through a wall, or something.

At the end of the third meeting, Hux and Kylo were left alone in the conference room. Hux slowly began putting away his charts and gathering up his papers, watching Ren from the corner of his eye. Ren sat still, staring dreamily at the blank wall in front of him. He was humming.

"You appear to be in a particularly good mood, for once," Hux couldn't help but say to him. Ren paused in his humming and turned his head toward Hux, that unnerving smile still on his face.

"It's a beautiful day, isn't it?"

Hux shrugged. "I suppose."

Now he looked at Ren, and said, cautiously, "And how is your lovely wife, on this beautiful' day?"

Ren's face changed instantly, from one that was contented to one that was elated. His eyes widened, his lips spread his smile even wider. His voice was low and floating, as he said,

"Rey isn't lovely, she's beautiful. No, magnificent. She's a magnificent beauty on this beautiful day."

He stood up to go, and as he did, he did something he had never done before. He walked to Hux, put both arms around him, and crushed him in a hard hug.

"I'll see you later," he said as he let go, before strolling out of the room, whistling.

Hux shook out his crushed arms, unable to help smiling a little as he watched Ren walk away.

*If I had known that this was all it took, to calm him down--I wish we had found Rey, sooner.*

---

They say that time has a way flying by, when you're having fun. But they neglect to mention that it can also speed by, when you're worried about something. That when you spend so much time and energy focused on the sole cause of your concern, that everything else passes you by before you have a chance to miss it.
And Rey, had started to worry.

It had been 5 months since she and Kylo had started copulating, and she had yet to become pregnant. It wasn't for lack of trying; they 'tried' with each other at least once a night, practically EVERY night, since that first time. And still, nothing.

Time was going so quickly; it had been almost a year, since she had been taken into the First Order. A year. Snoke had said, two years. Two years to produce a child, and she would get her reward.

But what if she couldn't have one?

What if, unbeknownst to her, something was wrong with her, inside? Or with Kylo?

After much insisting on her part, she had gotten both herself and Kylo into medical bay for an extensive health evaluation. Thankfully, the results turned up fine. Her parts were working, and so was his.

So what was the problem?

"Stress, maybe," Phasma had suggested to her one evening. "If you're constantly thinking about this baby thing all the time, likely, you're tensed up, and nervous. Maybe this is preventing it from happening."

"So how do I relax?"

Phasma shrugged. "Try to just let go, and have fun with him. Stop worrying on what's not happening, and focus on what is."

So she tried to take this advice. And for the most part, it worked. Phasma hadn't been wrong, in saying that what she and Kylo were doing, was fun. It was.

On Jakku, she had worked, for a portion of her teenage years, in a cantina. Cleaning, bringing drinks to tables, cooking food—a rather easy, if tiring, way to earn a few credits. But there had been one area of the cantina that had disgusted her, and that was the back room. For a few credits more, male patrons had the option of going to the back rooms and being 'entertained' by hired female help. This entertainment ranged from dances, to massages, to more.

And the sounds of the 'more' could be quite loud. Rey dreaded being sent to clean up the mess after he 'more', not so much for the mess itself but for having to see the looks on the faces of the females, after their male patrons had left them. Seeing that (combined with being touched or groped a number of times, while waiting tables for drunk customers) had left her with a very harsh impression of love, and sex, and she had carried that disdain with her most of her life.

But with Kylo, it was . . . different. So much different than she had expected.

Their first time had been rather awkward, but not entirely bad. Both had been remarkably self-conscious of their bodies, and had taken a bit of time touching, stroking, attempting to get in tune with each other, before going all the way.

Having Kylo that close to her, Rey realized for the first time just how big he was. It was an entirely different thing, going from having him lay next to her, to laying ON her. Several times she had had to tell him to slow down, or that his weight was making it difficult to breathe. But whatever she said, he accommodated his position immediately, and she could tell he was trying his hardest to be gentle with her.
Things improved considerably in the coming days, once he fell into a more natural rhythm, as her muscles adapted.

And it seemed that this new physical part of their lives opened up the channels to be more at-ease with each other in other aspects of their life. There was no more shyness dressing or undressing, the laughs and easier, their conversations deeper.

But still . . . no baby.

And, as hard as she tried not to show this, it was worrying Rey.

One night she sat quietly with Kylo, the two of them eating dinner as he told her about a mission he had just returned from. The story he told was funny, but she was hardly listening, simply nodding and pushing food around on her plate with a fork.

"I think I'm going to go to bed early, I'm a little tired tonight," she told him, when they were finished.

Kylo turned around from the sink, where he was washing the dishes.

"Do you feel okay?"

"Yes. Why?"

He took his hands from the sink and dried them on a towel. Then he placed one hand against her forehead, then her cheek.

"You've been very quiet today. I was just wondering if maybe you were coming down with something."

She smiled and shook her head. "Really, just tired. Snoke had me try my hand at questioning prisoners today. It's a lot more mentally exhausting than I'd anticipated."

Ren nodded in understanding. "Well, you get some rest, okay? I've got to leave in a few minutes, I have a late meeting with Hux in this raid we're planning for the next few days."

He turned as if to leave, then snapped his fingers and whirled back around, facing her.

"Oh, before I forget; I brought you something."

He reached in his pocket and dug around, until he pulled out a small, soft box.

He placed it in her hand with a smile.

"I know that our, uh, our wedding wasn't exactly ideal. And it occurred to me, I never even got you a proper ring. So here."

She opened up the box gingerly. Inside was an incredibly detailed, shining gold band, with a large stone set into the shape of a flower.

"It's an emerald," Kylo said, smiling. "I tried to find a hazel stone, to match your eyes, but this one stood out above all the others to me. It's rare, and its beautiful. Just like you."

She put the ring on her finger; it was a perfect fit.

"This is the nicest thing anyone has ever given to me," she said softly, looking up at him. She raised herself up on her tiptoes and threw her arms around his neck, hugging him tight. "Thank you."
He hugged her back and gently kissed her cheek.

"I know that you've been worried, Rey, about this baby thing. I know that you want to be able to leave, and see your parents. But, just so you know, even if we never have a baby, and you are here forever, well, I'll try and make 'forever' as happy as I can for you."

His words stunned her into silence. Before she could unfreeze her brain to think of a response, he lifted up her chin and pressed his lips against hers, a slow, sensual brush.

"I have to go meet Hux now," he said as he pulled away. "I'll see you later"; and with that, he was out the door.

She must have stood in that same spot for at least an hour, just thinking. Eventually she made her body move into the bedroom, and into her bed, but her internal conversation didn't stop.

For the first time ever, she found herself thinking of this future baby, as a baby. Not as a bargaining piece for her freedom, or the chip that would unite her with her family, but an actual living, breathing, flesh and blood human. One that would cry. And laugh. One that might have her eyes, or Kylo's hair. One that would, eventually, talk; and when it could talk, would it ask where Rey was? Would it ask why she had birthed it and then disappeared?

And WHO would it ask those questions to? To Snoke?

To Kylo?

And what would Kylo say, to their son or their daughter?

For that matter, how would Kylo handle it, when she left?

And Snoke. Why, exactly, was he bothering to train her in the ways of the Force, at all? If all he wanted from her was a child, and once he had that, he'd let her go, what was the point?

So many thoughts, so many conflicted feelings wrestling over the restless girl. She tossed and turned for hours, until, later, she heard Kylo come back home.

She was facing the wall, her eyes closed, but even so she could feel Kylo standing and looking down at her, as she 'slept'.

Smiling.

He carefully crawled into bed and put his arms around her, gently cradling her as he buried his face in her soft hair.

He fell asleep shortly after, and she wasn't far behind.
Chapter 8

"Again."

Rey grimaced, panting as she wiped sweat from her forehead.

Snoke had her engaging in some highly active physical combat training this week. Every day, he had multiple heavily-armored opponents coming at her, with a variety of fighting styles and techniques, and he would coach her on how to take the down. At the moment, they were practicing with metal staffs. In time, when Snoke felt she was ready, the routine would evolve to using lightsabers.

All morning, she had been sparring with a variety of men, as Snoke watched and guided her. She supposed the exercise was good for her, although she would have preferred spending more time on mental pursuits. Yet when she had timidly mentioned this to Snoke, the reply she had been met with was:

"When you are with child, my dear, your physical excursions will have to be considerably curbed. Better to learn these things now, while we wait. Wouldn't you agree?"

Rey had nodded, looking at the ground. The way that he said that, while we wait, put a touch of unease into her heart. It made her feel as though she had failed, somehow; and so she put that much more effort into these routines, trying to prove to Snoke (and herself) that she did have SOME value, some worth, beyond being the future mother of a clone army.

But still . . .

Why is it that everyone I fight has to be so much bigger than me?, she grumbled to herself.

"Because, my young apprentice, you are a small woman," Snoke answered her out-loud, having picked the thought from her mind. "Nearly everybody you meet will be larger than you. It is beneficial to know how to take down an opponent, not just with your mind, but your body, as well."

So Rey grit her teeth and committed to Snoke's desires for her. And, despite her small size, she was quite skilled. She got to the point where she could take down the biggest of men within a few moves, often so quickly that her opponents didn't even see the moves coming.

This didn't prevent her from coming home covered in cuts and bruises, though. Kylo walked in on her once, as she was changing in the bedroom. He took one look at the purple-black marks covering her shoulders, and he was livid. She had to forcibly sit him down and reassure him for hours that she was fine; her skin just bruised easily. Or so she told him.

Once, when she and Kylo were getting ready to go to bed, she asked him to try and take her down.

"What? Why?!"

"For my own peace of mind. I have no way of knowing whether I'm actually getting better in my attack, or if Snoke is somehow tricking me, telling these men beforehand to let me win. You're fairly big, like they are. So I've got to know."

"Rey, I don't think that's a good--"

"Oh, come ON, Kylo! Just come at me, try and take me down. And do NOT hold back, be as aggressive as possible."
Kylo was about to argue further, but stopped, seeing the determined look on Rey's face. He sighed and levitated the table against the wall so that it wouldn't be in the way. Then he began circling her, in the now-empty space in the living room.

He made several quick swipes at her sides, attempting to grab her; but she was surprisingly swift on her feet. So he changed strategies and dove at her legs, attempting to knock her off-balance and to the floor. He managed to get hold of one leg; but rather than lose her footing, she swung the other leg up, and somehow flipped her body so that she was on his back, her arms in a stranglehold around his neck.

"Okay, Ky; I asked you not to hold back!" she said, irritated. At the same time she brought her legs together around his chest, pinching the air off.

Using his strength, Kylo flipped over so that Rey landed, hard, on her back. He used her temporary surprise to grab her arms and hold them above her head, pinning her wrists down into the carpet.

"I win," he said, smugly.

Rey smiled at him, and craned her head up, pursing her lips together as if for a kiss. He closed his eyes and leaned down; she freed her wrists and, twining her strong legs around his waist, flipped him off of her and on to his back, where she quickly sat down on him, smiling triumphantly.

"I win."

Kylo pretended to pout, and this time Rey couldn't help but lean down and kiss him.

"It's a tie," she relented, smirking as she got off of him. She offered her hand to help him up. He took it, and pulled her back down on top of him.

"Let's go two out of three," he said, kissing her again.

---

Another restless night, another thousand and one voices of fear and doubt creeping into Rey's subconscious. She tossed and turned as words came to her in her sleep, her own brain refusing to let her worries lie dormant.

What if
What if it's
What if it's not . . .

"Oh, Maker, what if it's NOT Force-sensitive?", she had shrieked into the dark bedroom, bolting upright so quickly she nearly fell from the bed.

"W-what?", Kylo had muttered from beside her, only half-awake.

"What if it's not Force-sensitive? What if it's just normal, like everybody else?"

"What if what is--"

"The BABY!", she shouted at him, hitting his shoulder. She had started to cry, confused, hysterical sobs pouring from her mouth. "What if we have a child and it's normal? What happens then? Would Snoke --"

Kylo was fully awake now, and he had scooted closer to Rey, wrapping her in his arms.
"Shhhh, Rey, calm down, it's okay," he said soothingly, stroking her hair. "That won't happen. Genetically, it's almost a sure thing. My grandfather had it, my mother had it, I have it, and YOU have it. It will be fine. I promise. I know it's hard, but you have to stop worrying about something that doesn't even exist yet."

Bit by bit she calmed down, succumbing to Kylo's comforting words. Eventually she laid back down and pulled the covers over herself, feeling exhausted. Exhausted, but scared to go back to sleep.

Kylo sensed this, and asked, softly,
"You want me to tell you a story?"

She faced him and nodded.

"Okay. A long time ago, in a life far from this one, there was a little boy named Ben. Ben and his mother and father lived in a small house on Yavin. Ben had many uncles, or rather, males that his mother or father considered family. But by far, his favorite uncle was Uncle Chewie."

"Chewie?"

Kylo smiled and nodded. "Short for Chewbacca. He was a Wookiee; over seven feet tall, and hairy. In the hot months that was inconvenient, but during the cold season, it was a warm blessing. Ben would watch his Uncle Chewie, and how comfortable he seemed, playing with Ben in the snow. He envied him. So one night, Ben crept out of bed and into the living room, where his mother kept her sewing kit. He found her shears, and crept into his parents' room. Both were sound asleep, which was lucky for Ben. He needed their inaction to fulfill his plan."

"Plan? What plan could he possibly have involving shears, in the middle of the night?"

"You see, Ben assumed that if he could not grow Wookiee hair like his favorite uncle, well, he would have to make his own. So he crawled into his parents bed --"

"Oh, Maker . . ."

"-- and began cutting off strands of his mother's beautiful long hair. It came off so easily, and there was so much of it, that he couldn't stop. When he felt he had enough, he slowly crawled out of the bed and back into his room, where he spent the rest of the evening trying to glue his mother's hair to his arms and face."

Rey burst out laughing at that, covering her hand with her mouth and shaking so hard tears came out of her eyes.

"His parents found him asleep on the floor the next morning, a big clump of hair still held in his hands. His father, well, he laughed about as hard as you're laughing. Probably harder. And his mother, she had to wear a wig for almost half a year, after that."

Rey continued laughing, and Ren was relieved, that some of the animated vitality had come back into her face. Eventually she stopped and said, softly,

"Can I ask you something?"

He nodded.

"And you'll be honest with me?"
His heart started to pound, dreading what her question might be. But she surprised (and relieved) him a little, by asking "Do you miss it?"

"Miss what?"

"Your mother, your father? Your uncles? Do you miss Ben Solo?"

He closed his eyes before answering. "I do. I do. But you know, you've got to let--"

"--you've got to let the past die," she finished with him; and even with his eyes still closed, he could feel that she had rolled her eyes. "I know. You say that, SNOKE says that almost constantly." Here she gave another little laugh. "I guess I should be grateful, then, that he's helping me keep my past alive, by agreeing to reunite me with my family, huh?"

He opened his eyes and looked at her. Her face had taken on that dreamy, far-away look that it always got, when talking about her parents.

It made him feel like a lightsaber had been plunged into his heart.

"Rey--"

She leaned into him and gave him a feather-touch kiss to the lips.

"You're a good husband," she murmured as she closed her eyes, drifting back into sleep. "Even if I had had a choice, I don't think I could have chosen anyone better than you."

Her words brought a painful swell of guilt to his chest.

"Rey--I, uh, there's something I need to tell you. Rey?"

But Rey had already fallen asleep, breathing lightly into her pillow.

After a few moments more of watching her, he turned over and did the same.

---

There came a period of time when Snoke left the base, to make his yearly visits to various planets he controlled. After much debate, he decided not to bring Kylo with him, as he had done in the past.

"More time for you to try with Rey," he had given as his reason, favoring his apprentice with that unsettling smile of his.

He would be gone for about two months, during which time he left General Hux in charge of operational affairs, with Kylo to assist him.

When he was gone, everybody, from maintenance to officers, could breathe easier.

Well, most everybody.

Rey, surprisingly, missed Snoke. Not so much Snoke as the routines he had her do. She and Kylo still meditated every morning, and, when not otherwise engaged, he would physically spar with her. But it wasn't quite the same. She found herself with seemingly endless time left over, time she craved filled with activity.

About a week before Snoke's return, Hux instituted a thorough, vigorous scrub-down of the entire base. Maintenance was kept busy at all hours, and their ranks were supplemented by rotating squads
of storm troopers.

While everybody else grumbled about this, Rey was overjoyed at finally having something to occupy her time. Against strenuous protests from Kylo, who insisted that such a thing was beneath someone of her rank, she approached General Hux for a cleaning assignment.

He was of the same opinion as Kylo: "Surely, mi'lady, you don't want to be seen scrubbing tiles alongside Stormtroopers, do you?"

She had frowned at that, crossing her arms over her chest. "You say that as though it were demeaning in some way."

"For someone of your status, it IS."

"General. I'm not asking to be sent out to war. I'm asking to help make something dirty, clean. I don't think it would kill you, to accommodate me in this extremely humble request."

Frustrated, Hux looked over her shoulder at Kylo, who was standing quietly several feet behind, observing their conversation. All Kylo could do was shrug.

All Hux could do was sigh, and give in.

He gave her the task of helping Snoke's personal maids clean his expansive throne room. This way Hux could appease Rey, while at the same time keeping her cleaning a secluded activity away from the prying eyes of those cleaning the more populated areas on base.

But she was happy with her tasks. Each day she and the maids tackled a little more, until the room all but glimmered.

Two days before Snoke came back, she stayed cleaning in Snoke's archives room, situated behind the throne room, while the maids took their lunch break. Her own appetite had been spotty lately, and she preferred the calm quiet of the books and the holos in lieu of eating. Hux had warned her that this room had extremely sensitive, important documents, and to be absolutely careful with anything she touched. She promised to take care, but somehow, in the course of standing on a stool to dust the top shelf of a cabinet, she managed to accidentally knock over a box of papers.

"Kriff!", she exclaimed, jumping to gather the spilled documents. As she was hurriedly putting the papers back into the box, one piece of paper caught her eye.

It had her name at the top.

Kylo had told her, once, that Snoke had files on everybody that was under his rule. Not hard to believe, really, considering all that he knew about her, about everyone.

Although she knew she shouldn't, she began the lengthy document on herself. This was her chance, to learn where her parents were.

Towards the middle of the page, she suddenly had to sit down, hard, on the cold floor with a thump. One word had jumped out at her, a word so strong, so unbelievable that it had effectively knocked her breathless. The words, the paper, the room, everything started to spin around her, and she had to put her head between her hands, to keep from vomiting.

"Rey? What's wrong?!"

Kylo was standing behind her, having come to have lunch with her. Unable to speak, and with
shaking hands, she handed the paper over to him.

She watched his face as he read, waiting to see his face light up in surprise when he came across the ugly word. She waited, but there was no surprise whatsoever on his face.

There was no surprise, because . . .

"You -- you knew?"
Chapter 9

But it wasn't a one-sided knowledge.

She had known, as well. Somewhere, deep down in the well of her spirit, she had known.

Deceased.

This was the word, the sole word, that had leapt out at her from the orderly page.

Deceased.
Gone.
Dead.

But Kylo's involvement in this -- and yes, he was involved, he had known this horrifying truth from day one. It wasn't a question, it was a certainty. If she had known this in the depths of her heart, so had Kylo. He'd known, but he'd let her commit to this course of action.

Existing in a ball of utter and eerie calm, Rey watched herself get to her feet, finish putting the papers away, and leaving the room. General Hux was standing in the middle of the throne room, and he was speaking, a smile on his face. Likely giving praise in regards to the pristine condition she had helped to put the room in.

She continued walking, without hearing a word he said.

Kylo followed after her, and he was speaking, too--but she couldn't decipher anything he was saying.

Nor did she want to.

They got back to their quarters, and Rey immediately ran into the refresher, just seconds ahead of her own vomit. She felt sick all over, and the more she thought, the sicker she felt.

She had given so much of herself to the man standing outside the door, pleading with her to let him in.

She stared at the door, dully listening to the thumps--when suddenly, something changed. Some deep anger, hot and pulsing, rose up in her chest, threatening to crush her. Without much thought on her part, she picked up a small stool sitting in the corner of the refresher, and, using the Force, threw it at the door so hard that it ended up blowing a hole straight through it.

She looked at the hole, and the rage got deeper. Fists clenched, she marched through the doorway and up to Kylo, who was staring at the shattered stool (and door) in awe. She lifted her hand in his direction and slowly clenched her fist together. His hands went to his neck in a panic -- she was choking him! He had had no clue that she COULD force-choke, or that her strength would be so impressive.

"You lying snake," she hissed at him, squeezing her fingers tighter. "Give me one good reason I shouldn't kill you right now, you lying, manipulative son of a bitch!"

"... I... ou!", he managed to get out, his eyes rolling back in his head. His consciousness was rapidly fading--another few seconds, and...
Thankfully, mercifully, she let go. He fell forward on the floor immediately, drawing huge droughts of air into his burning lungs.

She stood in front of him, eyes still bright with fury, tears of rage that refused to fall.

"You KNEW," she said, slowly, through gritted teeth. "You knew my parents were dead and buried from the day we met! But you never told me! YOU, who always speaks about friendship, and caring, and all that other happy bantha fodder! Was I not important enough to you? Did I not deserve to know the TRUTH?!!"

Kylo didn't answer her; he couldn't even look her in the eye.

"Kylo, I . . . I truly thought, you were someone that I could trust. All these months, getting close to you, sharing with you . . . and all this time, you knew?"

"I would have told you, I swear. Eventually, I would have. But Rey . . ."

"But WHAT?!"

She struck him, hard, with her open palm, across his face. The edge of her ring caught the upper corner of his lip, tearing it open. He clapped his hand to the spot, backing away from her anger.

"If you knew, you would have run away. I didn't want you to go! I felt such a strong connection to you, I have ever since that day on Starkiller--I couldn't just let you leave me!"

She turned from him and stalked into their bedroom. After a few moments, he followed. She had every drawer open, and was throwing clothes into a small satchel.

"I'm leaving. And if you try and stop me, I'll kill you."

"Rey, please, no! You leaving is what will kill me! Just --please just let me talk to --"

She drew her lightsaber from her pocket and, without warning, ran at him, forcing him back. He drew out his own saber in self-defense, but he could barely hold off her enraged attack. Nor could he keep her from destroying nearly everything in her path--the couch, chairs, the walls, everything looked as though a small bomb had gone off. Eventually she cornered him, and struck at him so hard that the lightsaber flew from his hand, leaving him defenseless.

She force-pulled his dropped saber into her own hand, and heaved it out of the window. Then she turned and retrieved her bag of clothing.

She stood by the door, her own lightsaber still ignited and pointed in Kylo's direction, shaking.

Really shaking.

She had gone as pale as a sheet of paper, and the shaking had taken control of her extremities. As if on its own accord, her hand let go of the saber and it dropped, hissing, to the floor. Kylo used the opportunity to force-pull the saber to him, switching it off and clipping it to his belt.

"Rey? Maker, are you --"

But his words faded into a ringing blur. Her vision was narrowing, and her last coherent thought was telling herself to tuck in her chin so that she wouldn't bash her head open on the edge of the table.
She woke up slowly, coming back to herself in small bits and pieces. She squinted; wherever she was, the light seemed intolerably bright. Whiteness was everywhere; the walls, the floors, the blankets covering her.

She must be in the medical bay. As if to confirm her assessment, she heard the distinctive low whirring of the circular medical droid making its way to her. It checked over her vitals and recorded them in its internal log.

"Excuse me, can you please tell me where my--my husband is?"

"Lord Ren is currently asleep in bed number A-2234."

"Where is --"

But she didn't have to finish her question. A loud snore made itself known to her from her left, and she slowly turned her head in that direction. Slowly, because her neck was in pain. The fall must have hurt her head, after all.

Kylo, fully clothed, and using his surcoat for a blanket, was asleep on the cot next to hers. Looking at him closely, she was surprised (and somewhat ashamed) to see the amount of cuts and bruises adorning his face. Marks that she herself had put there, during her explosive outburst.

She took a deep breath, and then said, loudly, "Kylo."

It took a few repeated calls, but he eventually woke up, looking bleary-eyed and dazed. When he noticed Rey was awake, he quickly jumped out of bed and pulled a chair up to her bedside.

"You're awake," he said, softly. "I was worried; you've been sleeping for almost twenty-four hours, now."

Before she could respond, another droid brought over a tray of food, which it set over her lap. She shook her head and told it "I'm not really hungry, thank you."

"Ma'am, it is imperative that in your current condition you receive a proper amount of nutrients," it answered in its mechanical voice, before leaving them.

"My condition?", she muttered, looking at the tray in disdain. She floated it off of her and onto the next bed. "I've only hit my head."

"Er, no, Rey. That's not it."

"What do you mean?"

"They did a full exam on you, while you were unconscious. You, uh, you fainted because of the mix of emotional stress, combined with a fluctuating blood pressure rate."

She looked at him, confused. "I still don't understand what--"

"Rey, you're pregnant."

Disbelief rolled over her in a hard wave, and she was grateful that she was already laying down.

"Pregnant?", she repeated, her voice barely above a whisper. She put her hand weakly on her belly, hardly able to cope with the truth of what he had said.

He nodded. "They estimate you're at about six weeks."
Tears came, hot and sudden. This was it, this was the thing she had been wanting, waiting for, for over a year. And now it was here, but everything had changed. Instead of excitement, she felt fear. Instead of happiness, she felt pain. She cried, putting her hands over her face and sobbing.

"Please don't cry, Rey!", Kylo begged her, sounding as if he was close to tears, as well. "Please, it's okay, everything is going to be okay."

He attempted to hold one of her hands; she snatched it back angrily.

"Don't touch me," she said in a low, shaking voice.

"Rey, I understand how you feel about me. If I were in your position, I'd hate me, too."

He lowered himself to his knees by her bedside.

"I don't know if I've ever said this to you, but: I love you, Rey. You're the sun of my galaxy. Everything inside of me, revolves around you. You read that file, you know the truth. Your mother and father, they abandoned you. I won't abandon you, or our child. Not ever. Please, don't abandon me. Don't leave me. Please."

"Kylo--"

"Please?"

She gently drew her hands away from her face. "I can't lie, Kylo, and say that I don't love you back. I do. But I'm sorry, I can't stay. I can't let our son, or daughter, be turned into a monstrous army. My parents weren't there for me but, by the Maker, I am going to a proper mother to this child. And I can't do that, here."

"What if I could change it, here?"

"Kylo, you can't--"

"Just give me time, Rey, please. Time to come up with a plan. Stay. I won't try to hug you, or kiss you, or even sleep in the same bed, do anything at all to you, if you don't want me to. But I want to take care of you, and the baby. And I swear to you, if I can't come up with a solution that satisfies you before our child is born, all three of us will escape, together."

"That wouldn't work, Kylo. With as Force-bonded as you are to Snoke, no matter where we went, he'd find YOU."

"If that turned out to be the case, I'll take you and the child, and hide you away somewhere you would be safe. I promise. But just give me a chance to come up with a plan to avoid that reality. Just one chance. Please?"

Rey sighed, and squeezed Kylo's hand gently. "Fine. You have a little over 8 months here, then."

He kissed her hand, holding it gently in both of his own. "Thank you," he whispered.

"Now, you say you're going to take care of me? Please bring me some food from the mess hall. We," she said, cradling her belly with one hand and gesturing to the tray with the other, "Don't want this."

Kylo chuckled, relieved that Rey was feeling enough like herself again to make jokes. He kissed her hand one last time and set off to do as she asked.

As he walked quickly, head down, thinking, along the corridors, he ran directly into General Hux.
"Ren," Hux said gruffly, brushing off his clothes, "I've been sending you messages on your datapad all day. Where have you been?"

"With my wife," he replied, irritated. "What do you want?"

"Is she well?"

"She's doing better, yes. She, er, is fine. Yes. Fine."

Hux looked at him suspiciously, but shrugged off Kylo's odd response. Instead, he switched gears and opened up his inner jacket pocket.

"One of my men found this, laying in the grass in the courtyard," he said, pulling out Kylo's lightsaber and handing it to him. He held it by the very tips of his fingers, as if afraid it would bite him. Kylo couldn't help but smile a little, at his apprehension.

"You should really be more careful with that thing," Hux said in disdain. "I believe I heard somewhere that a force-user's lightsaber, is his life."

My life?, he scoffed, in his head. This fire-stick isn't my life. My life is laying on a bed in Med Bay, harboring another life inside of her. And unless I do something, I'm going to lose my life, forever.

Instead of saying all this to Hux, he merely thanked him, and tucked the saber into his belt.

And continued on his way.

Snoke came back tomorrow morning, and Kylo would have to go before him, and tell him the 'happy' news of Rey's pregnancy. He knew that Snoke would be greatly pleased, and mistake the nervous air coming off his apprentice as the normal anticipatory jitters of a first time father-to-be.

And that was good.

Ren needed all the time and deception in the world, to think.

And he certainly had quite a bit to think about.
No more physical training.

The walls of her quarters restructured to be soundproof, to keep out all outside noises.

No more cooking; catering was to be at her disposal 24/7.

Nothing more strenuous, generally, than walking to and from a place.

Two praetorian guards assigned specifically to stand outside her chamber doors, and accompany her wherever she went, whether her husband was present or not.

These, and more, were the rules that Snoke had set in place for Rey, in the wake of her announcement of expecting.

Kylo wasn't sure where Snoke had gotten all of his ideas from, but he was sure that he intended to keep up Rey's special treatment for the entire duration of her pregnancy. His near-fanatical drive to protect the life that Rey had inside of her would undoubtedly drive everybody mad, long before the baby made its actual appearance. Kylo was honestly surprised that he hadn't mandated somebody to physically carry Rey from place to place, although he kept this thought to himself, lest Snoke pick it out of his head and act on it.

When Snoke had returned from his trip, Kylo and Rey had gone go stand before him, to tell him the news.

Snoke, whom Kylo had never seen do much more than smirk before, had been ecstatic. He had wanted to hold a lavish feast and celebration in her honor, and he would have gone through with it, if it hadn't been for Rey's quiet pleasing that such a thing would cause her undue anxiety and stress. So he had settled for sending an announcement to every member of the staff, personnel, and officer of the First Order. This had served to irritate Kylo, although he kept his thoughts to himself. But he had felt (and still felt) that the early days of a pregnancy should be private, a sweet secret shared between the two people involved. For EVERYBODY to know, to be hearing congratulations on something that would still be many, many months in the making yet? It was a test of his patience.

The way Snoke was treating Rey was very much like how one would treat a favorite child, or a spoiled pet.

Or a high-end prisoner.

But Rey herself seemed to be taking everything fairly well.

Kylo knew that she was a bit frustrated, in not being allowed to physically train anymore; but she compensated for this by reinforcing her mental weapons arsenal. Kylo would sit with her for hours and let her practice pushing into his mind, projecting, freezing him into place, and a host of other skills.

And when he wasn't available, she had friends from around the base that would stop by during moment of free time, to chat, to eat, or to simply keep her company.

One day, when Rey was a little under 3 months along, Kylo came home to find her laying on the sofa, and Phasma standing over her, dangling Rey's ring on a chain above her exposed belly.
"What are you doing?", he asked, confused.

"It's an old wives' tale," Phasma explained with a smile. "You take the mother's wedding ring, and hold it straight above the baby. Depending on which way it moves, that's what the baby's sex is."

Kylo just barely kept from rolling his eyes, as he came closer. "Am I mistaken, or don't we have very extensive medical testing that could tell us the same thing? And likely a bit more accurately?"

Ignoring his comment, Rey told him, "If it moves back and forth, it's a boy. If it moves in a circle, it's a girl."

All three watched as Phasma steadied the chain, to see which way the ring would move.

It stood still.

Sighing, Phasma handed the ring back to Rey. "Maybe it's too early for that yet."

"Or maybe this child is unbelievably stubborn, like his father."

"His?" Ren asked, raising an eyebrow. "You think it's a boy?"

Rey nodded.

"Interesting," said Phasma with a smile. "Have you any ideas for names, for either sex?"

"I'm not sure about for a girl, but for a boy, I rather like Solo."

"Solo? Really? You want to name our son Solo Ren?"

Rey nodded. "I mean, I'd name him after MY father, but, well --"

Here she trailed off, and this was another thing Kylo had to get used to: Rey's very sudden, often unpredictable mood swings. She could go from happy to sad, and back again, with no reason, no rhyme, no provocation.

Phasma saw her sudden shift in mood and quickly said her goodbyes, giving Rey a hug before leaving. Once the door slid shut behind her, Rey burst into tears, drawing her knees up to her chin and burying her face in her arms.

"Shhh, shhh, it's okay, sweetheart," Kylo soothed her, putting his arms around her. "Everything is going to be fine."

"Dead," she sobbed, burying her face against Kylo's shoulder. "No mother; who am I supposed to go to for advice on how to BE a mother?!"

Before Kylo could answer, she went on, dejectedly,

"Oh, what does it matter? If I fail with one baby, I'll have a hundred thousand more chances to mess that kid up, too, won't I?"

"No, you won't," Kylo told her firmly, tightening his grip around her. "Our baby won't be cloned, and you're going to be the best mother ever. I know it."

She separated himself from his arms, and walked over to the couch. She sat down and swung her legs up, curling into a ball.
"You don't even have a plan yet, Kylo."

"I know. I just need --"

"Time. I know," she answered, closing her eyes. She was asleep within minutes, and Kylo covered her with a blanket, gently.

He was sitting alone, at a corner table in the Officers' mess. He had a tray of food sitting in front of him to his left, and a small stack of papers to his right. Every now and then he would pick up a new paper and read, chewing an item from his plate slowly.

Hair just slightly unkempt. Dark patches of skin under the eyes. A consistent jiggling of the knee and tapping of the foot. He was quite clearly on-edge, or really rather tired. Kylo could tell this simply by looking at him.

Not many others were present at the moment, and Hux hadn't even looked up when Kylo walked in. Kylo went and got himself a tray of 'food' from the line, then carefully carried it across the room and to the redhead.

"Hux. Would it be alright if I joined you?"

Hux looked at him with suspicion, but simply nodded and went on eating.

Kylo nervously pushed the food around on his own plate, before 'casually' observing: "You're looking well today, General. Is something different about you? Different coat, new hair style? Something?"

Hux tilted his head and looked at him, raising an eyebrow. "No. Nothing is different."

Kylo nodded, then hastily took a bite of his food. He wasn't hungry in the least, but he needed to appear as normal as possible. When he finished chewing he said, "I don't know if I told you this already, but I enjoyed the speech you gave to the cadets last week. But then again I've always admired your masterful command of language. It's your most enviable trait, perhaps. Aside from your leadership and command skills, that is."

The few other people in the room had finished and left, leaving the two of them alone. Hux suddenly seemed to notice the quiet, and he looked a bit frightened as his eyes scanned first the empty chairs, and then Kylo himself. Without knowing it, he had started to jiggle his knee just the slightest bit harder than before.

Kylo noticed this, and commented: "Is your leg in pain?"

Hux immediately stopped, relaxing the appendage. "No."

"Because, if it is, I could possibly fix it for you. My Force-healing techniques aren't perfected, yet, but they're at least good enough to take away pain."

Hux sighed and pushed his tray out from him.

"Ren."

"Yes?"

"I understand that it must be difficult for you, living with a hormonal wife. And I'd wager she's not
paying much 'special attention' to you, and you're craving 'attention.' Now, as a person, I find you tolerable. But we're co-workers. That's it."

"E-excuse me?"

"What you're looking for, you're not going to find it, here. Understood?"

Kylo blushed when he suddenly realized what Hux meant, what it looked like was going on, here.

"I should pull out my --"

"Please, don't."

"-- my lightsaber and stab you right now, for even thinking I'd be unfaithful to my princess."

Hux rolled his eyes and took a sip of tea. "If you don't care for such accusations, perhaps you shouldn't corner somebody, alone, and start complimenting them, with a strange look in your eyes. Just a thought."

Kylo nodded, and then he switched gears so rapidly that Hux had a hard time processing it.

"Hux, are we friends?"

"What?"

"You and I, are we friends? Do you consider me to be a friend?"

"I -- I -- uh," Hux stuttered. His face had darkened a shade red, and he was clearly flustered. "The First Order has no place for such banal trivialities, Lord Ren."

"So you find personal relationships to be foolish?"

"Unless they result in producing something useful, yes, I do."

"My wife has a friendship with Captain Phasma. Their friendship doesn't necessarily produce something 'useful'. So are you saying Rey, is foolish?"

"Kylo," Hux said, sounding quite weary, "Please. Snoke had me with him until nearly 4 in the morning today, revising the budget. I'm tired. I'm not sure what game it is you're playing right now, but please, can it wait until after I've had some decent sleep? Like 20 years' worth?"

"Just answer the question, first: are we friends?"

Hux put his head down on his arms, on the table.

"On second thought, go ahead and pull out your lightsaber. End this."

"Because I think friendship, means helping each other. Improving each other's lives. Answer me something: your budget meeting, with Snoke. How many of your ideas did he seem to take seriously?"

"A couple," Hux mumbled, his head still in his arms.

"And how many do you think you suggested?"

"A couple hundred."
Kylo nodded, expecting as much. "And doesn't that bother you, Hux? Your lack of control, of being heard? You know he treats you like an indulged child, and you're so much more than that. With your mind? Your brilliance? You should be Grand Marshall Hux by now."

Hux looked up at him slowly, his eyes full of fury. Kylo had just (knowingly) hit at a very sore spot in Hux's side. Grand Marshall was a title, something Hux had aspired to be given for many years. And by all accounts, he had earned it. But Snoke, for whatever reason, refused to elevate him from his General status.

Kylo saw his anger, and used it to fuel his next point.

"And the way you command this army; so effortless, so intelligently. But clearly Snoke doesn't appreciate that in you, either. Else he wouldn't be so adamant over a clone army."

Hux still didn't respond, but now he was gripping his teacup so hard that Kylo was surprised it hadn't broken.

"I'll wager, you haven't even seen them yet, have you?"

"Seen what?"

Kylo stood up abruptly, pushing in his chair. "Follow me."

He led Hux down to the lowest level of the base, an area Kylo knew Hux never visited unless absolutely necessary. They came to the wide silver door in question, an area that had, until recently, been the First Order's weapons supply room. Kylo stepped back, gesturing to it with a tilt of his head.

"Go ahead, look."

Hux entered cautiously, and even from behind, Kylo could tell that his jaw had dropped.

Several large machines were scattered around the room, and what must have been hundreds silver pods large enough to house fully-grown bodies. Equipment, tools that neither had ever seen before were set up throughout, as well as dormant functional computers.

"What IS all this?"

"It's the beginning of the cloning facility."

Hux turned to him slowly, shock covering his face.

"When did -- HOW did --"

Kylo put his hand on Hux's shoulder. "That diplomatic mission you went on two weeks ago. Remember? They started it then."

"This is impossible. I am always notified of EVERYTHING that goes on, including new construction, on this base! Do you mean to tell me Snoke broke ground on this without so much as a warning?!"

Kylo nodded. He was just barely able to keep the smile off his face, at Hux's rage. This was good. He NEEDED him angry.

"And if this is the case now, Armitage, I'd wager that Snoke isn't going to let you have much say with this army, once its been established. If any, at all."
"But -- but he, he already said --"

This was the most confused Kylo had ever seen Hux. He read his mind; Hux was frantically questioning everything he had ever thought, or been told. Was his position in jeopardy? What, really, would happen to his current army? Was there anything else Snoke was keeping from him? Important things?

Kylo moved away from Hux and leaned against one of the shining tables, arms folded across his chest.

"This room is still under construction, so there's yet to be a security system in here," Kylo said slowly, casually. "No cameras, no voice recording. The perfect place for a chat, between friends, wouldn't you say?"

"A chat? What could we possibly have to talk about?"


Hux held back. As angry as he was, he had been taught his entire life to respect his superiors. Even if he disagreed with what Snoke was doing, he had no right, to --

"That's a very noble attitude, Hux," Kylo said quietly, picking the thought from Hux's mind. "Respecting your superiors. But what if you HAD no superior? And everyone lauded YOU with respect?"

"Ren --"

"What if you were the one making the decisions? What if--"

"What you're saying, is an impossibility."

Kylo smiled. "Nothing is impossible, with a little magic, a little luck, and a lot of careful planning."

Without moving, kylo floated two chairs across the room, setting them down at the table he was leaning on. He sat in one, and gestured to the other.

"I've got the magic, you've got the luck. Together, we can create the planning."

So Hux took a deep breath, and sat down across from Kylo.
He dropped to one knee, shivering slightly, as always, as the absolute cold of the room ate through his thick robes.

He never quite knew what to expect, upon being summoned to his Master. No matter the reason, or the circumstance, Snoke's mood seemed to change at a second's notice. He would be praising his apprentice one minute, and force-slamming him into a wall the next.

"Rise, my apprentice."

As he raised himself up, he glanced, as he always did, at Snoke's guards. Clothed entirely in red, faces covered, they stood like the keepers of death itself.

Which, in a way, they were.

Beside him stood Hux. It was an unusual thing for Snoke to call them both into his chambers at the same time, unless something serious had happened. It raised all of Kylo's hackles, and he had a hard time keeping his composure under Snoke's gaze. Hux seemed to be having none of the same problem, though: he was as meticulous, stern and unsmiling, as ever. Hux appeared to have none of the nervousness that Ren did; either that or he was excellent at hiding his fear.

And that was good.

Ever since that day in the lower level of the base, where they had sat and talked over plans to initiate a new Order, Kylo had been worried. Worried that maybe he couldn't trust Hux, worried that Hux might betray him to Snoke in order to gain his favor. Surely reporting a treason would be enough for Snoke to grant Hux the much-eluded Grand Marshall position he feverishly dreamt of.

Or, if Hux didn't betray him directly, Kylo worried that he would, inadvertently. He had warned Hux that Snoke was always listening to his thoughts while he was in his presence, and he needed to be vigilant in regards to what he thought about. But that was possibly easier said than done. Kylo, after all, had had YEARS worth of practice with mental shielding. Hux, had none.

But to his credit, he had kept the secrecy on his end better than Kylo expected him to. Better than Kylo, perhaps.

Snoke had no inkling of their possible treason--but neither did Rey. Kylo kept everything a secret from Rey, as much as it pained him to do so, in a relationship where he had already betrayed her trust once before.

But this, he reasoned to himself, was different. When he lied to Rey about her parents, it was to selfishly keep her with him. This, this not telling her that he and Hux had begun planning ways to overthrow Snoke, was for her protection. You can't squeeze blood from a stone, and you can't get information from someone who doesn't have any to begin with. Her being in the dark protected her from retribution, and kept her safe.

But Kylo knew that she was horribly stressed out, mainly due to the fact she believed he still had no plan in place. Yet he couldn't assure her otherwise without tipping his hat to the reality. So he settled for trying to soothe her in other ways.

She was at a healthy six and a half months, now, and big. It was hard for her to move around, and she got tired very quickly. There was also a bit of a scare, several weeks ago, when the doctors
found that her blood pressure was at dangerously high levels, something common for many pregnant women. She was given medication and was ordered to bed rest, much to her chagrin.

So Kylo tried to ease her pain and discomfort, by doing any and everything he could for her. Ordering odd snacks for her at 2am, singing to her, telling her stories, massaging her swollen legs and feet.

He put this out of his mind, now, as Snoke began to speak to them.

"On Farsis, in the Outer Rim territories, there exists a droid stronghold on the westernmost part of the planet."

Snoke turned to his assistant, who pulled up. Holomap of the area in question.

"The droids are guarding a containment of Sulfuris, a unique chemical compound used in building ships and other large structures. It has the ability to strengthen ordinary metal by 85 percent, making it virtually indestructible."

Now Snoke pointed to an uninhabited space on the map, in the opposite direction from the stronghold.

"General Hux, I want you to take a group of your finest men. Land here, on the outskirts. Lead them on foot to the droids, destroy them, and bring back the compound."

Hux approached the map, his features twisted in confusion.

"Supreme Leader; why do we not mount a full-scale assault, with our ships, from the stronghold itself?"

"These droids have been trained to protect the compound from enemy hands at all costs, including initiating their own destruction, as well as that of the stronghold, to prevent the chemical from falling into enemy hands. This needs to be a stealth mission. The droids need to have no visual or auditory clues that you are coming. Now, it will take you and your men several days, traveling, to reach your destination. While I have no doubt that our fine soldiers have been trained to withstand even the harshest of conditions, I do believe that emotions may run high, and you will need assistance in maintaining discipline, and order."

He paused and turned towards Kylo Ren, gesturing to him with a smile.

"You will take Lord Ren with you. The two of you shall work together, to bring me what I desire."

Kylo's mind flooded with a sharp panic, and he took a moment to gather himself and say, calmly,

"Master, with all due respect, I have a wife at home on bedrest, who depends on me for nearly everything. Surely I can't be expected to leave her?"

Snoke waved his hand dismissively.

"She will be assigned two caregivers, one for the day, one for the evening, to provide round the clock supervision and companionship. There will also be a medical droid making daily visits, to ensure she remains in the best of health. Is that acceptable to you?"

Kylo nodded reluctantly, seeing no possible way he could protest that. Still, the idea of being away from Rey made his chest clench with fiery spasms.
"If I may make a suggestion, Supreme Leader?", he asked quietly, not looking up. "My wife, she has a special friendship with Captain Phasma. If it pleases you and the Captain, I believe Rey would appreciate Phasma's company overnight, rather than one of the nurses."

Snoke nodded. "Very well. Speak to the captain before you leave, and if she agrees, send her to me that we may discuss altering her work schedule to accommodate this."

Addressing both of them now, he said, "You leave in three days, at sunset. More details to follow. And now, dismissed."

They both bowed and left the room together, stepping out into the bright (by comparison, anyway) hallway.

. . .

"Now, you're going to be fine, Rey, okay?"

Kylo stood in his quarters, preparing to leave his wife for the journey ahead of him. He knew that Hux was undoubtedly impatient waiting for him; he was supposed to have been on the ship 20 minutes ago. But Kylo couldn't make himself go.

"I know I'm going to be okay," Rey said, smiling. "You're going to be okay, too. Breathe."

There was a knock on the door, and Kylo opened it. It was the daytime caretaker assigned to Rey, a young woman, the daughter of one of the officers.

"Hi," Kylo said to her, shaking her hand. "You're Quatin's daughter?"

"Yes, my Lord."

"Then I expect you're intelligent, like your father. I expect you to take good care of my babies while I'm gone. Can I trust you with that?"

"Yes, my Lord," she replied, bowing before him.

He nodded. "Good. Now I've had catering send up a snack for the two of you; go into the kitchen and make yourself comfortable, while I make my goodbyes to my wife."

She nodded and did as he said, leaving the two of them alone. Kylo turned to Rey and said, with a smile, "She seems like a sweet young girl. And Phasma will be here in the evenings, so you're in good hands, Rey. Don't --"

"If you say 'don't worry' one more time, so help me, I'll choke you," she said, playfully. He chuckled and pulled her gently into his arms instead, holding her tightly.

"I shouldn't be gone more than two weeks."

"Kylo?"

"Yes?"

"You know that I love you, right?"

He held her out from him, searching her face. She was smiling, but her eyes looked like she wanted to cry. Before he could comment, she continued,
"I just want you to know that, and I'm not sure I've ever said that before. No matter what happens, I'm glad I met you. Thank you for being my friend. Thank you for giving your heart to me. Just, thank you." She leaned up and kissed him, softly, on the lips.

Kylo felt that there was more to what she was saying than what her words conveyed. But, being stressed out about countless other things, he dismissed her unusual level of sweetness as the result of hormones.

"I love you too, sweetheart. More than you'll ever truly know."

He hugged her one last time, kissing her forehead before walking swiftly to the door.

"Take care of yourself, Kylo Ren," she said, as the door slid shut behind him.

... 

Kylo had done years of extensive physical training with Snoke, but even so, this was a LOT of walking, even to him.

And it seemed that way for everyone else, as well. The first few days walking were strenuous for everyone, and some were already showing cracks under exhausted pressure.

One of Hux's officers in specific, a short man with a weaselly face, was getting on Kylo's nerves. For the past few days he was loudly vocalizing every doubt, every fear over the unknowns of the mission, bringing to life the fears that everyone else was working hard to suppress. Today, in particular, his mouth seemed to have gone into overdrive. He had been talking and worrying for a solid hour, until Kylo finally felt he couldn't take any more.

Without warning, Kylo spun around and walked back towards the lieutenant, going to stand directly in front of him.

"If I have to tell you one more time to be quiet, I will kill you myself," he hissed at him through clenched teeth. At the same time, the man grabbed at his throat, panicked. It felt a though an invisible pair of hands, strong hands, were squeezing it painfully. "Your hysteria is endangering you, me, and everybody else. If you need to have any more outbursts, do so, QUIETLY. Am I understood?"

He released his grip on the man, and watched as he fell to his knees, drawing long droughts of air into his starved lungs. It took him a few disorientated moments to realize that Kylo was staring at him, still waiting on a reply. Before he could anger him again, he got back to his feet and said quickly, quietly, "Understood, Lord Ren."

Kylo nodded and strode ahead to where Hux was, at the front of the column, keeping pace with the scout.

"Your soldiers really leave much to be desired," Kylo grumbled to him.

"Everybody is on edge, Ren. Please, try to exhibit a bit more patience. And no more choking; we can't afford to lose anyone."

About an hour before sunset, they came to a large open area, and it was decided they would make camp there. Everybody was exhausted, and in low spirits. Even the most cheerful of the company were quiet and subdued. There was no talk tonight, no stories or jokes told round the campfires. After roll call and rations, the men simply went to their assigned tents and dropped, one by one, into uneasy sleep.
Hux, however tired he was, couldn't have slept even if he tried. There were so many unknowns on this mission of theirs that it made him vastly uncomfortable. He paced around and around the boundaries of the camp, thinking. He walked long enough that he saw the camp guards change twice, long enough so that he saw the first traces of blue dawn creep over the night sky.

Around 0500, he finally felt tired enough to go to bed. The company wasn't due to move out until 0700, so he figured he could salvage about an hour of sleep.

When he circled back to his tent, he was surprised to find Kylo standing in front of it, arms folded, and watching him approach.

"Ren," Hux said, when he got closer, "What can I do for you?"

"Where were you?", Kylo demanded, sounding angry.

"Walking," Hux replied shortly. He wasn't in the mood to deal with Kylo right then, so he attempted to slide past him and into his tent. "Now if you don't mind, I'm rather tired, so . . ."

He was halfway through the flap when Kylo caught him by the arm and spun him around to face him.

"Let go of me!", Hux demanded, yanking his arm from Kylo's grip.

"You shouldn't wander off like that! It's irresponsible, and dangerous! Especially out here, where --"

"I didn't 'wander off'," Hux interrupted him. "I was within the borders of the camp the entire time. The guards knew of my whereabouts."

"I didn't know of your whereabouts! And I need to! I need to know where you are, at all times!"

Hux drew back and looked at Ren closely. He wasn't sure where this outburst was coming from, or why Ren seemed so upset over such an arbitrary thing. Nevertheless, he was far too tired at the moment to put up much of a fight against him.

"I'm sorry, Ren," he said, grudgingly, in a low voice. "Next time I will be sure to let you know where I'm going. Alright?"

Ren nodded and stepped back. It appeared his anger had been sated, although, with him, it was hard to be sure.

"Do me a favor; send one of the men to wake me in one hour," Hux requested, before finally sliding past Kylo and into his tent. Not bothering to undress, he simply threw himself on top of his cot, letting sleep take him almost immediately.

. . .

The next few days were all rather alike. Endless walking, endless non-changing scenery. Hux had begun to be worried that maybe they had been on the wrong path the entire time, and all the effort they had put in moving forward was for naught.

And then finally, *finally*, towards the end of the week, their view-sopes picked up what was clearly a military encampment, of some sort. High walls, and guards posted at every entrance.

The men began to get excited, once the enemy was in sight.

But Ren and Hux talked it over. From where they were positioned in the hills, it provided an
excellent cover. They would not be detected by the enemy until they were almost directly at their gates. The angling of the cliffs and the direction of the wind kept even the most ardent of campfire smoke hidden from sight and smell. The men wanted to attack right away, but Hux, and Ren, decided it would be better to wait a few days, for several reasons. The first was, they wanted to send a small reconnaissance group out to assess the security and possible modes of attack. The second was, quite plainly, everybody was exhausted. A day of rest, a full day, would be beneficial in everyone resetting their physical and emotional batteries. Once the Rec group reported back, that's when they'd begin their decent from the hills.

Everyone was grateful for this leisurely reprieve, and, per orders, spent the day lounging, eating, or sleeping.

Everyone, of course, except Hux.

Kylo saw him leaving his tent, and sighed, seeing that he appeared to be getting ready for another of his brutally long walks. He walked up before he had a chance to leave, intercepting him.

"No, Hux. This day applies to you as well. You're not leaving."

Hux bristled at being spoke to in such a brisk, authoritative manner. And by Kylo Ren, of all people.

"What gives you the power to dictate what I do or don't do, Ren?"
"We've been walking 15+ hours a day. When we make camp, you spend more than half the night walking more. You barely eat anything, and you're worrying incessantly. You need a rest, the same as everyone else."

Hux shrugged off Kylo's words, attempting to take a step around him.

"I'm fine, Ren. Once this is over, I'll be fine. And by the way: the last time I checked, I still had a father; the old bastard is alive, and well, and you're not him. You're overreacting."

And he was. And in some vague corner of his mind, he knew he was overreacting. In actuality the proper term for what he was doing, was called Projecting. Kylo was angry at not being able to be home, and taking care of Rey. So he transferred those feelings unto the person that he WAS around, the only other person he felt any kind of caring for: Hux.

But there was another, far less noble part to this. If Hux was tired, he wouldn't be as focused. He could be distracted in the heat of battle. And if that happened, if Hux got hurt, if he in some way was killed on this inane mission, Kylo's entire plan would be derailed. And Rey would leave. So he was driven quite hard by self-interest, in his over-zealous concern for the scowling redhead.

Kylo shook his head defiantly. "No, I'm not. I want you to go and lay down for a few hours."

"'Go and lay down'?", Hux repeated in disgust. "It's the middle of the day!"

"I'm aware of the time, General. And I'm not asking. If necessary, I will immobilize you, throw you into your tent, then stand guard outside."

The look on Hux's face shifted from disbelief to anger. Kylo saw the change, but pressed on with his point.

"I don't wish to do that to you; to let these men see you being handled in such a manner. But if you won't cooperate, you leave me with no other options. Today is a day of rest. For everyone. So go and rest. Anything that comes up, I can handle it on my own."
The firm look on Kylo's face, his words, his stance, told Hux that arguing any further would be futile.

Quietly, he turned back around and crawled into his tent once more. He laid down on his cot, feeling a bizarre mix of anger, and gratitude.

*Maybe I was wrong,* Hux thought to himself. *Maybe, well, maybe we ARE 'friends'. How odd. Is it appropriate for a Supreme Leader to have friends? I suppose we'll find out.*

Eventually, sleep caught up to him, and he went into it without a murmur of protest.

...  

Kylo stood stock-still in the center of the room, trying his hardest to keep from keeling over in a faint.

He, Hux, and the men had arrived back from their mission just a few moments ago. The attack on the droid stronghold had gone surprisingly well, for as armed as the facility was. They managed to escape with an unprecedentedly low number of injuries of casualties, and had procured the chemical that Snoke had been so rabid for. In reality, the journey there and back took longer, and was more complicated, than the actual attack. Kylo had to wonder if Snoke KNEW this would be the case, of this had been his way of tormenting his apprentice and his General for his own sadistic entertainment.

Hux had gone to report to Snoke, upon their arrival back, and Kylo made a beeline straight to his chambers.

As soon as he stepped inside the doors, he knew something was wrong.

The girl, the daytime caregiver, was sound asleep on the floor by the window. Not as if she had fallen asleep naturally--but as if she had been made to pass out. *Forced* to pass out.

Kylo burst into their bedroom, and that was in total disarray. Drawers were opened, papers and clothes strewn about everywhere. The place where Kylo kept credits hidden away was raided, all of the stash missing. Looking at the mess closer, Kylo realized that Rey's favorite cloak was missing. As were a great deal of her fatigues, and dresses.

"Rey?!", he called out in a voice devoid of strength. "Rey?!"

He frantically tore through the rest of the rooms, although some part of his mind told him that this was futile. She was gone.

*Gone.*

He hadn't realized it yet, but he had lost all the feeling in his extremities, and he was shaking all over. As he stood in the living room, trying to make sense of his feelings, a small slip of paper underneath the vase on the windowsill caught his eye.

He crossed the room, mechanically being careful of the sleeping girl, to pick it up.

*Dear Kylo,*

These are the hardest words I've ever had to commit to paper, in my entire life. I've left. I'm almost seven months pregnant, and you seem to be no closer in achieving a plan than day one. I love you, I truly love you, but this child is the most important thing in the galaxy to me. I can't allow it to be cloned, I can't allow Snoke's manipulative poison to enter into his or her mind, the same way it did
their father's. I know Snoke will look for me; please, do not join in that search. I've gone somewhere that no one could think to look for me, and, if you value my safety and that of our child, you'll let us go. I love you so much, my dear, and I'm so, so sorry. Please forgive me.

-Rey

She had gone.

And she was sick; she was supposed to be on bed rest.

And she was alone.

Kylo read and re-read the note so many times, feeling as though his heart had frozen in his chest. He needed to find her, but if he found her and brought her back -- she was a deserter now. This was treason. Snoke would keep her alive just long enough to give birth, and then have her executed.

What should he DO?

His shocked brain had just barely conceived the idea of going to Hux, when a loud, insistent knocking on his door finally caught his attention.

He watched himself answer it, and come face to face with one of Hux's officers, Ensign Hubres.

"Lord Ren; Supreme Leader Snoke is demanding you come before him at once."

Kylo nodded numbly, and stumbled on legs he couldn't feel, to the throne room.
Chapter 12

"Master. Perhaps it's time to consider, that it's best she goes."

Kylo Ren was in the throne room, having been summoned by Snoke. Hux was with him, both kneeling on the floor in front of the throne. Snoke's guards were standing, poised to strike, in a half-circle around the room. Snoke had been informed by the medical droid sent to do its daily check on Rey that she wasn't present in her quarters, an extensive search of the entire base hadn't located her, either. Snoke had called Kylo in front of him, for possible answers.

Now, Snoke looked at him incredulously, his ghostly face darkening in slow anger, at Kylo's out-of-place statement.

"It's 'best she goes'?", he repeated, in a flat monotone. "Enlighten me, Ren; to what extent is it 'best' that she goes?"

Kylo could feel Hux's anxiety bleeding out of him during this tense exchange, but he pressed on with it.

"Rey, does not belong here. She never did. And our child, when it comes into existence, does not deserve to be cloned."

Silence. It stretched out so long and so loud that the quiet fairly echoed off the walls.

"This, is your fault," Snoke said, slowly. Kylo had never seen his face look quite as angry as it did at that moment, but he could not deny Snoke's claim. It WAS his fault.

"Have you been filling her mind with these ideas, this entire time? Have you been weakening her resolve, with your deplorable sentiments of love, and peace?"

Before Kylo could answer, Snoke froze him with his mind, then slammed him, face-first, to the ground. Kylo lifted himself up weakly, blood running in a steady trickle from his mouth. He spit out a broken back-tooth.

"There are no ideas in her head that she didn't think of herself. She's smarter than you took her for, and guess what? She figured out the truth about her parents. If she ran, this is YOUR fault as much as it is mine!"

"Well, rest assured, Lord Ren, she will not get far. She WILL be found, she WILL be returned to me."

"She isn't your PROPERTY! She's a human being with thoughts, feelings, ideas--"

"She is NOTHING. She is a NOBODY from a NOWHERE planet! Not even her own parents wanted her! They sold her off for drinking money!" He stood up angrily, pointing his finger at Kylo. "This is how she repays my kindness, my generosity? I give her a chance to rise above her station, to be a part of the greatest technological and military advance of this lifetime, and she runs away? She's no better than the trash she was spawned from!"

Here he paused, that infuriating half-smile returning to his face.

"But I suppose it should be of no surprise to me, that you'd form an allegiance to her, rather than me, should it? Or that you're defending her cowardly treason. You're a 'nothing', too. A weak, scared,
spoiled child masquerading as a man. A Skywalker who lacks the power of his grandfather, the tenacity of his uncle, the strength of his mother. You even lack the charm of your father, which, if you didn't, would have enabled you to find a mate long before I brought the girl to you. Pathetic. But the both of you with your impressive Force abilities, I thought you'd be grateful, for the opportunity to combine your sole strengths into another life-form."

Kylo stood up straight and looked Snoke in the eye. His fists had clenched, his entire body shaking with rage.

"How. Dare. You.", he said, slowly, through grit teeth. "Say what you will about me, but you will NOT speak of my wife like that. You want to speak of being nothing? YOU, are NOTHING. An ancient, manipulative monster. You're not worthy to lick the toe of her boot! You're --"

Kylo's entire body lifted off the ground, bent backwards so that his head almost touched his heels. He emitted a hollow, shocked cry of pain.

"It wasn't enough for you, that I let her stay? That I gave her to you, in marriage? That I cemented a way for your legacy, your Skywalker bloodline, to forever burn bright in the annals of history?"

"Snoke --"

"But no. I often forget, nothing is quite 'good enough' for my disappointment of an apprentice, is it?"

Force-Lightning rocketed through Kylo's body, making him scream out in agony as he dangled mid-air in front of Snoke's throne. He was just barely conscious of Hux, still knelt on the ground behind him, his own mind covered in a thick blanket of fear.

Snoke stood from his throne and approached Kylo, that sickening half-smile on his face.

"Don't worry, Lord Ren; although it's more than you deserve, I'll make sure your family name lives on. Once I kill you, I shall send out my best men to find your treacherous wife. She'll be brought back and made comfortable, until she gives birth. After which, she'll follow you into the afterlife."

He put his gnarled hand on Kylo's face, looking him in the eyes.

"It's a shame, really. I had such hopes for you."

As terrified as Kylo was, as much as he wanted to shut his eyes to his impending demise, he didn't. He had run from too many things in his life; he was at least going to stare death in the face, like a man.

*I'm so sorry, Rey,* he thought as the pain intensified, and his air supply was further cut off, *Please, wherever you are, forgive me.*

When Kylo hit the ground, his formerly clenched fists opening reflexively, at first he wasn't sure what had happened. The fire was gone from his veins, and he could breathe. He drew long, calming gulps of air into his burning lungs, trying to gather his senses. His first coherent thought was that Snoke was toying with him, prolonging the moment of death, and torture, for his own amusement.

At this angle, on the cold floor, he should have been looking at Snoke's feet. So it was a surprise to realize that he was staring at the Supreme Leader's head. Raising himself to his knees, slowly, he saw that Snoke's entire body was laying, sideways, on the ground. In a daze, Kylo crawled over to his Master, and realized, with somewhat of a shock, that he could see the opposite wall through Snoke's middle.
"I know that wasn't precisely part of the plan," said a voice from behind him, "But I'm afraid your situation forced me to improvise."

He turned his head slowly and faced Hux, who was standing calmly to his right, smiling. In his hand he held a blaster, the end still sending up little puffs of smoke from being recently fired.

Kylo staggered to his feet, panicked. The thought that leapt immediately to his mind, the one that he now vocalized, was "The guards! What about Snoke's guards!"

Hux turned towards the red-cloaked, heavily armored men, and nodded. One by one, they lifted off their helmets, revealing a roomful of Hux's topmost lieutenants.

"I paid off the actual guards," Hux said, quietly. "I procured a small ship for each one, and enough currency for them to comfortably disappear for the rest of their lives."

"But how--when--"

"I arranged it before we left, to correspond with the day we returned.", Hux said, smiling as he took Kylo's arm, steadying him. Kylo was swaying on his feet, both from the lingering pain and from the shock of Hux's revelations. "I took it for chance that Snoke, being in a rage about Rey, wouldn't notice the switch."

"But -- but --", Kylo stuttered, still confused. Everything was happening so quickly, it felt like he was walking through a dream. "How would you even know, that Rey would--"

"It's insulting, almost, how little faith you have in my planning abilities.", Hux said, sighing a little. "Rey didn't run away. I contacted her yesterday and asked her to write that note, then I had my men sneak her off-base this morning to somewhere safe. I'm sorry about the mess they created in your chambers, but it had to look as though she had hurried away."

"She's safe?!", Kylo exclaimed, his heart racing. "She's okay, she really is?"

Hux put a hand on his shoulder and squeezed. "Yes, she's fine. I'm having them bring her back, now."

Kylo didn't know what to say. Things had changed so rapidly that he could hardly keep up with them. And Hux, he was so much smarter, than Kylo would ever have given him the credit for.

He threw his arms around the thin redhead and hugged him, nearly knocking him over to the floor. Hux smiled and hugged him back.

Then Kylo swiftly went to one knee in front of Hux, bowing his head.

"All hail Supreme Leader Hux!"

The lieutenants in the room followed suit, everybody kneeling before the new Ruler.

"That'll take some getting used to," Hux said, softly. He was a man who strived his hardest not to let emotions get to him, but this, was the most emotional moment of his life. He quickly bit at his lower lip, an attempt to hold back the joyful sob that wanted to burst from his throat. Such an action would not be becoming, to--

He looked around himself with a frown. "I believe my first action will be converting that wretched cloning facility downstairs into a decent throne room. I don't much care for this one; it gives me the creeps. It always has."
"That sounds like a worthwhile endeavor, Supreme Leader."

"And my second action: ordering you to never call me Supreme Leader again. You and Rey will continue to address me as Hux, or, your personal favorite, 'you idiot'. Is that understood?"

Kylo laughed, nodding. "Understood, Hux. Although, to be honest, I think you've successfully dispelled the 'idiot' moniker, now."

"Good to know."

Hux began pacing a little in front of the throne.

"There's so much to do," Hux said, talking to his men. "Snoke's body has to be removed, and the Order, made aware of the shift in power. I have to reorganize the entire chain of upper command. And then --"

Here he paused, taking a glance at Kylo.

"I'm going to need your help with all this, Lord Ren. But I assume you'll be unavailable until you can see your wife. So go and get yourself cleaned up before she arrives back. You look awful."

Kylo began to head from the room, when a staticky crackle from Hux's wrist communicator caught his attention.

"Yes? Report, Captain. What's the current situation regarding your location?"

"We're enroute back to base with Lord Ren's wife. We've jumped to light-speed and will be there within the half-hour."

Hux frowned. "So soon? I expected at least 2 hours, considering how far you took her. Is something wrong? Are you being pursued?"

Kylo's body went rigid, and he tensed up with fear. The Captain's next words brought his heart into his throat.

"Sir, have the medical staff prepped and ready when we land. She appears to be going into labor."
For a man who wasn't the best at holding himself together to begin with, Kylo Ren was unprecedentedly frantic, by the time Rey's ship landed. He was pacing back and forth, shouting loudly to himself, and his eyes had taken on the wild, reeling look of someone teetering on the verge of complete and utter panic.

10 weeks.

Rey was supposed to have a little over 10 weeks, to go, before this day had come. But this . . . this was so early, so sudden and unexpected. What if something went wrong? What if Rey --"

No, he thought to himself loudly, firmly. You can't do this. You can't let Rey see you fall apart like this. She needs you to be strong for her. Hold it together.

So he forced himself to put on a calm expression, as two men, one on either side of his wife, helped her off the ship.

"Kylo!", she cried, as they got close to him. "I'm so glad to see you."

Her words breathed a small bit of peace into his troubled soul. He took her hand and kissed it, gently.

"I'm happy to see you, my Princess."

He took her from the men and lifted her into the wheelchair he had with him, to take her to Med Bay.

"You don't have to worry about a thing, Rey. The medical staff is all prepped and waiting for your arrival."

Rey's face contorted and she hunched forward slightly, clearly in pain. "It's so early," she whispered fearfully. "What if --"

"No. No what if's. Everything will be fine. In a little while, we're going to be parents, Rey!"

She nodded, and then she asked, into his mind, Did Hux . . .

Kylo smiled a little. He's Supreme Leader Hux, now. He did it. I can barely believe he pulled it off.

Good. He deserves it. I believe he'll be a much better leader than Snoke. And this baby . . .

This baby will live a normal life. And so will we. If -- if you still want me, that is.

Rey grabbed his hand and lightly stroked over his fingers.

. . .

It was all over so quickly that Kylo could hardly believe anything had happened.

After less than an hour of sweating and pushing, Rey had delivered her baby. Kylo had held her hand the entire time, surprised at how strong Rey's grip was, as she squeezed it. He could actually hear several of the joints in his hand crack, and wondered whether he would need to be put in a cast before he left.

But something happened. Or at least, he thought it did.
The baby didn't cry. It made no sound whatsoever. The doctors rushed it from the room almost the second they cut the cord, and Kylo could feel his mind, as well as Rey's, devolve into gut-wrenching fear.

"What happened? Where is my baby?!", Rey demanded, struggling to get up. She was still bleeding, and quite heavily at that, but she wouldn't calm down enough for the doctors to help her. Kylo had to hold her down (and even being bigger than her, outweighing her, it was a struggle) for them to administer a painkiller and sedative combo. She fought against it, still demanding to see her child, until at last it took effect and she faded back helplessly on the cot.

"What happened?", Kylo asked the head doctor, once Rey was being tended to.

"The baby's lungs are somewhat underdeveloped, being so early, so we had to take her to an incubation unit so she could breathe. She's hooked up now, and my assistant droid is monitoring her."

"Her? Did you say, her?"

The doctor nodded and smiled. "You have a daughter, Lord Ren. Congratulations."

A wave of surrealness washed over Kylo's head, making him dizzy. He quickly shook it off, as the doctor was still speaking to him.

"Being early, there are several complications to be aware of. The first being the lungs, which we're artificially substituting now. Her heart appears to be fine, as the rest of her organs. Outwardly, she's much smaller than a normal newborn. Her growth will depend greatly on how much substance her body will absorb. Right now she'll need to be hooked up to an intravenous tube to be fed, but in time, you or your wife should be able to do it with a bottle."

"But she's--she's alive?", Kylo reiterated, his voice breaking on the last word.

He nodded. "She's alive."

"And she'll STAY alive? She'll get better?"

Instead of answering directly, the doctor cautiously put his hand on Kylo's shoulder, and squeezed it firmly. "Her vitals are much better than expected. She's receiving the best care possible. You've got to have faith, sir."

Kylo nodded, drawing in a deep, shuddery breath. He glanced at Rey, whose own medication had taken effect, leaving her in a deep sleep.

"Can I see her?"

The doctor nodded. "You'll need to scrub your hands and arms in the sink, first, please. Although the incubation unit is built to filter out toxins and germs, all precautions must be taken. Her immune system isn't developed enough yet to fight off any potential illnesses, even a common cold."

"You mean I can't hold her?"

The doctor shook his head. "I'm afraid she's as of yet too delicate. There are two holes on either side of the glass, where you can stick you arms through. Properly sterilized, with gloves, of course. You can touch her lightly, but ONLY lightly. And delicately, as soft and gentle as possible. Alright?"

Kylo nodded numbly, still not sure that he wasn't in some horrible nightmare.
After washing and donning the gloves, he approached the glass machine with a pounding heart.

Although the doctor had warned him, Kylo felt a rolling wave of cold shock go through his body, at seeing his daughter. She was so -- so small. She looked like she would barely span the the length of his hands. Her skin looked like paper, mildly translucent, and she was incredibly thin. Her eyes were closed, and she was hooked up to more devices than Kylo could count. Her one defining feature was that she had a surprisingly thick crop of wavy hair on top of her head. Black hair. Kylo's hair. And she was, without question, the most beautiful creature Kylo had ever seen, in his entire life.

He wasn't aware that tears were running down his face until he felt one slide into his collar. He quickly wiped them away with his sleeve, clearing his throat.

"You're -- you're sure it's okay, to touch her?", he asked unsteadily. "She seems so -- so fragile. So breakable."

The doctor smiled. "I'd wager she's stronger than you think, Lord Ren. And don't be afraid to talk to her; studies show that very young infants can recognize the sound of their parents' voices, and it helps soothe them. Talk to her, let her know you're here. Go ahead; I'll leave to give you both some privacy."

He left, and Kylo slowly, slowly reached into the case, and lightly touched his daughter's cheek. "Hello, sweetheart," he said softly, reassuringly. "I'm your daddy. Your mommy and I are so happy that you're finally here," he said, stroking along her arms. "You must be, too, since you were so excited to join us. You're sick now, but you won't be forever. Okay? Everyone is taking really good care of you, until you're strong enough to come home with us. But you've got to help us, baby. You've got to fight. You don't have to fight alone, we're fighting with you. We love you so much, honey, and we want more than anything for you to stay with us."

He paused, clearing his throat.

"Please, please, stay with us."

... The next few days were a sleepless, jumbled blur.

As much as he hated to leave Rey (who they were keeping in Medical Bay, due to health issues pertaining to high blood pressure) and their child, Kylo had duties to fulfill. Hux's public transition into Leadership had gone smoother than either man had expected. The story that they had put out about Snoke ((that they paid Snoke's former personal physician to corroborate them on)) was that Snoke had a heart attack. Apparently, people thought it was most natural, for Hux to take over in Snoke's place. As a General, he was intelligent, patient, and strategically skilled in all manners of business and battle. He had an excellent rapport with his men, and the decisions he made had always been sound ones. And he was rational, level-headed in a way Snoke had not been. Kylo wasn't much surprised, upon reading the minds of those around him, that many were simply relieved that KYLO wasn't the one taking over the reigns.
Hux had had a very large rally, with everybody present, from his officers to the kitchen staff. He spoke of change, he spoke of hope. He spoke of making life better for everybody, of giving everyone more of a say with what went on in their lives. He was met with deafening, thunderous applause.

Hux held meetings all week long, with his financial planners, with the engineers, with the officers and commanders and maintenance and servant staff; going over his plans for change, for renovation, for reinvention. And Kylo was present at Hux’s side for every one. It was important now, more than ever, that the public see the two of them working together, as a united front.

From a professional standpoint, life was better than ever, for Kylo Ren.

Personally, well, the story was different.

Days turned into a week, then two, and Rey was still confined to Med Bay. The doctors told her that stress was contributing to keeping her ill; but telling her to relax was futile, Kylo, not wanting to go home by himself, had set up shop there with them, sectioning off half of the area for their own private use.

The doctors assured them, daily, that their daughter was improving; but it was hard to tell. She was still so small. Her skin had improved, though, having less of a see-through consistency and more of a healthy, solid color.

She lungs and stamina also strengthened enough for them to be able to hold her, briefly, outside of the machine, for a while each day. She was taking nutrients from the tubes, but was having a difficult time latching onto the bottle. They would each try with her, coaxing her, but she wouldn't take more than a few drinks at a time.

It was slow progress, but it was progress, nonetheless.

But horribly frustrating. They wouldn't be allowed to take her home until she had gained a certain amount of weight, as well as show that she could eat on her own.

One day, in the early evening, Kylo looked up from the book he was reading, surprised to see Hux, and two guards, walking through the doors. He glanced over at Rey; she was dozing on the cot next to Kylo's.

"Hux," he said, as he went to greet him, "You shouldn't be here, in Med Bay. This is not exactly the sort of place a Supreme Leader would be seen, unless injured, himself.

Hux smiled at that, stepping closer. "With all due respect, I make the rules now, don't I? I'll decide where I should and shouldn't be, and right now, I should be here. To see your child, for one. And then, if she'll see me, I'd like to talk to Rey."

So Kylo led Hux to the small, sectioned-off area of the ward where they were keeping his daughter. Hux stood quietly, and looked at her through the glass of the machine for a long time.

"Though she be but little, she is fierce,'" Hux said after awhile, quoting a popular Terran story. "My God, she's pretty. Have you chosen a name, yet?"

Kylo shook his head. "We kept thinking it would be a boy, so we really had no girl names picked out. And now, I guess we're waiting, just--just in case --"

Hux shook his head angrily. "NO. Don't do that, don't say 'just in case'. She IS going to survive this, and she WILL need a name, and soon. Am I understood, Kylo Ren?"
Kylo nodded. "I know, I know. It's just --"

"It's just hard. I know. But you'll get through it. All three of you will. Now, if it's okay, I'd like to visit your wife."

Kylo gently woke up Rey, informing her she had a visitor. Then he left, to let them talk alone.

He stood back, and watched from the windows. Hux was sitting on the edge of Rey's bed, his guards a respectful distance back from them, allowing them privacy. Hux had taken Rey's hand between his own, and was speaking quietly, earnestly to her. From where he was, Kylo couldn't hear what he said; but was happy that whatever it was, had brought a smile to her face. Possibly the first real smile she had had, for weeks.

Towards the end of their talk, Hux leaned over and kissed her cheek, and she put her arms around his neck, squeezing lightly.

When he left, Kylo went back to Rey's side.

"It's about time for her feeding," he said. "Do you feel up to coming, or do you want --"

"I want to come."

Kylo helped her out of bed, and they made their way slowly across the ward, to their daughter. The medical droid had already prepared the bottle, and Kylo took it, giving it to Rey.

He carefully lifted his daughter out of the machine, and as he did so, he noticed that, for once, her eyes were wide open, and looking at him.

Warm hazel eyes.

Rey's eyes.

"Hey, kid," he said, brightly. "It's mommy and daddy; we've brought you some food. Now, we know it's hard, but you've got to try and eat, okay?"

A strange sensation came over Kylo, bringing a crop of goosebumps to his arms. The baby was still staring at him, but now it seemed almost as if she was -- listening?

More than that; like, like she was understanding, what he said.

But that was just wishful thinking . . . wasn't it?

He handed the baby gently into Rey's arms, as she sat in the little chair by the machine, along with the bottle. Rey kissed the baby's forehead, then put the nozzle into her mouth.

Kylo watched anxiously, sure that this would be like the other times when she had only taken a sip, and then had to be hooked up to an IV tube again.

The formula was draining.

Draining.

He and Rey stared, in stunned disbelief, as the liquid in the bottle went down lower and lower, until there was nothing left. And when Rey pulled the empty bottle out, Maker help them, it looked like their daughter was grinning at them.

Grinning.
"You're positive you're feeling well enough to go?", Kylo asked her, anxiously tying the back of her dress for her. It was hard, there were a lot of delicate loops and straps, and his hands were big. He hoped she wouldn't notice if it was just slightly uneven, back there.

Rey sighed and nodded. "Kylo, I'm taking an elevator three floors down, then walking a few steps into a room. I'll be fine. Stop worrying, okay?"

He nodded reluctantly.

The past two weeks had filled Kylo and Rey's life with hope, and positivity. Their baby, while still not quite at the ideal weight to take home, had been noticeably, consistently improving. Her lungs had grown and strengthened to the point where she only needed the breathing tube for a few hours a day, rather than continuously, and she was more alert, responding to outside stimuli and events. Other people could hold her now, too. Phasma came several times, after her shifts, to cuddle and coo over the tiny girl.

And Rey improved, as well. The more she saw her daughter getting better, the better she herself felt, until her blood pressure had returned to normal. Although she was cleared to leave, she didn't want to go back home until her daughter could, too, and Kylo felt the same, so they remained in Med Bay.

But Kylo was worried that so much time spent in one place was likely driving Rey stir-crazy, so he had asked Hux if it was alright if Rey joined him for half a day, to oversee construction on his new throne room. A mundane activity, to be sure, but it would give Rey a chance to stretch her legs, and to talk to someone other than Kylo and the medical staff.

But now that the time for her to go was here . . .

"I'm fine," she repeated, leaning up to kiss him. "If I start to feel tired, or sick, I'll have someone bring me back. Okay?"

"Promise?"

She leaned up and kissed him again, deeper this time. Since their stay here had begun, she and Kylo hadn't been very physically demonstrative with each other. A few hugs, the occasional kiss--and they weren't even sleeping in the same space, as both of them had separate cots to lay on at night. Rey, was missing their intimacy. And she knew Kylo was, too, although he would never bring this up to her, for fear that she would feel he was being insensitive. But she couldn't wait for them to get back to their own place, and their own bed, for more reasons than one.

"I promise," she mumbled at the end of their kiss, smiling at him. The she touched his cheek very lightly, and said "I love you, you know."

Kylo's heart melted, at hearing her words. Her love was so much more than he deserved, after all he had done to her, lied to her about, put her through. An underserved gift, but one he was willing to spend the rest of his life, trying to earn.

"I love you, too," he said, kissing her forehead. "You go now, and don't worry about anything. Me and Waves will be fine," he said, smirking. 'Waves' is what he called their daughter, because of her hair.

Rey rolled her eyes and began to head for the door. "We need to think of a REAL name, soon, you
know.

"I know."

...

It felt so good to be moving again, that Rey could hardly believe it. She took her time walking along the corridor to the throne room construction site, enjoying the way her steps were echoing off the tiles. She frowned a bit; this hallway was awfully sparse. She hoped Hux had plans to renovate this area, as well.

She walked into the room and had to do a double-take, upon seeing Hux. He looked so . . . so regal. So calm, so composed. Nothing like the neurotic, on-edge General she had met upon first coming here. Instead of his old black or Snoke’s gold, he had chosen his garments to be in a deep, soft blue, that matched his eyes. He wore no crown on his head, as Snoke had done; but then again, he didn't need one. Everything about him, screamed 'Leader'.

He was standing by the far wall, going over blueprints with one of the architects. He glanced up, saw Rey, and his face broke into a wide smile. He left his builders and walked up to her, and even that was different about him. The old Hux would walk so quickly and so rigidly that it was almost as if he was running, always worried, always in a hurry. This Hux had the measured, fluid gait of one who felt completely in control of himself and his surroundings.

"Mi'lady," he said as he reached her, taking her hand and kissing it, "It does my heart good, to see you healthy and well."

"Thank you, Supreme Leader," she replied, bowing her head.

"Hux," he corrected, gently.

"Hux."

She took a slow, detailed look around herself. "This room is certainly shaping up to be nice," she told him. "And a good idea; I always hated the old one, upstairs. It always made me so uncomfortable."

Hux nodded in understanding. "I don't think there was anyone who didn't feel that way, honestly. At least this room will be well-lit. And warm."

"What about the hallway, though?", Rey asked, turning and pointing to the way she had just come. "It doesn't match the inside of the room, at all."

Hux frowned, pursing his lips. "I know, but as of yet I have no ideas on how to fix it. What do YOU think I should do?"

So Hux had her brought some paper, and Rey sketched out her ideas for him. Hux was impressed; she had a surprising mind for detail, and style. He was so engrossed in listening to her plans that he didn't notice the situation going on to the far left of the room.

A group of men were balancing the bottom half of a large, solid wall, that was being held up top by ropes, held by a crane.

Unbeknownst to any of them, the ropes were slowly fraying, until the point of . . .

It all happened so quickly that it seemed nobody had time to react.
The ropes supporting the wall snapped at the ends, and the heavy piece of steel swayed drunkenly, preparing to fall on the men.

To flatten them.
To kill.

The only (useless) thing that Hux could do was to shout for them to run, but before he even had a chance to draw in the breath to yell . . .

Rey had turned towards them, hands outstretched. The impossibly heavy steel was, impossibly, floating in the air, just inches above where the men's hands were still outstretched above it, frozen in shock.

Hux was so awed by the sight that he couldn't think to tell everyone to, once again, move. Luckily he didn't need to; the men recovered quicker than him and went scattering out from underneath it.

When the last man was out, the steel hit the floor with a deafening thud. The impact created a strong vibration that spread throughout the floor, that even Hux could feel from where he stood.

Time started again, and Hux looked to his left, somewhat alarmed that Rey had crumpled to her knees. Her face had gone an ashy-gray, and her breathing was a bit hard.

By now several stormtroopers had surrounded them, panicked at the sight of Rey so weakened, but thankfully, Hux had regained enough of his senses to react.

He turned to the troopers and told all the ones who had been underneath the wall to go to medical bay right away and get checked out, for possible arm strain. The remaining troopers be told to rest for two hours, then re-converge back.

Finally he knelt down beside Rey and cautiously put his arm on her back, steadying her.

"Are you alright? Do you need to go to Med Bay as well?"

Still panting, Rey shook her head. "I'm -- fine -- just -- give me a minute -- breathe--"

"Are you certain?", he asked, feeling panicked. If Rey had in someway hurt herself, Kylo Ren would undoubtedly murder him, for allowing it to happen. But, amazingly, Rey started to laugh. Still on her knees, and balancing on her palms, she laughed so hard that tears leaked from her eyes.

Even more amazing, Hux could feel his own lips twitching, begin to curve upwards.

"What's wrong with you?", Hux couldn't help but ask.

"You! You should have seen your face! That is the most scared I've ever seen you before!"

The smile that Hux had been sliding towards immediately turned into an indignant scowl. "I was NOT scared, I was worried. I was thinking of all the death reports I would have had to have my assistants fill out; among them, MY OWN, as Kylo would have destroyed me if he thought I let anything bad happen to you."

Rey stopped laughing, wiping the tears from her eyes.

"I'm fine," she said, reassuringly. "I promise. It's just mentally straining, but I'm okay."

Hux helped her to her feet, then firmly guided her over to the throne, gently pushing her down into it.

"Fine or not, you're going to sit and rest for at least an hour, young lady."
Rey rolled her eyes at that, but decided it would be in her best interests not to argue. If he sent her back to Med Bay now, and told Kylo what happened, he likely wouldn't want her leaving anymore.

But she hadn't counted on the fact that he would see all the men coming from here that Hux sent to Med Bay, and that he would put two and two together.

Within minutes, he was storming in, looking both frantic and furious as he spotted Rey, sitting on the throne. Hux's guards had assessed the possible situation brewing, and they detached themselves from the wall, readying themselves to intercede, if necessary.

"Are you okay?", he demanded, going to her and taking her hand.

She nodded, and quickly told him what happened, assuring him repeatedly that she was okay, just tired.

"You really didn't rush all the way down here, and leave Waves all alone, did you?"

He shook his head. "No, Phasma's off-duty today, so she came to see her. She promised to stay until I got back. Just . . . you're positive you're okay?"

Rey nodded. "I'm okay."

"You didn't really name that girl Waves, did you?", Hux asked, speaking for the first time.

Rey sighed. "No; we still haven't chosen a name, yet. That's just a nickname that Kylo calls her."

"Because of the hair," Kylo put in, clearly calmer now, and allowing himself a small smile. "The Maker certainly knew what he was doing when he designed this kid; my hair, and Rey's everything else."

"Speaking of designs, though, look at these," Hux said, handing Rey's sketch paper to him.

"Huh," Kylo said, looking it over carefully. "This is really good. Which of your designers drew this?"

Hux pointed to Rey. "That one."

Kylo looked at her incredulously. "You drew this?", he asked, tilting his head. "I didn't know you could draw."

Rey blushed, and Hux said, "There are several other areas on the base that I want to redesign. The conference rooms, the staff offices, the dining halls, the training grounds, almost everything. If this is something you enjoy, Rey, would you like this to be your new position? You'd be working closely with the architects, the engineers, the landscapers, the fabric and furniture and art suppliers. And you could bring Waves with you; I'd have areas set up where she could sleep, rest and play while you work."

Rey smiled widely. She had been worried, that Hux might have wanted her to go back to what she had done for Snoke, interrogations and prisoner handling, once she could return to work. But this . . . this was something she was genuinely interested in, and could see herself doing a good job at.

Looking at Kylo, she could tell he felt the same way.

"I'd like that very much, Hux."

"Excellent. Then once Waves is ready to leave Med Bay, we can begin planning."
"We REALLY have to think of a name for her," Rey replied, and all three burst into laughter.

The day came, and Rey and Kylo were ecstatic.

Their daughter had finally, finally obtained a healthy weight, and no longer needed the breathing or the feeding tubes. She had been eating on her own for the past week, and taking in a little more each time.

Kylo had spent the last few days back in their quarters, and, with the help of Phasma, had straightened it out and gotten rid of all the dust and the lifelessness that had come from being uninhabited for so long. He had also set up the baby's room, putting together furniture, folding all the clothes they had received as gifts neatly into the dresser or hanging them up in the closet, and painting. He had carefully, meticulously painted the whole room bright, cheerful shades of rose and white. Rey had had to laugh, seeing Kylo come back to Med Bay each night with long runners of glittering pink on his black robes.

Today, was it.

Rey carried the baby carefully down the halls, speaking softly to her, smiling. They were stopped by many people, and Kylo had to fight himself on the urge not to snarl, when someone leaned over and looked at his daughter. Rey didn't seem to mind, but some people, to him, were getting just a little too close for comfort.

Their daughter didn't seem to mind, either. She was awake, eyes open and staring calmly, thoughtfully at everything and everyone she saw. She had grown so much since those early days, and made a comfortable weight in her mother's arms. She seemed to know that today was a special day, as well.

And not one to be celebrated alone. Back in their quarters were a variety of officers, staff members, Captain Phasma, and most surprisingly, Hux, all waiting for the little family to return home. Everybody had brought food and drinks, and some brought even more presents for the girl.

"Welcome home, Waves!!", everyone shouted as they walked through the door, startling the baby into tears.

And that was another beautiful thing: crying. When she had been born, and for weeks afterwards, her lungs had been too small for her to even cry. To hear it now was a miracle.

Rey quickly soothed the girl, and Kylo told everyone, with a grin, "'Waves' has a proper name, now."

"Really? What?," Hux asked, taking a sip of his wine.

Smiling, Rey said, proudly,

"Emlyn Asha. Emlyn means 'brave and noble warrior', Asha means 'hope', 'happy', and 'alive', in three languages, respectively."

Silence, and then: "I honestly can't think of anything more appropriate, or beautiful, than that.", Hux said, rising from his seat. He lifted his glass and said, "To Emlyn, and to the future."

"To Emlyn," everyone else agreed, raising their own glasses before partaking in their wine.
Everyone ate and drank, laughing and talking, and giving presents to Rey and Emlyn. She was passed from person to person, analyzing everybody with her scarily intelligent eyes. She landed last on Hux, and seemed to like it there, as she fell asleep in his arms. Kylo eventually decided it was time to bring out the cake, that he had ordered off-planet for this party. He went into the kitchen to bring it in.

But this cake had a surprise.

Write across one side, in cursive, was "Will you marry me . . . Again?"

Kylo was planning on asking Rey to re-marry him, in front of all their friends. To have a REAL wedding, representative of two people who loved each other, and had CHOSEN to be in each other's lives. He had gotten her another ring, and this one he had designed himself: a pink diamond in the center, to represent Emlyn, beset by a half-circle of tiny red diamonds going around one side, and a half-circle of tiny yellow diamond around the other, Rey and Ren, protecting it.

"Kylo! Are you coming?", Rey called out above the talk and laughter of their guests.

Kylo took a deep breath and felt in his pocket, making sure the ring box was nestled there, waiting.

"Coming," he called back, as he picked up the cake and headed through the door.

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