**Beneath the Moon, I Saw You**

by Poaxath

**Summary**

After the death of her grandfather, Rey moves to a house at the edge of the city, where she's haunted by a wolf with amber eyes and entirely too much personality for a normal beast.

**Notes**

This work is dedicated to my fabulous friend, LadyLionhart. For her endless support and encouragement, as well as all of the laughs. Thank you, my friend. Here's to many more days, and copious amounts of gifs.

Please note that this prologue does include descriptions of terminal illnesses and lots of feels, so if that makes you uncomfortable, here's your warning.
Prologue

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

We used to have it all

It was us against the world, but now

I've been sleeping on my own

Spending all these nights alone knowing you're not coming home
The fluorescent light overhead was going to drive her nuts, she realized dimly, her gaze shifting once again to the bulb that wouldn't stop with its incessant flickering. Why didn't anyone fix the damned thing? She'd come here every day for the past few months and mentioned the light often enough to the hospital staff that it should've been replaced by now. And yet, here she was, sitting at her grandfather’s side while he lay in bed, going crazy because of a fucking light.

The rhythmic beep of the heart monitor in the corner of the room seemed to be the only comfort to be had. Her grandfather was still alive, though time was growing increasingly limited. Chemotherapy had failed, and now he was Stage 4 with pancreatic cancer. It had spread to his surrounding organs; an inoperable mass, the doctor had said.

Rey Jakken had always thought of herself as patient, caring. She'd never had a reason to hate—not until now. The anger burned through her veins, flowing like molten lava with its heat. Underneath the rage was overwhelming despair. There was literally nothing she could do to help the one stable thing in her life. Grandpa Kenobi was her rock, her support. And while she knew they weren't related by blood, his endless love and encouragement had always been enough.

Despite everything, she still held onto that sliver of hope. Maybe, just maybe, a miracle would happen and he'd be healed. Rey wasn't really of the religious type, but throughout those long months of waiting, in the silences she encountered while he slept, she prayed. She reached out to whatever god, goddess, or otherworldly force might be listening, and she begged.

*Please don't take him.*

*Please just give me more time.*

*I'm not ready to be alone.*

There'd never been any sort of acknowledgement that her pleas had been heard.

With a weary sigh, she ran a hand over her face, knowing she must have looked a fright. She wasn't getting much sleep these days, being alone at night. Every creep of the floorboards, every bang of the pipes kept her up.

Hazel eyes lifted, scanning the sleeping form in the hospital bed. Sometime earlier, she had pulled a chair close, and in the proximity, she could see every detail of Grandpa Kenobi’s face. His mouth was pulled into a grimace, pain marring the expression he wore, even while resting. In the past few weeks, his pain medication had to be increased exponentially, and he spent most of his remaining days in a drug-induced slumber.

His face was incredibly thin, eyes sunken in, and his skin had an ashy pallor to it. His breathing was rapid and shallow, as though drawing a true breath was agonizing.

Rey reached out and gently slipped her hand into his, taking notes of the difference in their complexions. Her skin was tanned from spending many long hours in the woods and fields outside the ranch-style house they shared. It was a stark contrast to the paper-thin skin she held. She carefully avoided the IV tubes that disappeared into the bright blue veins that ran beneath.

The gesture made the man stir, his eyes moving blindly under closed lids before fluttering open, his gaze unfocused, shifting around the room.
“Hey, Grandpa,” she said gently, a smile lifting one side of her lips. She always felt so relieved when he woke up. As the days passed by the chances of him waking again grew more slim. His green eyes flickered over to her and recognition gradually filled them.

“Hey, little bird,” he croaked out, voice rough with disuse.

Her smile grew and she gave his hand a light squeeze, not letting go as she reached to the bedside table, grabbing the glass of water she had set there earlier that morning.

It had become a ritual for her, to fill that cup and place it on the coaster. Some days it went untouched, but it was times like this that she was grateful she did it.

She lifted the water to his mouth, making sure the bendy straw was at the right angle for him.

He lifted his head weakly and took a few sips before settling back against the pillow with a sigh.

“How are you feeling?” she asked, meeting his eyes as he turned his attention back to her.

A pained smile appeared on his face as he replied, “I’ve been better. How are you? Are you all right at home?”

“Yeah, I’m all right. Nights are...really hard.” Her gaze dropped down to their joined hands again.

He was silent for a long moment, long enough for Rey to think he had fallen back asleep, when his voice came again in a hushed whisper, “I’m sorry, little bird. I don’t think I’m going to make it back home.”

Her heart clenched tightly and she felt the hot sting of tears forming. Trying to compose herself, knowing he was still watching her, she looked around the room again.

There were flowers and balloons scattered around various counters and tables. On each of them, there was a note of some sort, no doubt all with some form of ‘Thinking Of You’ or ‘Get Well Soon’ written on it. If only the senders knew how unhelpful their well-wishes were.

“Do me a favor,” he continued, breaking her train of thought. “Leave this place when I’m gone. This town is toxic. There would be nothing left for you here.”

Rey opened her mouth to speak, to disagree with him, but he seemed to have caught his wind and he wasn’t going to let it go while he had the chance.

“Sell the house, use the money to move somewhere else. Maybe Corellia; I’ve heard you should never miss a Corellian sunset.” His expression turned reminiscent, his eyes sad.

Her heart felt like it was in her throat, the tears from earlier now slipping out from the corners of her eyes.

“Grandpa, I can’t--” she began, only to be cut off.

“Please,” he said fiercely, with all the strength he could muster. “Please, Rey. You can’t hold on to this place forever. Go find something or someone that makes you happy. You deserve that. You deserve that and so much more.” His eyes closed slowly, as if he was fighting it. He looked so tired in that moment, and Rey couldn't find it in her to refuse him.

“Okay,” she whispered, relishing the small uptilt of his lips at her admission.

“Thank you,” he breathed before his eyes slid closed again.
I love any and all feedback! If you want to, feel free to reach me on Tumblr.
@thewayofthesith

Lyrics for this chapter are "Alone" by I Prevail.
I really recommend it.
Chapter 1: New Beginnings

The house looked so much bigger with all of the furniture removed, she thought. Turning slowly, she surveyed the room, eyes tracing the walls where family portraits had once been hung. They were packed safely away now, stashed in moving boxes.

The photos had been her favorite. They told stories of a time when life had seemed so much simpler. When people didn't have nearly as much to worry about. There were a few of Grandpa and his wife, who had passed sometime before Rey had come into the picture.

He'd spoken of her, eyes glazing over at the memories. How he had been a man sworn to his order, and he'd gone against the code for her. Satine, her name had been. What a woman she must have been to have held her grandfather's heart so long after her death. He'd never remarried, never even entertained the notion.

His only companion besides Rey had been the brown tabby kitten he'd brought home one snowy evening. She'd been attacked by a stray dog, and after several weeks of care, she had become a normal, troublesome little thing.

She never would have survived the night if I had just left her, he'd explained as he deposited the bundle into a much younger Rey's arms. Treat her right, and she'll always be there. Daisy, as she'd come to be known as, was Rey's lifeline, now that he was gone. She was waiting in the car for Rey to finish her final tour of the house and turn the keys over to the realtor.

Grandpa Kenobi passed the day after he had begged her to leave.

There was something to be said about death. Movies always made it seem a peaceful affair, romanticized it, even; reality was a far crueler mistress. It was not quiet, and it most certainly was not peaceful. There was a ripe smell that filled the room after; every muscle did relax after departure, after all.

He had been cremated as he had wished, his ashes scattered to the wind with his wife.

From there, it had only taken a month to sell the house. The market was looking good, and sure enough, some home renovator had swooped in and seen the potential in the building. It pained Rey to hear of all the changes they had planned to make, but she was going to carry out his request.

The antique flower wallpaper was going to be the first thing to go, she remembered.

She drifted over to the wall and ran a hand across it, taking in the floral pattern that had long since
been discontinued.

Her feet carried her to the kitchen, where there were notches in the pantry door, marking her height as she had grown.

A small smile appeared as she remembered standing there, waiting for the pen to be placed over her head. It was a thing they had done every birthday, even as she had grown into her twenties. She eyed the tallest mark, the same height as the last few before it. One more couldn't hurt, right?

She fished inside the purse that was slung across her chest and pulled out a blue pen. She lifted it to her mouth and pulled the cap off with her teeth, holding it there as she placed another mark above her head.

There.

She turned and added the day’s date next to the line, the last one of hers that would grace it before it was painted over and another family moved in and added theirs.

Rey inhaled deeply, taking in the lingering smells of the floorboards and the walls. This would be the last time she set foot here. There were so many moments that had taken place in this kitchen burned into the back of her mind.

It was time to go, she knew. The contract for the house sale had been signed; the money was in escrow. She just had to leave.

Taking one last look around the room, she nodded to herself, readjusted the strap across her chest, and marched back through the living room and out the front door without a backward glance.

Outside, the realtor and the new family were engaged in conversation. Rey studied them as she approached.

There were two small boys, no more than five or six, chasing each other across the lawn with toys that vaguely resembled swords, though they glowed a neon blue and a crimson red. The clanking of plastic and fake sound effects met her ears, and she smiled inwardly. Would she ever have children that played like this one day? At twenty-four, she knew she still had all the time in the world, but she did wonder every now and then.

She’d never been in a steady relationship before, mainly crushes that had either been unrequited, or a fling that hadn't lasted more than a few weeks.

Her first kiss had been awful, she realized as she looked to the parents, who were currently wrapped around each other, lips locked together. The picture of happiness.

It had been wet and sloppy, performed by a boy that had wanted to stop kissing and go straight to other things instead. Needless to say, that relationship hadn't lasted very long.

“Hey, thank you for letting me have a moment in there,” she greeted, sidestepping quickly to avoid being smacked with a toy.

The mother looked flustered and tried to reign her child in, to which Rey gave a sympathetic smile. She really didn't mind. At least the children weren't throwing tantrums in the supermarket like she had seen some do before. Those were the worst, especially when the parents looked exhausted and at the end of their ropes.

“Oh, it’s nothing,” the father piped up, beaming. “I’m sure you've had a lot of great times in there.
We understand.”

Rey looked down to her bag and dug around in it again, this time for the final set of house keys. She turned to the real estate agent, who was standing a little off to the side to give them the illusion of privacy. Her hair was a platinum blonde, done up into a tasteful bun, and her makeup was artfully applied. She was truly beautiful, Rey thought as she held the keys out.

Once they left her fingers, she stepped back and huffed out a short breath. It was done. Well and truly done, and she needed to start her new life now.

“Enjoy your new home,” she murmured quietly, glancing down at the two boys, who were now silently standing side by side. “Take care.”

She stepped off the lawn and walked down the gravel driveway, to where her car was parked. It was a simple thing. Grey, about seven years old, and Rey knew it was the kind of car one could speed down the highway in and the police would never see. It was nearly invisible in its plainness.

Opening the driver’s side door, she slid into the seat and turned to look down at the cat carrier in the one beside her. “Time to go, Daisy,” she uttered. The cat’s only response was to stick a paw out through the door of the carrier, a wide yawn making an appearance.

“You really are the best cat,” Rey laughed and stuck the keys in the ignition.

Corellia was a few hours’ drive away. She checked the gauges on the dash as she pulled away from the house. She had a full tank of gas, and a playlist full of music to keep her occupied.

At the end of the driveway, she took one last glance back at the ranch house through the rearview mirror, and whispered, “Goodbye, Grandpa.”

The city was mesmerizing, flocks of people bustling from building to building, holding bags after a day of shopping. There were people dressed for work, holding briefcases in hand as they hailed taxis.

It was a huge change from the town she had left. Luckily, her new home was on the edge of the city, closer to the wilderness she yearned for. The idea of not being able to go out and explore the woods whenever the need arose had been a deal-breaker for whichever location she had chosen.

“103...105...107. Here we are,” she breathed, taking in the house numbers. The houses themselves were spread fairly far apart, with several acres in between them. The land had driven the price up, but with the money from selling her grandfather’s place, she’d been able to get it and still have enough left over for any furnishings or to live off of for a while, until she got settled.

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“Let’s go take another look, shall we?” she asked the cat, who was sleeping soundly beside her. “Or maybe not. I need a little enthusiasm here, Daisy.” Her reprimand was promptly ignored, until Rey gently lifted the carrier from the car and made her way up to the front door. The paint was flaking, showing several different layers of paint colors, the most recent being a bright pink. She was going to have to repaint that. Who thought pink was a good color for a door?

She unlocked it and stepped inside, eyes sweeping around the room. “Home, sweet home,” she
grumbled and nudged the door shut with her foot. She set the carrier on the floor and opened the
door to let the tabby out.

There were moving boxes stacked everywhere, just waiting to be unpacked. A groan left her as
she stared at them. She was going to be at this for the next few months. She’d hired movers to help
her get from point A, but here at point B, she was on her own to put everything where it went.

First things first, she thought, making her way to the kitchen. There were boxes on the counter,
labelled for bowls, plates, and various other kitchen utensils. The one she was looking for sat on the
floor next to one of the cherry oak cabinets. *Daisy.*

She tore the tape off of it and plucked out the cat food bowls, along with her food mat. She set the
mat and the bowls down on the ground, before digging back into the box for the bag of cat food.
Never know when Her Royal Highness is going to be relaxed enough for some food, she thought.
She filled the other bowl with water from the sink and went to go try and find the new litter box she
had gotten.

As she headed back out to the living room, she noticed the tabby in question was sitting in the
large window at the front of the house, looking outside with an intensity Rey hadn’t seen on the cat
before.

“What do you see out there, pretty girl?” she asked, moving closer and peering outside. Aside
from a few birds swooping around, she couldn't find anything that might have drawn the cat’s gaze.
She tried following Daisy’s line of vision, but it only lead her to the wall of trees at the edge of the
property.

Frowning, Rey turned to look at the boxes. They were intimidating, if she was being honest with
herself. She looked back out the window to the forest, and then took her cell phone out of her pocket
to check the time.

Maybe she could just go and explore a bit before it got dark. There were still a few hours of
daylight left, and the boxes would still be there when she got back…

“Let me just get your litter box set up, and then I'll go out for a bit,” she told the cat, who was still
staring intently out the window, tail tip twitching.

Rey clicked the door shut behind her, once again reminding herself that she'd have to repaint that
door as soon as possible. Shuddering from how hideous it was, she turned and headed off in the
direction of the woods.

There was a certain calm here, hidden in the trees and undergrowth, away from the noises of the
city, and the throng of people. It was a place she often came to think, to find her inner peace. It was
cathartic, in a way, to be able to purge her thoughts like this.

It became a place where the only thing she had to focus on was where she placed her feet,
avoiding a tree root here, stepping over a downed log there.

Occasionally, she glanced up in the direction of the sun, tracking its progress as it descended low
in the sky. From under the canopy of trees, she could see the hints of pinks and oranges that painted
the sky, but it was mostly hidden by the leaves overhead.

Shit, she should probably start heading back. The light was already growing dim; had she really
been out here that long already? Unease started to grip her as she realized she may have made a huge
mistake coming out here. She was new to the area, had never gone into these woods before, and now it was getting dark. She could just tell where the last dying light of the sun was sourced from, and she used that to help point her in the direction she needed to go to get back home. Once that light was gone, though, she'd be in serious trouble.

She kept her eyes straight ahead, trying not to lose sight of where she needed to go by watching her feet. As a result, she kept tripping over branches, one sending her sprawling into the dirt and moss. It was squishy under her fingers, and the gritty soil crept up under her nails.

Lifting her head, she groaned deeply. How much longer until she got back to the house?

It was at that point that she saw an opening between the trees. She lifted herself back to her feet and brushed at her pants and dusted her hands off.

Almost there, almost there, she chanted mentally.

She set off at a trot, sensing escape was near.

As she burst into through the line of trees, her heart dropped. It was just a clearing, a good-sized circular portion of land where the trees refused to grow.

The moon hung low in the sky now, creeping higher with every passing minute. It touched the tips of the trees, casting the landscape into shadows that seemed darker than the night.

What drew her attention was the movement out of the corner of her eye as she studied the treeline.

Her heart began to beat faster, adrenaline pumping through her as she realized just how much of a mistake she had made.

For there, bathed in the light of the moon, was a wolf. It hadn't seemed to notice her yet, its body hunched over a form on the ground. Between the thudding of her pulse and the ringing in her ears, she could hear the sounds of flesh ripping away from bone. Low growls rose from the animal as it tore off another chunk and swallowed.

She stood still for a long moment, simply watching the creature. Its fur was dark, and she could tell it would've been a deep onyx by day, but here, under the light of the moon, it was tinted blue.

Suddenly, it stopped eating and stepped back from its kill.

No, no, no, Rey thought, muscles locked in place, panic gripping her.

Slowly, its attention shifted to her, head swinging low. She could make out the shape of its ears, tilted in her direction. She caught the glint of eyes, but was too far away to get a good look at the color. Something thicker than blood dripped from the corner of its mouth, landing on the ground with an audible squelch.

It was also bigger than any wolf she had ever seen before, in zoos and textbooks, she noted somewhere in the back of her mind.

Its long legs brought it close to four feet or so off the ground.

From where she stood, she could clearly see as it pulled back its lips and snarled, canines glinting menacingly.

“Fuck,” she whispered, taking a step back. She tried to remember anything about what to do in
this situation. Were you supposed to curl into a ball on the ground like a bear and hope it left you alone soon? Were you supposed to run? No, you were never supposed to run.

It took a stride forward, making up the difference that she had put between them.

There was no way to fight off this thing if it really wanted to hurt her, she realized.

It was fight or flight now. She didn't have a hope of fighting, she knew. It was massive and could easily take down game a few sizes larger than itself. She would be no issue for it. Her only hope was that it was too tired from its most recent hunt to give chase for too long.

She spurred her legs into motion, pivoting away and launching back into the direction she came from.

She ran as fast as she could, ignoring the scrapes of low-hanging tree branches against her cheeks and the snags in her hair.

Twigs were snapping behind her, the only indication that the beast was giving chase. She didn't look over her shoulder; it would do no good and she'd probably trip again in the process.

She was running blindly, only turning when the sound of movement started creeping up on her side, close, but never enough to bite. If she looked closely enough, she could see it moving through the underbrush near her. It was more than close enough to lunge at her, so why was it just following her? Its maw was still open in a snarl, and that was enough for her to push her legs faster, to reach down as deeply as she could and find that extra energy.

Looking back ahead, doing her best to ignore the animal running alongside her, she nearly stumbled again from sheer relief. There were lights in the distance. House lights. Her lights.

She pushed through the edge of the trees and raced for the door, not slowing as she flung the door open and closed it tightly behind her. Rey stood against it only for a moment before moving swiftly toward the living room window, the one Daisy had since vacated. One look outside, and she could still see the form of the wolf, having halted at the edge of the forest. The outside house light reflected off of its eyes, and she was stunned to see how brilliant an amber they burned. It met her gaze for a long moment, eyes alight with an intensity that did not belong in an animal's face, before turning back and disappearing into the shadows.

Understanding rippled through her, then. It hadn't been trying to hunt her; it had been trying to herd her.

But why?

Rey took a deep, shaky breath and let it out slowly, her mind made up. Tomorrow, she would be properly prepared. Tomorrow, she was going back into the woods while the sun still flared brightly. She was going to test her luck again.

Chapter End Notes

Lyrics are from "Big Bad Wolf" by In This Moment.

As always, I live for comments and feedback~
Chapter 2: Little Things

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

I want you to lead me

Take me somewhere

Don't want to live in a dream one more day

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If one more person bumped into her, she was going to scream. Why were there so many people in this city?! She hated the city, hated the people. She'd tried to give it a chance, but after just one morning of being trapped in the shadows of the towering skyscrapers, and the rudeness of others, she was done.

“Coming here was a huge mistake,” she grumbled, shoving her hands deep into her coat pockets. “...never should have left…”

As it was, she stood waiting to cross the street, packed against many other bodies, feeling very much like a herd of cattle waiting to head to slaughter. A man she didn't know pushed against her roughly as the light signalled it was okay to cross. She threw a glare at him, taking in his profile. He had beady blue eyes and pale skin, wrinkled from middle-age; he could use some time in the sun, instead of whatever office he was heading to. He wore a cap on his head, hiding any hair he might have had.

His gaze never turned to her, either studiously ignoring her, or honestly not realizing how forceful he was. Or maybe he just didn't care. She was betting that was it.

Huffing loudly, she readjusted the shoulder strap of her purse and strode purposefully across the street.

She was trying to find some sort of sporting goods store. Something, anything where she could buy some basic survival gear. If her trek back into the woods was going to happen, she wanted to be prepared.

Someone behind her was yelling, trying to get someone else’s attention, but she brushed it off. He was probably trying to get a taxi. Silently, she hoped he missed it, and vaguely she wondered where that thought had come from. This place was turning her thoughts dark, dispassionate. The sooner she could get back home, the better.

It was her haven, her recluse. Once spring rolled around, she had plans to start a garden, images of tomato plants and strawberries dancing behind her eyes.

She scanned the storefronts as she stormed past. Was it really window shopping if she didn't
linger? There were candy stores, with the workers inside putting on displays of them pulling taffy into shape, dipping fruits into various types of chocolate.

Her mouth watered at the sights. The smells didn't help very much, either. The scent of warm popcorn and melted butter hit her as she passed yet another store. It seemed this one specialized in every flavor of popcorn imaginable.

Why hadn't she grabbed breakfast before leaving the house? She knew the answer, deep down.

She wanted to get back out there to see if she could find that wolf again. If she had tried to explain it to anyone else, she knew she'd have sounded like a lunatic. She'd barely made it out of those woods without getting maimed, and here she was, eager for round two.

Rey knew it was a bad idea, but something called her. She knew that if that creature in the woods had truly been trying to kill her, it had many chances to do it while she was running. It had been so close.

She could have reached her hand out and touched it, slid her fingers through that plush fur. If it didn't bite her hand off, of course.

She was intrigued, the image of those burning amber orbs seared into her mind. They haunted her, appearing through the haze of her dreams. They were so intense, years of harsh experience bleeding into them and making them seem almost human.

Her face nearly smacked into someone’s back as they stopped abruptly in the middle of the sidewalk, attention turned down to their cell phone.

Grunting, she stepped back, her thoughts ripped back to the present. How many stores had she passed without seeing? She glanced at the one nearest to her and raised an eyebrow. It was just the type she was looking for. What luck.

Stepping around the woman that had halted in the middle of the way, she rushed inside. It looked like it was locally owned, if the little bell announcing her entry was anything to go by.

She grabbed a cart and began her stroll around the aisles, not knowing exactly what she was looking for. Definitely some protein bars, something easily carried in a backpack. Maybe a knife for self-defense?

The door-bell sounded again as she found herself staring at several different brands of bear mace. She heard a deep voice murmur a greeting, and kept her gaze trained on the items in front of her. Reaching out, she hesitated before grabbing one of the bottles and reading the front. It was maximum strength, the highest potency mace available, and specifically designed for use by hunters to work on bears. It should work on a wolf just fine then, right?

Not that she was actively going to use it unless needed.

“Excuse me, miss?” That same voice from earlier uttered.

Rey lifted her head to the source, finding herself having to crane her neck back to meet his eyes. God, he was tall.

She was met with eyes the most beautiful mix of umber and honey she had ever seen. They were soulful, full of demons. If she looked hard enough, she could almost see them swirling behind his irises. That being said, they were warm and inviting. Her gaze shifted instead to the black mane of hair that fell just past his chin. It was flipped back on top from something constantly running through
Realizing she was staring, she shook her head and answered, voice a little shaky, “Yes?”

He lifted a small rectangular accessory, and as she looked down at it, she frowned. That was her wallet. “I believe this belongs to you,” he said, voice rumbling as he held it out to her.

“Did you steal my wallet?” she gritted out, looking up at him from under her brow.

He looked genuinely shocked for a moment, before a small smirk appeared at the corner of his mouth. “No, I didn’t steal it. From you, anyway.” He paused, glancing away while running his hand through his hair, shifting his weight onto his other foot slightly. A moment later, he turned back to her, “You're new here, aren't you?”

Rey felt heat creeping up the back of her neck and tried to force it down before it reached her cheeks. He was still holding her wallet out. “Yes, I am,” she muttered as she took it from him, unzipping it to quickly scan its contents.

“A little advice, then. Always keep an eye on your bag.” He looked pointedly down at her hand and the item she still held. “I saw the man at the crosswalk bump—” he lifted his hands—Rey noted how big they were—and made little air quotes with his fingers, “into you. He pick-pocketed you.”

Her blush from earlier came back in full force now, unable to hide her embarrassment at the situation. “Oh,” she whispered, looking down at the pocketbook again.

“I tried to call for you, but in a city this size, that's hard when you don't know their name, Miss…?” he trailed off, the question hanging in the air.

“Rey,” she supplied, smiling faintly. “And I suppose I should thank you, Mr…?”

“Ben,” he smirked, extending his hand.

“Ben,” she finished, placing her hand into his and giving it a firm shake. His skin was so warm, almost burning. She withdrew from his grip and he stepped back. He opened his mouth to speak again, when the shopkeeper came around into the aisle.

He was a short, stout man, his stomach hinting that he didn't get outdoors nearly as often as this store suggested. “Everything okay over here, Ben? You and the lady need help finding anything?”

“Yeah, everything’s good, Al,” Ben answered before turning to Rey, “You okay? Looking for anything in particular?”

“Ohm, yeah, actually. Defenses against animals. Wolves, mainly. And just general outdoorsy gear.” She glanced at the can of mace she still held before lifting it for them to get a good look. “I didn't know if this would be excessive or not.”

“Wolves? Where are you going to be that has wolves?” Al asked, eyebrows lifting nearly to his hairline.

“Well, I saw one in the woods outside my house on the south side of the city, just by the outskirts,” she began, frowning when an indulgent smile made itself known on Al’s face. “What?” she asked.

“Darlin’, there aren't any wolves within two-hundred miles of Corellia. Haven't been in some time. Whatever you saw must’ve been someone’s dog, but I guarantee you it wasn't a wolf.”
Rey risked a glance at Ben, who just shrugged his broad shoulders before adding, “I’ve never seen any wolves, and I go camping quite a bit.”

Her frown deepened. She knew what she had seen. “Okay, fine. Not a wolf, then. Would this work against a really big dog?”

Al nodded, “Oh yeah, that'll take care of it, for sure. Just make sure you spray it downwind though or it'll fly back and get you, too.”

“Fantastic, anything else you two would recommend?” She was trying to hide her irritation as she dropped the can into her shopping cart.

“What kind of outdoor adventures are you planning, girly?” Al asked, seeming oblivious to the sudden shift in Rey’s mood.

“Rey,” she muttered. “And just some things to go hiking. Backpacks, shoes, anything needed for an emergency.”

“I’ll hook her up, Al. I think you've got someone over at the register,” Ben said before the other man could start rattling off about anything else.

“Oh, shoot, you're right. Whenever you guys are ready to check out, I'll be over here,” he clapped Rey on the back and waddled off to the front of the store.

Letting out a breath she didn't know she had been holding, she turned to Ben, tilting her head. “Thank you. I'm not new to hiking or anything, just wanted to make sure I had everything since this is a new area.”

“Over here,” he said, turning away from her, his long legs making her have to take two steps for every one of his. They walked around to the next aisle and he picked out an emergency first aid kit, flashing it at her before he dropped it into her cart.

He continued down the row with Rey pushing the thing along after him. His long fingers wrapped around a new water bottle, along with a few protein-packed granola bars. While he was preoccupied with picking out items, she took the time to glance over his form. He really was tall, she noted again. Definitely over six feet; she was willing to bet about six-two, or six-three. He wore a blue plaid shirt with the sleeves rolled up, exposing incredibly muscular forearms. While his attention was on the items on the shelves, she glanced at the side of his face.

His skin was pale, with freckles and beauty marks dotting the line of his neck and cheek.

Long, dark lashes fluttered as he blinked in concentration, eyes scanning for something in particular. With a quick motion, he snatched a silver whistle by the lanyard, inspecting it briefly before dropping it in with the other items.

“What size shoe are you?” He asked suddenly, turning his intense gaze back to look at her.

Staring into those eyes, she had the sudden feeling of getting sucked in. Like she was falling into a well of darkness, and something primal.

“Rey,” he commanded, dipping his head forward to try and recapture her attention.

“Huh, what did you say?” she asked, physically trying to shake the sensation off.

“I asked what size shoe you are,” he said gently, the barest hint of a smile
“Oh, uh, nine and a half,” she said, glancing down at all the things they'd collected so far. She was going to have to put this on her credit card until the money from selling the house finalized.

“Hmm,” he murmured as he picked out a pair of shoes and held them out for her. “Try these on.”

“You're serious?” Her voice came out just a little higher pitched than intended.

“Well how else are you going to see if they're comfortable?” He snarked back. “You're going to be in these for a few hours at a time.”

“All right, all right,” she conceded. He was right, after all.

Taking the shoes, she slipped the ones she was wearing off, bending down to lace the new ones up.

“So you go camping a lot?” She asked as she straightened, moving around the cart, turning her feet this way and that to model them. “You sure seem to know your way around this place.”

“Yeah, at least once a month. I come in here about once a week to grab things to restock,” he said, nodding in approval at the shoes. “How do they feel?”

“They feel fine; they'll break in really well.” She replied, already putting her other pair back on.

“Good, then that means the last thing you need is a knife.”

His form moved over to the counter in the back of the store, where there were dozens of knives glinting under the lights of the showcase display.

“That one,” he murmured quietly, eyes trained on one that had a long, curving blade. The hilt was molded from wood, the grain giving it a rustic finish.

“Why that one?” she asked, leaning forward to get a good look. Being this close, she could catch a hint of whatever cologne he used. It was musky, woodsy, faintly metallic. Cedarwood was the word that came to mind.

“It’s silver,” he answered softly. Seeming to remember something, he added quickly, “If you ever need to use it on yourself, say to cut something out like a tree branch or something, silver has some antibacterial properties that help prevent infection. You'll still need to go to a hospital, so don't think it’s a magic cure.”

“Well obviously,” she replied. She wasn't stupid. The man attending the display came up and unlocked the case before picking up the knife in question and holding it out to Ben, who promptly shook his head, taking a step back.

“She’s the one who will be using it.” He made a sweeping gesture with his hand to Rey.

She grasped the knife firmly, not wanting there to be any sort of incident that ended with punctured toes. “It feels good. Like it was made for my hand,” she admitted, slightly in awe of the workmanship.

“That's also good for self-defense,” Ben added, eyeing the silver blade. “If you see any dogs, or wolves, for that matter, that's sure to work.”

Rey stared at the blade for a moment longer before turning to Ben, flashing him a bright smile. “Thank you so much for all of your help, by the way. I never would have thought of half this stuff.
knew the woods outside my old house inside and out so I never had a need for any of this.”

“Well, it’s good to have, just in case. You never know what animals might be out there,” he said as he stepped back even further, grabbing one more thing from a nearby rack.

She cocked her head in confusion until he held up a flashlight.

“Ready to go?” He asked, taking one last inventory of everything they’d gotten. He seemed satisfied, though he did run a hand through his hair again as the knife was boxed up by the counter clerk.

It seemed to be a habit he did when he was uneasy or nervous.

She nodded, heading up to the front registers to where Al was waiting. He gave them a huge smile, “Hey, I see you got everything. Ben’s a good lad; better keep him close, yeah?”

Rey let out a nervous laugh, averting her eyes as she began placing items on the counter.

As the last thing was rung up and the total appeared, she fished in her pocketbook for her credit card.

“You two have a great day now, you hear?” Al said, and she glanced up in time to see Ben slipping his own wallet into his back pocket.

She blinked at him for a long moment, trying to comprehend what just happened. “Did you just buy all of this for me?” she demanded, absolutely stunned.

“Call it a welcome to the city gift,” he said, that same damned smirk appearing again as he gathered up the bags. Winking, he turned and strode out of the store. She was left trailing after him like a lost puppy, anger rising up in her chest.

“I am perfectly capable of buying my own stuff!!” she barked after him, stopping beside him at the edge of the sidewalk. He rose his hand to the air and hailed a cab, opening the door as it appeared, sliding the bags into the back seat.

“I’m sure you are,” he answered calmly as he stepped away from the car door, motioning for her to get in.

“Then why?” she glared, planting her feet stubbornly and crossing her arms over her chest.

“Because it sounds and looks like you’ve had nothing but a rough time since moving here,” he finally huffed out, brow furrowing deeply. “Not everyone here is bad, so please, Rey, just let it go and get in the taxi.”

She peered at him for a long moment, finally biting her lip and relenting. “Fine,” she muttered, slipping across the leather back seat of the car.

He leaned down to look at her, and again she was struck by something about his eyes. “The cab can take you back to wherever you parked your car. This way no one will steal your things.”

Without another word, he shut the door and went to the front, handing the driver more than enough money to cover the short trip.

Rey watched him from her spot in the car, eyes narrowing, before she finally nodded and raised her hand in a little wave, leaning forward to tell the driver where to go.
As they pulled away from the sidewalk, she turned back to glance at Ben, who still stood there, giving a single wave before turning and slipping into the mass of people.

Chapter End Notes

Lyrics are "Come Clarity" by In Flames.

The next chapter will be posted in a couple of days. I was at home sick working on these last few, and now that I'm back at work there will be some time between updates.

Comments are like gold. <3
The taxi moved slowly through the city, the cabbie apologizing profusely for the delay. They were stuck behind other cars, horns honking obnoxiously. Did people really think laying on the wheel like that was going to make anyone move any faster?

Dropping her head back against the seat, Rey watched the buildings creep by, letting her thoughts drift back to the encounter with Ben at the store. He didn't know her from Adam; why was he so kind to a total stranger? He didn't have to help her pick out the gear, and he definitely didn't have to buy it for her.

If she was honest with herself, the gesture was adorable. Chivalrous, even. Something in her chest bloomed, though she couldn’t quite place a name to it. She’d been so used to providing everything for herself in the past few years since Grandpa had gotten sick. It was nice to have someone else help for a change, even if her pride didn’t want to admit it.

Depending on how today’s trek went she might even end up running into the man named Ben again. She’d probably have to return to the store in the future for more supplies; she hoped those granola bars tasted good. She’d even be willing to put up with Al’s know-it-all attitude. And what had been up with his comment in the store? Better keep him close, yeah? What did that even mean?

This period in her life was about finding out who she was, not some guy she had just met in the city.

Her eyes drifted along the crowds of people milling about as they drove by, her thoughts wandering even further to her grandfather’s words.

Go find something or someone that makes you happy.

You deserve that.

You deserve that and so much more.

How was she supposed to do that when her heart hurt so much from his loss? He’d been her beacon in the night; her protector and friend. Wiping a hand across her eyes, she glanced at the rearview mirror, breathing a sigh of relief to see the driver focused strictly on the road rather than on
her. She hated crying, especially in front of other people. Crying wasn’t a sign of weakness in her opinion, but it was embarrassing. It was endearing how people tried to comfort those in pain--mostly it consisted of awkward back patting or hugging. How long had it been since her last hug? Grandpa had been bedridden for months, unable to move. While she was still able to lean over him and give him one, it wasn’t the same as feeling a set of strong arms wrapped around her.

The car came to a halt, shaking her out of her daze as she sat up to look around. They were at the parking lot her car was settled in. Even with the traffic, it seemed time had flown by. She thanked the cabbie, giving him a small smile as she gathered up her things and hopped out. He nodded once to her before pulling away to go find another person in need of a lift.

As she pulled into the driveway, she groaned inwardly. She’d completely forgotten to get some paint. The front door looked even worse in the bright late morning sunlight, glowing like a signal fire. She bet it could be seen from space, too. Mentally, she made a list of all the various other upgrades she was planning to make to the house. Maybe a wrap-around porch with a swing, new shingles--one glance up said the gutters needed to be cleaned out, too.

Well, maybe once she got all the boxes unpacked she'd get started on it. Maybe she could ask Ben to--

What was she thinking? She barely knew the man.

Shaking herself from her thoughts, she unlocked the door and headed inside. Daisy was nowhere to be found; she was probably hiding somewhere in the new place.

Glancing around, she took in the area once more. The bigger items like the couch and end tables were already in place, tucked against one corner of the living room. The television set was directly across from the couch, leaving the space between bare except for an old oak coffee table she’d built one time back in high school for a woodshop class.

Boxes were stacked in almost every otherwise empty spot, just waiting to be unpacked. She’d tackled a few the night prior once she had returned home, taking the time to wrap her mind around the events in the woods. She knew she should probably just make a day of it and finish putting everything where it went, and she had originally planned to, but her mind was more occupied with other things. The boxes would still be there, after all.

Making her way to the kitchen, she deposited her bags of goodies on the floor beside the counter. Her stomach let out a groan, reminding her she still hadn't eaten yet. She browsed her options, which were still fairly limited since she hadn't found a supermarket yet. Decision made, she prepared lunch--just a sandwich, topped high with pickles.

The bags on the kitchen floor drew her attention while she ate, staring back at her with possibilities.
The forest looked so much different during the day, with the sunlight making itself known between the leaves in the canopy. Rey readjusted her new backpack, the one that held all of her goodies, taking a deep breath. She stood at the edge of the woods, trying to muster up the courage to take that first step. Once she was in, it would be so much easier—it was the sense of the unknown that was making her anxious.

She had her knife strapped to her calf, her bear mace easily accessible in one of the water bottle pockets of her bag.

It was now or never. Walk in now, or back out and be forever afraid of the woods. She couldn't live like that, she knew. The outdoors were her life; they had helped shape her into who she was. Honestly, she was still struggling to figure the rest of her story, but this part she knew. She was certain of this.

Inhaling sharply through her nose, she jerked her head once and plunged that single step forward.

Without having to worry about the dying light of the sun, she was able to get a good look around, giving one single glance over her shoulder back at the house, where Daisy sat attentively in the window, watching her.

Turning back around, she was able to see the beauty in the scene around her. Moss crept over the rocks and fallen trees, lush and ethereal.

It made her feel like she was living in one of her favorite books, this fantasy world where the only worries were simple and easy. There was no room for mourning here, no time to grieve. There was just the scent of the woods, earthen and damp with the morning dew. Birds were chittering back and forth to one another as they fluttered between the trees, their songs lulling her into a sense of calm.

As she crept deeper, she placed strips of neon ribbon around the thin branches of saplings, trees that would grow large and wide in the years to come. The markers would help her find her way back home when she was ready.

The undergrowth curled around her legs, reaching. More than once she tripped on a branch or a vine that seemed to appear out of nowhere, having completely missed it as she calculated her steps. Luckily, she was able to catch herself before she went sprawling face-first again.

A sound rustled the fallen leaves to her left, and she turned, breath stilling. She scanned the area quickly, looking for any hint of a raven pelt, any sign that she was not alone. The only thing she saw was a squirrel bounding along the ground, hunting for the last bits of food before winter finally approached.

The thought made her wrap her jacket closer around herself. It was the beginning of autumn now, just cool enough to need a light coat or a sweater, but not so early that the leaves desperately clinging to the trees were green. They were a mural of colors, a brush-stroke across the scenery, a kaleidoscope of reds, oranges and yellows in many different hues.

She scanned the ground, looking for any trace that a larger animal had been here recently. She’d never been particularly skilled at tracking, but she could recognize when the forest floor was disturbed.

She couldn't see anything so far.

She’d been wandering the woods for hours now, continuously placing the markers as she went.
There'd been no sign thus far, and her hopes were getting just a bit dashed. Had she really thought she'd see it again, and so soon, at that? It hadn't really seemed to be skittish or afraid of humans.

Maybe it was nocturnal and slept during the day. She tried to think back on everything she knew about wolves, remembering that it didn't really seem that they operated on a strict day or night schedule.

Another rustle of leaves came from somewhere off in the distance, and then it fell quiet again, the songbirds suddenly silent. She snapped her head in the direction of the noise, scanning for movement.

Her breath caught in her throat, her ears straining to catch anything out of place. She didn't realize just how much natural sound there was in the world until now--now that it was completely devoid of anything besides the slight breeze.

Her hand slid down to the knife on her leg, slipping it out of its sheath. She gripped it tightly, palm clammy. Her heart was starting to pound as she took another step, doing her best to keep her footfalls quiet while continuing to listen.

There was another shuffle, closer this time, a grunt followed by a deep, throaty sound.

*Something* was there.

Her pulse was thudding against her neck now, tremors licking along her limbs. She caught sight of something maneuvering easily through the tangle of bushes and trees, something large. Definitely larger than a wolf.

A mental curse left her. It was a bear. A fucking bear was out here. There weren't supposed be any wolves. She hadn't asked anything about bears.

It hadn't seen her yet, but she knew it had caught her scent on the wind. It was just a matter of time.

Her fingers were trembling as she slowly, *oh so slowly*, slipped one of the straps of her backpack off, swinging it around so she could reach for the canister tucked into the side pocket.

She took a quick glance down at it, feeling the cool metal against her skin. Supposedly, it sprayed up to thirty feet, but her goal was to never let the animal even get that close.

The beast was lumbering closer, its brown fur blending into the surroundings with surprising efficiency. Eyes trained on it, she clenched her knife tighter, doing her best to calm her nerves. She couldn't panic; that would only make things worse.

The bear lifted its snout to the air, nostrils flaring. She was shocked to see just how big it was. Its body was thick and fatty in preparation for hibernation.

And then it lowered its head in her direction, eyes boring into her.

Rey averted her gaze, remembering something about never looking a predator in the eye.

If her heart wasn't pounding before, it certainly was now as it took a step toward her. First one, then another, picking up speed until it was running.

She lifted the mace and aimed, waiting until the creature was just inside the range.
Her finger squeezed the trigger, praying there was no sudden shift in the wind.

The liquid came out in a short burst, definitely not reaching anywhere close to thirty feet, before sputtering and jamming; useless.

“This is how I'm going to die,” she thought dimly, bracing herself to get mauled. “Alone out here in the woods.”

_You're not alone._

The words entered her mind, deep and rumbling, but solid and clear. And they weren't hers.

A blur of obsidian streaked past her, launching itself directly into the path of the bear. Eyes wide, Rey fell back to the ground, scraping one hand against small rocks and twigs, her knuckles turning white from how hard she was holding onto her only remaining weapon.

The wolf, the same one from the night before, she realized, was snarling again, jaws snapping viciously in front of the bear. The larger animal seemed unphased, swiping out with its enormous paw, long talons in prime position to cause serious damage.

Rey could only watch in stunned silence at the vision before her, playing out like an unstoppable horror movie as she scrambled further back.

The canine leapt away from the oncoming attack, darting in again in time to latch onto the thick area of exposed throat. It wasn't a good grip, she could see. The bear's fur was so thick that it would be hard to try and get a stranglehold on the windpipe.

Seeming to sense this as well, the wolf released its hold and backed up again, keeping itself between Rey and the bear.

Why was it doing this? This creature had come to her rescue, and was currently warding off a bear for her...? It felt too surreal to understand. Maybe the details would become more clear later.

They were a visage of black and brown, two colors merging before parting, their growls and warnings filling the air. The bear was not backing down, and as it rose onto its hind legs, she had a moment to understand that her protector could not hold it off by itself.

Blood was starting to roll down the sides of the bear's muzzle, evidence of the many bites it had received. Its fur was turning ruddy with it as well, becoming matted and tangled.

It slashed downward and came away with a large bit of charcoal fur between its claws, crimson dripping from the ends.

A cry started to make its way out of her throat at the sight, fear turning into anger. Doing the only thing she could think of, she slapped the bear spray against the side of a tree, trying to dislodge whatever was blocking the nozzle.

She gave an experimental press of the trigger, aiming in the direction of the bear, who was currently being circled by the smaller animal. The wolf was favoring its front left leg, and if she looked hard enough, the fur in the shoulder area was darker than black, gored and raw.

The spray whipped out, shooting well across the distance it was supposed to in a plume of mist. It hit the bear directly in the face, and it let out a roar as the chemicals took effect, burning eyes and constricting throat passages.
She heard a high-pitched yelp and realized the fog had probably reached the canine on the opposing side of the bear. Her heart clenched, guilt clawing at her.

Apparently the bear still wasn’t finished. It let out an enraged bellow, turning to the source of the pain.

Shaking its head, it charged toward her; as it drew closer, she could see the way its eyes were watering, could hear the labored breathing.

She readied her knife, bringing it back to strike. On the downward stroke, and a second too late to stop, she saw a black form rushing under the bear’s chin, using all of its strength to push the beast away.

The weapon came down, slashing with a sickening sound in a clear line from the point just over the wolf’s eye, down the side of the muzzle and across the throat, descending to one shoulder—the one that had been unmarked.

In that one moment, Rey was able to look into its eyes, seeing the pain that filled them, though it made no sound. Those swirling amber orbs held more emotion and thought in there than she would have guessed. If they both survived this beast, maybe she’d be able to find some answers.

The chemicals were truly working on the bear now. It was distracted, pawing at its face and turning in circles repeatedly.

The wolf stood at her side, eyes blinking rapidly, occasionally it would make the same pawing motion, but for the most part, the bear had taken the brunt of the hit.

Concern rippled through her and she reached for her water bottle, hoping to flush the toxins from its eyes. Before she could get very far, the wolf stepped closer to her, pushing its side against her legs, applying pressure. It wanted her to move, she realized.

She stepped back, and it went with her, keeping up a steady stream of contact until the beast was beyond their sight. Understanding that it seemed to want her to keep going, she turned and began heading back along the path she had laid out with her ribbons.

She glanced back, seeing it still trailing after her, shuffling along on injured limbs. Her accidental slice with the knife had opened its face, blood flowing freely into its eye and dripping from the edge of its maw.

Her chest clenched, her face twisting into a deep frown as regret filled her. She felt awful—she had done that, scarred it like that. The first aid kit was in her backpack. If they could just get a little bit further, she’d stop and see if it would tolerate her cleaning the wounds it had sustained on her behalf.

Chapter End Notes

I know it’s kind of a cliffhanger/weird stopping point, but the next chapter resumes immediately where this one left off. While I was writing this, I came to the conclusion that fight scenes are really hard. I hope you all can picture what I tried to describe. For those that don’t know, bear mace is SUPER strong pepper spray that shoots out quite far. There are tons of YouTube videos if you want to see one in action.
Lyrics are "How Did You Love" by Shinedown.
Chapter 4: Restore

Thank you for all of your wonderful comments! \o/ They totally make my day. Updates may be a little bit slower in the next few weeks; I've got a lot on my plate right now. This chapter is also a little bit shorter, but I hope you all enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

I'm not gonna let the emotions take over

This probably won't end well, but maybe I can't tell

Nothing will change, so just go through the motions

It's better in my mind, believing our own lie

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When they were far enough away where there was no chance the bear could still find them, Rey finally stumbled to a halt, catching her breath. The wolf that accompanied her waited patiently, glancing at the bushes around them. The wind picked up slightly, rippling through its plush coat.

She slid the backpack from her shoulders, placing it on the ground and crouching over it. She glanced over at the wolf, and found it watching her intently through one eye, the other squeezed shut from pain and blood.

Unzipping the bag, her hand dipped in, easily fishing out the first aid kit that lay near the bottom.

“They've got to get you fixed up,” she told the animal, meeting that amber gaze. “This is my fault that you're hurt.” She popped the lid on the little plastic box, looking down at the items inside.

“I don't know why you keep showing up,” she continued, pulling out some gauze and little tube of antibiotic paste. “But I'm grateful you do.”

The beast's head tilted slightly at her words, drawing her gaze down to the matted fur along its neck. “You understand me, don't you?” she murmured, more to herself than anything else.

It lowered its head, nose nearly touching the ground, eye still watching her. It wasn't quite an answer, but it was...something.
“Come here.” She shifted the medical supplies to one hand and gestured for it to come closer.

It took a step, hesitating for a long moment, before huffing out what seemed to be a resigned sigh and closing the distance. It stood close, its muzzle hovering somewhere over her head, giving her a good look at the gash she had placed on its neck.

She had a brief moment of nervousness with having its mouth so close to her face. What if it suddenly decided it didn't want her near it anymore?

Maybe it smelled her apprehension, but it gave a soft grunt, just the barest sound.

A thought struck her then; she didn't know if this animal was male or female. It seemed odd to keep referring to it as well, an it.

She shifted slightly, looking around its body to--

Oh.

Male. Definitely male.

Feeling a blush creeping into her cheeks---why was she blushing?--she stole a glance up at it, no, at him. She could have sworn she saw a hint of amusement in those features.

Looking away quickly, she focused on the gauze packet she held and ripped open the waxy paper.

First things first, she had to stop the bleeding and flush out any debris.

Falling forward onto her knees instead of the crouch she’d been in (her calves were protesting from the duration), she set the gauze on her thigh and reached into the bag again for her water bottle.

She struggled a bit to unscrew the cap, wondering why she had put it on there so tightly.

“This may sting a little,” she muttered quietly, straightening her back and lifting the water over his face. Sucking in a deep breath, she carefully reached up and placed her thumb and forefinger around the bottom edge of his muzzle, just around his chin, touching it lightly and slightly lifting his head.

He let her maneuver him, standing silently. As the water began to cascade down his face, washing away the blood, she felt his jaw twitch, lips pulling away from long, ivory canines.

She snatched her hand back, moving her face away from his in case he decided he wasn't having any of it.

His mouth settled back into place, and she waited a long moment, her breath still.

This was a really bad idea. Crazy, even. At the same time, she figured if he really didn't want her touching him, he’d probably move away. Right?

She hesitated for just a moment before dumping more water against the wound, trying to be efficient with it. His jaws snapped through the air, away from her face, low growls reverberating throughout his chest, seeming to vibrate the air near him.

Pausing again, but not moving away, she watched for any sign of aggression toward her. His breath was coming a bit more quickly, almost to the point of panting, his muscles tense. But he still stood there. Now that the blood was out of his eye, his amber gaze turned to her. There was some emotion there, but she couldn't quite pinpoint what it was.
Once the wounds were completely flushed, she grabbed the gauze that still rested on her thigh and dabbed it gently across the exposed tissues, soaking up any blood until it stopped oozing, being particularly careful of the area around his eyes as she moved further up.

Doing the same with the injury on his other shoulder, she had a moment to stop and take a good look at the different hues that lived within his fur. Whereas she had thought he was just a solid wall of black, the more she looked, the more she could see the different shades of darkness. There was charcoal, ebony, soot and ink all rolled into his coat. It was beautiful, hypnotizing.

In a moment of weakness, she slid her fingers through that plush fur on his side, revelling quietly in its softness. He didn't seem to mind, eyes flickering back and forth between her face and to the sounds of squirrels skittering through the leaves.

She was in awe of this creature, and she found herself wanting to know more about him. Where did he come from? Why was he here in Corellia? Were there others like it? She eased away from his side, ducking under his chin to grab the antibiotic paste.

After smearing a generous amount across all the raw and torn skin, she tucked everything back into her kit, shoving it back into her bag. “Daisy is not going to be very happy with me.”

There were very few moments in life in which Rey was at a loss. This was definitely one of them. She'd made a mess of the day, and this animal had paid the price. She almost regretted going out into the woods. Almost. What she truly felt bad about was the giant scar that would grace his face, probably for the rest of his life. At least she'd be able to recognize him now. Actually, she was betting she could pick him out easily if an entire pack of black wolves were to suddenly show up.

As she stood, brushing the dirt off of her knees, she glanced to him. He hadn't moved from his spot, and he was watching her. Again, there was that intelligence in those eyes that made a shiver crawl along her spine. She knew dogs were smart, and their ancestors were probably smarter to survive in the wild. This was different somehow, she knew. She had never seen another animal look so... aware.

It wasn't like she could take him home, couldn't let him recuperate in her house. No, if the Department of Wildlife caught wind of this she'd get some hefty fines and maybe even some jail time.

Rubbing her hand over her face, she sighed, “So, what now?” The question was directed at herself. Really, what now? She supposed she could get home to get started on unpacking the moving boxes. Lord knew she had spent enough time avoiding it.

There was a bump against her knee, gentle yet demanding. A giant head was pushed against her. Sighing again, she bent over, slipping her hands against his cheeks and lifting his face to look up at her. His fur was softer here, if that was possible; even if the antibiotic cream did make it a bit oily. She had no idea what was prompting her to touch him so flippantly.

“I can't take you with me,” she told him sadly. “I wish I could. Legalities and all that.” She paused, then let out a small chuckle. “That and I think Daisy would kill me.”

A gust of breath escaped him, making the sides of his lips flap as he withdrew from her grasp. She covered her mouth with her fingers to stifle a laugh at the way he looked. Grabbing her bag with her free hand, she slung it back into place on her back and looked over to the pink ribbons on the trees. She was really grateful she had brought those. “I’ll be back soon,” she told him, turning back to him.

Her brows pulled together into a frown as she scanned the trees and bushes, her heart falling. He
was gone--he’d simply vanished without a sound. Damn it.

She’d be back to check on him in the next few days. Her only hope was that it would be easier to find him when she returned. She couldn’t exactly load him up into her car and drive him to the nearest veterinarian’s office. Any type of wildlife call she made would probably end up with him euthanized, stating that he was a danger because he was willingly walking up to a human.

That particular thought had her biting her lower lip. What was she doing? He was a wild animal and she had no business getting close to him. He’d grow dependent on her for food and start thinking the city was safe.

Her mind was overworking the entire way back to her house--which wasn’t far, thankfully. She knew once he was healed, she would have to stop going out into the woods, would have to stop searching for him. Part of her also knew that she would never be able to stop, not really. Even if he suddenly disappeared and she never saw him again, she could imagine herself looking out the window of her living room every night, saying goodnight as she turned out the lights and headed to bed, hoping to see some glint of amber from the treeline.

As she stepped into her house, she placed her bag by the door, heading to the kitchen to wash her hands of blood and dirt.

Daisy came sauntering in after her, moving to sit beside her food bowl with a demanding glare in her eyes.

“All right, all right,” Rey grumbled, moving to find the bag of cat food she’d stashed in one of the bottom cabinets. As she leaned over to pour some into the bowl, the tabby came closer, nose twitching as she sniffed Rey’s jeans.

Daisy’s maw dropped open, letting whatever she smelled reach those glands on the roof of her mouth, processing. Her body tensed, a hiss erupting from her throat. Every strand of fur on her body rose as she bolted somewhere further into the house, completely ignoring her food.

Dropping her chin to her chest, Rey let out a heavy sigh. She could already tell this was going to be a point of contention between them.

Hopefully a shower would get the smell off and make her relax a little bit when she finally came out from wherever she was hiding--probably under the bed.

As she waited for the water to warm up, Rey undressed and took a long moment to stare at herself in the mirror. She looked a bit different; thinner, her cheekbones more prominent than they had been in past years. She could see the outline of each of her ribs, and as she traced them absenty, she had to wonder how she let herself get to this state. She knew grief was a terrible thing, but she hadn’t really recognized the signs in herself. Her muscle mass was smaller, a result of not enough nutrition. A part of her knew that if she didn’t start taking better care of herself, she was going to revert back to the state she had been in when her grandfather had first adopted her.

Frowning, she wiped a hand across the mirror, removing the steam that had built up, taking one last look before turning away.

As she rinsed her hair, her thoughts turned back to how her life had been before. At this point they were glimpses, memories that were shrouded in darkness. She’d been young, just seven years old. Just old enough to recall the abuse; the way food was withheld from her as a form of punishment for giving into her childish impulses and curiosity. The nights she spent alone in her dark room, the door locked from the outside. Unkar Plutt truly had been a monster.
Obi-Wan had tried to present a case against him for neglect and abuse, but the courts hadn’t taken the case seriously enough, and the bastard had walked free. As far as she knew, he was still running a foster home, doing who knew what to those kids. White-hot anger flared through her at the thought, her hands balling into fists, fingernails digging into the flesh of her palm.

Damn him.

 Damn him.

A little while later found her digging through the boxes in the living room, hair falling in wisps around her face, having come free of the triple-bun style she usually wore. Running an arm across her forehead, she grunted when she tried to lift a particularly heavy box, trying to remember what she had put inside to make it weigh this much.

There was a knock against the front door, tentative, as though whoever was outside had stood there for a while to muster up the courage.

Silently thankful she didn't have to deal with the heavy box at the moment, Rey went to see who it was.

When the door opened, she was stunned to see a young man standing there; he looked to be about her age, more or less. His skin was dark, beautiful against the afternoon sun. In one hand, he held a leash, and she followed the line of it down to where it connected to a white and rust colored dog, who immediately approached her, tail wagging excitedly. In the other, he was holding some sort of tray covered in tin foil.

“Hello,” she greeted, doing her best to give a welcoming smile, even in her current frazzled state.

“Hey, uhm, hi,” the man said, looking a little flustered himself. “I saw you moved in and figured I'd say welcome to the neighborhood. Well, actually it was my boyfriend’s idea, but he's at work right now…” He trailed off, shifting uncomfortably from one foot to the other.

“Oh, that's so nice of you!” She beamed, extending her hand. “I'm Rey.”

Moving the loop of the leash he held to his wrist, he reached out and shook her hand tightly, his grip warm. “I'm Finn, and this is BeeBee,” he said, motioning down to the dog. “He's my boyfriend’s--Poe’s--dog. His real name is Baby, though I have no idea why you'd name a male dog that.” There was a dazzle of brilliant white teeth as he chuckled.

It was so infectious Rey couldn't help but laugh along with him. “That is a rather unique name,” she said as she leaned down to pet the animal in question, pleased he was so easy-going.

“Oh, this is also for you,” Finn added, offering the platter to her. “It's lasagna, my own recipe. I figured with all of the unpacking and such you wouldn't feel like cooking too much.”

Taking the food, Rey looked down at it for a long moment before lifting her eyes back up to his. They were so dark, but welcoming and filled with warmth. “Thank you, that's very kind of you. Maybe you and Poe can come over for dinner later and help me eat it. No way am I going to be able to finish it all. How about seven?”

“Yeah, that would be great! I'll let Poe know when he gets home. We're the next house down the road, by the way, if you ever need anything.” Stepping back with BeeBee, he gave a small wave before turning and strolling back down the street.
She waved back at him with her free hand before slowly closing the door, feeling better than she had in quite a while. Maybe she wouldn't be so alone after all.

Chapter End Notes

Lyrics are from "Probably Won't End Well" by All That Remains
Chapter 5: It Shut You Up, Didn't It

Chapter Notes

Please take a look at the tags, as they've been updated. If a/b/o dynamics are not your thing, here's your chance to back out now.

Also, here's a huuuuuge thank you to 27vampyresinhermind for the ideas and for proofreading through everything a million times! Couldn't do it without you!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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I can't escape this hell

So many times I've tried

But I'm still caged inside

Somebody get me through this nightmare

I can't control myself

---

Fuck, his face hurt. Ben stood in his bathroom, a towel wrapped around his waist, inspecting the wound Rey had gifted him. Unfortunately, that was going to be a permanent fixture, even with his healing capabilities. He'd made her get the silver knife and of course it had come back to bite him. It had been meant to be protection against him, just in case, and now here he stood, the right side of his face sliced open.

He couldn't fault her, though. Not really. What else was she supposed to do when a giant wolf and a bear were mangling each other right in front of her? It would've been easier for him to shift into his humanoid form, the one torn between man and beast, and kill the bear, but he was hoping he wouldn't have to reveal his secret if he didn't have to. And so, he bore injuries attesting his decision. The bear claw marks would heal quickly and without a scar. But while that silver blade had marked him, it wouldn't kill him. He supposed he should be grateful, in a way. Rey had patched him up as best she could, even though infection was impossible at the rate his immune system functioned.

Frowning, he turned away from the mirror to go dress. Already, he could feel his anger simmering below the surface, a side effect of his oncoming rut.

That was the thing about being a werewolf; he went through these odd cycles where he just needed to fuck. Something, anything. Usually it lasted for about twelve to twenty-four hours and then it would subside. But during that time, he was volatile, aggressive, snarling over a mate he didn't
have. He was insatiable, jerking off more times than he could remember. On the few times when he had taken a human female to bed, they hadn't been able to keep up with him and his desire, leaving him frustrated and unsatisfied. And they had tried to. God knew they had tried. There was also the whole issue of knotting, which he hadn't actually been able to do with a partner, not that he would have wanted to. It was supposed to be reserved for an omega, one who could actually take it. And so, after he had tended to his lover's needs, he would pull out just enough to finish himself off, flopping down to the bed and covering himself so they wouldn't see the way his shaft swelled for up to thirty minutes at a time. It made him feel dirty, no better than a dog fucking a bitch in heat.

After Snoke had turned him, the old man had explained everything that came along with being what was termed 'an alpha'. The rut cycles, how no amount of sex would sate the need unless he were to claim an omega. These terms only applied to other werewolves, of course; a human couldn't be an alpha or an omega. Unfortunately, female werewolves were a rarity, according to the old tales.

And so, every month or so, Ben would disappear into his apartment and lose himself in the stroke of his hand for a day while it passed.

Sighing heavily, he removed the towel from around his waist and ran it over his hair as he entered the bedroom. He grabbed a pair of sweatpants and slid them over his legs. Honestly, he was tempted to just walk around nude, what with how many times he was going to be pulling these pants down soon. No, he was going to cling to the part of him that was still human, free of bestial urges while he still could.

As he looked around the room, its furnishings bare and devoid of much personality, he did let his gaze rest on the lock of pale fur that sat atop his dresser, a mockery of what he was. The fur belonged to Snoke, the man (creature was more apt, really), that had lured Ben into the darkness, literally and figuratively. He'd been a mentor for years, until it came to light that Ben had just been being used. He'd snapped that day, shedding one form for the in-between one he also had, a perfect mixture of man and animal, using long talon-like claws to rip flesh.

The memory presented itself to him like an offering and he lost himself in it for a few moments.

Rain pounded against his back, matting his hair to his forehead as he stalked through the woods outside Scarif. His father had been right; everything made so much sense now. Snoke had been using him, sending him out on odd jobs that would usually end with Ben--Kylo as he had been called at the time--killing someone in self-defense, sometimes several someones. He understood now. He was nothing more than a hitman, using his supernatural abilities to cement Snoke as the leader of his own mafia. His attackers on those jobs were Snoke's targets, making Ben kill without ever outright giving the order. How could he have been so blind? It should have started clicking sooner than it did, he knew.

Shaking his head, trying to erase the image of what he'd done, Ben moved to the window, gazing outside to the bustling cars below.

He'd kept the souvenir as a reminder not to become like that, a manipulative thing with no regard for others. He would never turn anyone against their will, and he wouldn't harm anyone that didn't have it coming. Not anymore.

As he followed swarms of people milling about on the sidewalks below, his mind turned to that day he'd met Rey. She'd stuck out like a sore thumb in the city, clearly having never visited one before.

He hadn't known what had come over himself that night in the woods when she'd first spotted
him. He’d just shifted, and usually his baser animal instincts would take over for a while, hence the
digging around in a deer carcass. As soon as he’d seen her, though, it was as though a fog had lifted
and everything became crystal clear.

Some unknown force had been urging him to protect her, to _save_ her. From what, he wasn’t quite
sure yet. He’d guided her home, as unorthodox as a wolf chasing a human through the forest was.

She was light, salvation. He’d thought that maybe if he just helped her it would redeem him of his
past transgressions, as well.

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At exactly six fifty-five, there was a knock on the door. Rey jumped at the sound, smacking her
arm into the hot rack of the oven, where she was pulling out the lasagna from being reheated.

Cursing loudly, she placed the food on the top of the stove and switched it off, cradling her burnt
arm as she went to answer the door. “I’m coming, I’m coming!” she called to the men outside.

When she opened the door, she was greeted by Finn, who was wearing a well-loved leather jacket
over a white shirt and some jeans. Standing next to him was another man with a boyishly handsome
face, his black hair styled back away from his face, and she caught just the faintest hint of a few gray
streaks. Oh, so Finn liked them a little bit older, then. He was wearing a button down shirt tucked
into some dark pants, holding a few bottles of wine in one hand, his other slung around Finn’s
shoulders.

“Finn!” Rey smiled, stepping away from the door to allow them in. “And you must be Poe; it’s a
pleasure to meet you,” she said to the other man.

“The pleasure’s all ours,” Poe grinned back. “Finn mentioned we have a beautiful new neighbor
that invited us to dinner, and who am I to say no?”

His dark eyes scanned her quickly, resting on her chest for a moment as he mouthed something to
himself. Chuckling, he met her eyes and said, “Kiss the cook? Really?”

Blushing, Rey glanced down at the apron she’d been wearing, letting out a soft giggle. “Hey, it’s
the only one I have right now.” She knew instinctively that this dinner was going to be fantastic. Poe
was the kind of guy that could relate to anyone or anything; he was just so darn charismatic. Finn,
who was giving his boyfriend an indulgent smile, shook his head before leaning close to Rey and
placing a chaste kiss to her cheek in greeting.

“Make yourselves at home,” she told them, taking the wine bottles from Poe before moving
towards the dining room.

The table was set with some of her nicer dinnerware, the silverware laid out _just so_. A basket filled
with garlic bread, and a big bowl of salad sat in the center, ready for the taking. Placing the bottles on
the table, she went over to the china cabinet in the corner of the small room and plucked some wine
glasses out of it.

Finn came into the room first, rubbing his hands together in anticipation. “Man, it smells good in
here.”
Flashing him another smile as she went to rifle around in some drawers for a wine opener, she threw over her shoulder to him, “Well I hope so--you made it!” Letting out a triumphant cry, she turned back around, flashing the device as she returned to the table. “Please, sit.” Looking over to Poe as he trailed in, she added, “Both of you.”

Handing the corkscrew to Finn, she went to grab the lasagna from the stove top, leaving him to open the bottles. She'd never been very good at it, to be honest. Rey wasn't much of a drinker, but a few glasses sounded good right about now.

Scooping generous amounts of the lasagna onto everyone's plates, she let them take first dibs on the side dishes before grabbing some for herself, everyone digging in happily for a few minutes. “So how did you two meet?” she asked around a mouthful, using her fork to point between the two men.

Finn made a choking sound, his dark cheeks managing to turn even darker as he glanced to Poe, who was smirking proudly.

“Well, funny story, that,” Poe began. “I'm a pilot for a local skydiving company in the air fields on the outskirts of town. So one day, this guy here,” he gestured to Finn. “Comes out with some of his buddies and they're betting him to jump out of a plane. The guy is scared shitless of heights, see.”

“And with good reason!” The other man piped up, seeming to feel as though he had to justify himself. “Falling from the sky and relying on nothing but a parachute will make anyone piss their pants.”

“And that's a good point, babe,” Poe snickered, patting him reassuringly on the back. “So he gets in the plane and we're cruising about a mile above the earth, almost to the jump point, and he's about to chicken out. The instructor is having a hard time calming him down, and Finn here is absolutely hysterical.”

“I was not hysterical!”

Rey tried to hide her smile behind a piece of garlic bread, thoroughly enjoying the interaction of the two men. They were so clearly made for each other.

“You absolutely were to hysterical! And honestly, if you weren't as adorable as you are, I wouldn't have done what I did.”

Raising an eyebrow, Rey tilted her head at him. “What did you do?”

“He kissed me,” Finn said, pushing some sauce around on his plate. “The bastard put the plane on autopilot, came into the back, and fucking kissed me.”

“It shut you up, didn't it?” Poe demanded, beaming good-naturedly.

Finn grumbled something under his breath about how he had been stunned by the plane flying without a pilot and not the actual kiss.

“So he finally makes the jump, screaming the whole way down from what I heard, and then a week later, he shows up again. This time he gives this shy speech about wanting to go to dinner or something. And the rest is history, as they say.” Poe leaned over and turned Finn’s face to his, pressing his lips to the other man’s lovingly.

Smiling, Rey lifted her glass and took a long drink to give the two lovebirds some sense of privacy. When Poe finally pulled away, she glanced at Finn and she didn't think it was possible, but his face was flushed even darker than before, his pupils wide.
“And you’ve been together for how long?” Rey set her fork down before reaching for another piece of garlic bread.

“About four years,” Finn answered, his voice only a little breathy.

“Four years? Wow, that's amazing,” she said as her eyes slid stealthily to each of their ring fingers. Surely four years was enough time to decide if they wanted to get married, right?

Poe had seen where her gaze landed, and using the eye Finn couldn't see, he winked at her, a small smile on his lips.

“Yeah, he's pretty great,” Finn said, shooting a look over at the older man. “What about you, though? You got a boyfriend? A cute boyfriend?”

Rey shook her head gently, a slight frown marring her face. “No, nobody.” She shrugged, a slight gesture that was intended to be nonchalant. They both saw right through it.

“Aw, don't worry about it, hun. You'll find someone. Have you been into the city yet? There are lots of available men and women there,” Poe suggested, wagging his well-groomed eyebrows at her.

Laughing, she shook her head again, eyes bright, “I ventured out yesterday. I don't know if I'll be going back there more than I absolutely have to. Five minutes into the city and someone stole my wallet.” She smiled faintly as she remembered Ben giving it back to her, though. “Someone was kind enough to return it to me, and then helped me pick out some things from the outdoors shop off Main Street. He was nice, but I don't really think I'll run into him again.”

Poe perked up at that, leaning forward to place his elbows on the table and rest his chin in his folded hands as he gazed at her intently. “Oh yeah? Did you catch a name?”

“Ben. Not sure on the last name,” she replied, fidgeting under the intense stare he was leveling her.

Snorting, Finn answered, “Well, this Ben-With-No-Last-Name sounds like a nice guy. The only way you might see him again is to get out of the house. Hey! Wait a minute.” He turned his attention to Poe, his eyes dancing with an idea. “What if we take her to our favorite club over on First and Third? She’s bound to find someone there; or at least someone to keep her company for the night.”

Rey was pretty sure she was turning about fifty shades redder than normal. “Ah, that's not necessary,” she said hastily. “I don't do one-night stands.”

Poe narrowed his eyes at her, clearly searching for something. “Nah, something tells me Rey’s too innocent for that. She’s pure. Just look at her; she looks like a tomato at the thought of some strange guy in her bed.”

Blushing even harder, she settled her hands in her lap, very studiously inspecting her nails to avoid confirming his suspicions. Yes, she was a virgin. No, she wasn't going to jump into bed with the first guy she saw. She wasn't desperate. Lonely, sure. But not desperate.

“Well, one of these days we’ll drag you out to the club, even if it is just for some platonic grinding on the dance floor,” Finn chuckled, completely missing her unease.

“Yeah, maybe,” she agreed, trying to think. She hadn't gone to a club since her twenty-first birthday with her friend, Jess, back in Jakku.

Standing, she started to clear off the table, everyone having long since stopped eating. Both men
rose from their chairs and began to help her bring the plates to the sink. With all the help, the dishes were cleared away in no time.

Picking up the second bottle of wine, she pulled the cork on it and grabbed her wine glass before heading to the living room to see if the two men wanted to watch a movie before they headed home.

They agreed and settled comfortably in the loveseat, while Rey took the chair in the corner.

The trio argued over the movie they’d be watching, promises to catch a particular romantic comedy on another night. It made Rey smile, the thought that nights like these may be more frequent in her future. It was nice, having amiable company. They made her feel welcomed into their circle, included, even when they were so wrapped up in each other.

At that particular moment, Daisy decided to make her presence known. The tabby came sauntering out of the bedroom, emerald eyes hooded and completely unaffected by the new people in her home.

She hopped up onto Finn’s lap, promptly curling up and purring loudly, her pleasure vibrating through the room.

“Looks like you're going to be stuck there for a while,” Rey commented with a smile before turning her attention back to the screen.

They were watching some movie about a man and a woman that shared the same lake house, but were stuck at different points in time, communicating through letters left in the same mailbox at the end of the drive. It made her heart clench, a sense of yearning rising in her chest. What she wouldn’t give for a love like that.

Chapter End Notes

Song lyrics are from "Animal I've Become" by Three Days Grace.
As always, thank you for reading. :) 
And let me know what you thought of the dinner! I know some of you were excited for Stormpilot.
Chapter 6: It Was A Big Badger

Chapter Notes

Well, here we are again! What story does Ben come up with in regards to his scar? I had a great deal of fun bouncing ideas off of my two wonderful friends and beta readers. I hope you all enjoy~

See the end of the chapter for more notes

I know your insides are feeling so hollow

And it's a hard pill for you to swallow, yeah

But if I fall for you, I'll never recover

If I fall for you, I'll never be the same

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In the weeks that followed, Rey ventured out into the woods every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday to try and check on the wolf; each trip was a disappointment. He was nowhere to be seen. There was no sign, no hint that he'd ever existed and if it weren't for the fact that her medkit was tampered with, she might have thought she'd imagined the whole thing.

She was diligent in her search, though. Donning her best zip up jacket, designed to block the cool late October breeze, she slid a knit hat over her head and appreciated the warmth the soft wool provided before heading out, a mechanic manual in her bag.

Rey had always loved tinkering and fixing things. She’d probably mended Obi-Wan's grandfather clock about a dozen times, inspecting the inner workings of the ancient thing. Maybe she'd take up knitting; she was always looking to learn new skills that involved her hands. That was a task for another time, however--one where she wasn't job hunting, or hanging around at Finn and Poe’s to fix up the older man’s motorcycle.

It was an older model X-Wing--well, the skeleton of an older model, really--and Poe had given her permission to make any modifications she wanted as she repaired it.

Along with the manual in her backpack was a blanket, just waiting to be spread out beneath a sturdy oak for her to do some studying. Now, just to find the perfect place to settle down for a bit.

The leaves on the trees were almost gone, the last few clinging stubbornly to the branches. She'd seen reports that winter weather was in the forecast soon. It was supposed to be the first real snowstorm of the year, and she'd heard news stations suggesting to stock up on milk, bread, and
pantry items in case of a power outage. Coming from Jakku, and the dry climate that it had been, Rey had never experienced it before and she’d be lying if she said she wasn’t looking forward to it.

Finding the perfect tree to nestle under, she stripped off her bag and pulled out the blanket—an old thing that had been patched back together more times than she could count. It was soothing, a comfort in this world of unknowns.

Situating herself with her back against the tree, she rummaged around in her bag for the hefty book and a granola bar. Taking a quick glance around and not seeing any wildlife, she tore the bar of food open and took a bite. It was a lot better than she had been expecting, full of protein, and a drizzle of chocolate on the top.

She crossed her ankles and settled the book onto her lap, flipping it open to a page detailing the different types of exhaust systems and which would be more conducive to the type of engine she was planning to rebuild. She took a couple of notes in the margins of the book, a few rough sketches here and there of headers and intake systems.

It was a beautiful day, she thought. She wasn’t cold with her thick jacket, even sitting prone as she was. In fact, she was pretty warm, warm enough to let her eyes drift closed and to bask in the fresh air.

She couldn't take a nap here, not now. Who knew if that bear had gone into hibernation yet. And yet, she was comfortable, relaxed. One minute ticked by, and then two, her breaths slowing down in time with her heart as she slipped into unconsciousness.

She was standing in a field, the sound of a stream trickling over rocks off in the distance. The sun was warm against her skin and she turned her face toward it, savoring the heat. There were birds soaring overhead, circling ominously, their figures casting shadows across the ground.

She turned, seeing a black form slinking across the grassland, growing ever closer. The scar that bisected its cheek was open and bleeding, as though her efforts hadn’t done any good. The beast’s lips lifted in a snarl and she was given a glint of ivory canines. Glancing around, she took a step back. There were no other animals around her, nothing else the wolf could have its attention trained on. Something wasn't right--this was not the creature she had helped before. It looked like him, but the attitude was wrong; it looked like it was ready to kill.

Clouds appeared out of nowhere, obscuring the sun and darkening by the minute, the promise of rain heavy in the air. Wind began to pick up, whipping the long stalks of grass into a frenzy.

Her heart began to pound against her ribs, her breath coming faster as she stepped back, looking for somewhere, anywhere that might shield her. There was nothing, no trees, no buildings.

As it grew closer, she could see muscles moving beneath the fur she knew to be so luxurious. Bones began to shift and snap, a loud, harsh sound. And yet the creature still moved closer. Its back hunched in on itself, looking like something out of a horror movie as the fur slid away, the muzzle shortened and bones rearranged.

Right as it reached her, the monster lifted himself to his back feet, caught somewhere in between wolf and man. A hand extended out toward her, claws sharp and threatening. It touched her shoulder, sinking through the fabric of her clothing and into her skin. A shriek built in her throat, and she opened her mouth to--

Jerking upright, she gasped loudly, eyes wide. Her eyes flew to the man beside her, his hand extended, almost touching her. Trying to make sense of what happened, she simply stared for a long
moment, chest heaving.

Rey almost didn't recognize the man, his face bearing an angry red mark of a healing wound over his right side. It looked so familiar, almost as if…

“Ben?” Her voice was a nervous croak, adrenaline still pumping through her veins.

He was frowning, dark eyes scanning over her form still on the ground as he dropped his hand back to his side. “Why are you sleeping out here? Don’t you know how dangerous that is? You literally have no protection against wild animals.”

Dumbfounded, she looked up at him from where he was looming over her, taking in the lightweight black coat he wore, unzipped to reveal a forest green shirt clinging tightly to an expanse of pectoral muscle. “What happened to your face?” She hadn't meant to blurt it out, but her mind was still reeling, screaming something at her she couldn't quite understand.

Blinking at her, unease written on every bit of his features, he shoved his hands into the pockets of his jacket. “It was a be--adger. Badger.”

Raising her eyebrows at him, she slowly pushed herself to her feet. “A badger did that to you?”

Looking at her with utter seriousness in his eyes, he nodded. “It was a big badger.”

There was no way in hell Rey bought his excuse, not even close. She couldn't read minds, though, so unless he was willing to tell her the truth, she was going to have to go along with it. “I would love to hear that story.”

“Everyone knows beavers can be very aggressive.” His mouth twitched just the faintest bit as he spoke, running one hand through his hair.

“I thought it was a badger.”

“That's what I said.” His smile was more pronounced, and now she knew for sure he was messing with her.

Crossing her arms over her chest, she shot him a frown, but couldn't quite manage to make it as stern as she meant to. “Fine, don't tell me what really happened. What are you doing out here?”

Using one hand to make a sweeping gesture to the woods around him, he smirked, “Hiking. And finding sleeping women. What are you doing out here?”

“Well, I was reading this book to help me get an idea for a motorcycle I'm rebuilding for a friend. And then I fell asleep. I was having this weird dream when you, you know.” She waved her hand a little, trying to get her point across. Admittedly, she was a bit shaken from the dream turned nightmare, and the scar on Ben’s face resembled the one on the wolf's almost identically.

Bending back down, she placed her items back into her bag before picking up the blanket and shaking the dead leaves and debris off of it. Rey could feel his eyes on her as she worked, and she tried to brush off the way it made goosebumps rise on the nape of her neck.

Folding the blanket, she tucked it away and slung the bag over her shoulder, straightening to look at him. Again, she was struck by just how tall he was, and in the light of the late afternoon sun, his eyes burned like embers, the brown catching the rays and making them reflect different shades.

“I, uhm, wanted to thank you for getting my wallet back for me,” she said suddenly. “Could I
make you some lunch or something?”

He smiled again, and it looked really good on him, she thought. “Sure, you can make me lunch. It was nothing, though. Really. I just didn’t want your first time in the city to be traumatizing.”

She grinned up at him, shaking her head before asking, “So what are you, like my protector? I don’t know anything about you.”

He laughed, a deep rumbling sound that also managed to be light and airy, “That’s kind of the point of the whole dark and mysterious thing I have going on.”

Rolling her eyes, she turned away from him, and headed back the way she’d come. After a few steps of silence, she glanced over her shoulder to see if he was following. His footsteps were eerily quiet, like a wraith ghosting over the terrain, but he was right behind her.

She supposed he was right; she really didn’t know anything about him at all. Other than the fact he had fantastic hair and soulful eyes. Maybe he was a serial killer or a rapist and she had no idea. He didn’t seem like the type, but from all of the late night crime shows she’d seen before passing out on the couch, those kinds of people were always very charismatic and friendly on the surface.

Biting her bottom lip as they moved closer to the edge of the woods, she slid a glance at him again, “Okay, don’t laugh at my house. I haven't gotten around to fixing it up yet.”

He raised an eyebrow at her, lifting his hand to clutch his chest. “I would never. Frankly, I'm offended you'd even think I would.”

“Yeah, well, a lot needs to be done to it. Hell, I might even hire you for a bit. If that chest of yours is anything to go by, it looks like you can do exactly the type of work I need.” Smirking, she stopped to look pointedly at said chest. She was only half-kidding; she could do the work herself, but it would go so much faster if someone was helping.

“...My chest? Were you checking me out?”

Of course, he would fixate on that one portion of what she’d said. Huffing out a breath, she turned away from him and marched off. Okay, so maybe she’d noticed he was well-defined through his clothing. She had not been checking him out. Nope.

“No, I was not. Whatever you were doing to give you that scar on your face, you clearly won.” They were almost to the house now--she could see it in the distance.

His voice sounded like he was on the edge of laughter, mirth shining through as he answered, “Barn owls don't like you going near their nests, apparently.”

“Oh my god, you are insufferable!” She groaned, throwing her hands up in the air. “You know what, forget it. You can't have lunch unless you tell me what really happened!” She didn't really mean it, her footsteps still carrying her closer to her home. She was intrigued now to find out the truth and she’d pry it out of him one way or the other.

Rey could hear him chuckling behind her as they exited the treeline, almost to the front door. Suddenly sensing no movement behind her, she turned again, seeing him hesitating to move closer. “I didn't mean it,” she said quickly, afraid he'd thought she’d been serious about no lunch.
He hadn't been afraid she'd rescinded her offer of lunch, not at all. It had just occurred to him that
this was the closest he'd ever been to her house. He was so used to stopping at the edge of the trees
while in his wolf form, an unwelcome beast in the face of civilization. And now, she was actively
inviting him inside her home.

A home, which, by all reasoning, looked like shit. The siding needed to be redone, the gutters
were overflowing with leaves, and the shingles looked like they were barely hanging on. Then there
was the door. The bright pink front door that had no place being attached to this otherwise neutral-
toned building.

Clearing his throat, he glanced down at her and nodded, “It looks...homey.”

Throwing her head back, Rey let out a laugh that sounded so pure it made something in his chest
constrict just a little. Then she swatted his arm lightly and said, still grinning, “Don’t lie; it’s a
travesty. I have no idea why I bought this thing, other than the location.”

“Well,” he rubbed the back of his neck as he surveyed it. “There’s supposed to be this big snow
storm next week. I could see what I can do in the meantime to make sure your roof doesn't cave in.
At least make sure it’s properly sound. How this thing passed inspection…” He trailed off, shaking
his head.

Giggling--she fucking giggled--Rey sized him up and said, “Well, if you manage to do that, I’ll
make you lunch every day you help me out.”

“What if your cooking is terrible?”

“Oh, it is. But I make a mean sandwich,” she smirked as she opened the door and stepped aside
for him to enter.

When he didn't, she turned to see him simply standing there, staring at the threshold with his hands
shoved deep into his pockets. She came over to him and snapped her fingers in front of him, forcing
him to shift his attention back to her. “Hey, you okay? You look like a vampire waiting for
permission to enter.”

Rolling his shoulders to bring himself out of his thoughts, he quickly twisted his face into an
indignant expression. “Why the hell would you say that? If I hadn't just been mauled by a blue-
footed boobie, that would hurt my feelings.”

“Vampires have feelings?” She snorted, ushering him inside.

“Who said I was a vampire?” He grumbled half-heartedly as he slipped his jacket off at her
insistence.

Watching as she took the coat from him and hung it up on the rack by the door, he raised an
eyebrow, waiting for an answer.

“Well, you didn't deny it,” she shot back.

“How could I be a vampire? Those don't exist,” he said quite matter-of-factly, following her
through the living room and into the kitchen. It reeked of cat in this house. He didn't necessarily
dislike cats at all, but he hated their smell and they never seemed to like him, anyway.

As Rey took to cutting up a giant loaf of French bread, and topped the halves with various slices
of deli meats and cheeses, he had to admit it looked delicious. “How would you know?” she asked. “Have you spoken to every single person in the universe?”

“Of course not. I hate people,” he leaned his arms on the kitchen island watched the way her hands flew over the ingredients, adding lettuce here, tomato there.

“You don’t seem to hate me.” It was intended to be a passive comment, he knew, but he could sense the underlying curiosity in her words.

“I will if you put mustard on that,” he deadpanned, looking pointedly at her hands, and she quickly set the yellow bottle she’d been holding over one of the sandwiches to the side, giving him a sheepish look.

For the first time, he looked around the kitchen. The cabinets were old and scuffed, years of abuse etched into the dark wood. The counters weren't any better—an almost orangish shade of laminate trying to mimic a wooden look. It looked like something out of the 70s. God, this whole house was a disaster.

“You know, I could have some of my guys come in and fix this place up for you,” he began, wondering if he was overstepping. At the quizzical tilt of her head, he explained. “I’m a landlord, and often times when someone moves out, we have to replace carpets and do any renovations between tenants.”

“Oh, uh, I don't know…” she frowned as she placed the sandwich on a plate and held it out to him. He took it gratefully, fingers just barely brushing over hers. Her gaze snapped down to the floor and he could see her subtly trying to wipe her hands against her jeans. “I don't know if I could afford that.”

“No charge,” he said as he took a bite. She wasn't kidding; she did make a mean sandwich. “If it makes you feel better, you can pay me back with more of these, as agreed.” He lifted the food in question. Having the sudden feeling that they weren't alone, he glanced in the direction of the hallway, to see a little brown tabby cat slinking out, scenting the air warily.

From beside him, he heard Rey say, “That's Daisy. She usually loves new people. Strange she's acting like this.”

He knew exactly why Daisy was acting like this. She smelled dog, and if she was like most other cats, she didn't like them at first contact. The pair—man and cat—locked eyes and held it for about ten seconds before Ben purposely turned his attention away, going back to eating. “Was she abused in the past?” His voice was soft, kept low so as not to startle the creature currently stepping closer.

“She was nearly eaten by a dog when she was a kitten, before my grandpa saved her.” He caught the way her tone wavered slightly at the mention of the man.

“Your grandfather sounds like a great man,” he told her gently, giving her a reassuring smile.

“He was,” she said quietly, nodding in agreement.

Ah, she suddenly made a lot more sense now. He'd figured it was probably something along those lines. She was trying to restart her life, making an odd decision to move out here, of all places.

Suddenly, he felt something cautiously sniffing at his leg, and he slowly leaned over to look, spying Daisy with her tail puffed out, neck extended so that she could scent him without getting any closer. Sensing his movement, she leapt back and hissed, tail lashing wildly before she took off back in the direction of what he guessed was a bedroom.
“Wow, I've only seen her react like that once before. A few weeks back, there was this wolf out in the woods, and…” she bit her lip before lifting her hand and waving as if it didn't matter. “Nevermind, it's a crazy story.”

No, it’s not a crazy story, he wanted to tell her. He knew exactly what happened, and he wanted to tell her that it was real, that she wasn't a lunatic. “No, come on, tell me,” he pled, giving his best impersonation of pleading puppy eyes.

“Maybe another time,” she said, shaking her head defiantly. “After your crew comes to fix my house.” She grinned at him, and he smiled back, thrilled that she'd accepted his offer.

Chuckling, he nodded once, “I'll try to get my guys out here to do what we can. For now, I think I better get out of your hair; I've got to go pick up some rent checks, anyway.” Picking up his plate, he took it to the sink and rinsed it off. “Thank you for lunch.”

“You're welcome. And thank you in advance for the help. I appreciate it. Maybe you could come for dinner sometime, too.” She looked almost hopeful, and he couldn't bring himself to deny her and dash that look.

“I'd like that,” he said as he moved toward the door with her trailing alongside him. “See you soon.”

Chapter End Notes

Lyrics are "Love Somebody" by Maroon 5. One of my favorite songs!
Chapter Notes

Thank you for all of the wonderful comments on the past two chapters (I seriously live for each and every one of them). I hope you all enjoy this chapter, as well. Special thanks to 27vampyresinhermind for Rey’s reply to Ben. That was all her. I also want to take this time to say that if you guys have any ideas or anything you'd like to see, feel free to throw them in the comments!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

And I just wanted to say, I'm sorry

This time, I think I'm to blame

It's harder to get through the days

You get older and blame turns to shame

Cause everything inside, it never comes out right

The loud knock at the door startled Rey from sleep, causing her to jerk upright and blink furiously. She glanced over to the clock on the nightstand, frowning when it read seven-o’eighth. Who the hell was at her door at this time of the morning? She wasn't expecting any packages that she could remember.

Swinging her legs over the side of her bed, she grabbed her robe and slid it on. Wouldn't want to traumatize whoever was waiting by seeing her nude form. She looked over to see Daisy curled up at the end of the bed, completely uncaring. Rey ran her hand lovingly along the cat’s spine before heading down the hallway.

When she got to the door, she looked out the peephole, only to see Ben standing there, looking as though he’d been up for a while. Groaning, she opened the door and squinted against the bright morning sun, clutching her robe around her against the morning chill, her nipples hardening beneath the fabric.

“Oh good, you're up,” he greeted, giving her a warm smile, though she didn't miss the way his eyes dipped down to see her wearing next to nothing, settling briefly on her chest.

If looks could kill, he'd have dropped dead at her feet. “What are you doing here so early?”
Her eyes widened at the sound of a large truck approaching, its diesel engine annoyingly loud.

Ben shuffled nervously in front of her, before speaking, “Well, we’ve got a lot of work to do and not a lot of time to do it in, so an early start would be good.”

For the first time, she really looked at him, and she saw that he was wearing a pair of dirty old jeans covered in paint stains, some boots that looked like the toe was steel-covered, and a white T-shirt that showed off his defined arms and torso alarmingly well.

“Okay, uh, give me a minute to go get dressed, then,” she grumbled before closing the door.

Why the fuck was he here so damned early? When he’d said see you soon, she hadn’t thought he’d meant this fucking soon. Not that she wasn’t grateful for the help or anything; she'd just had a bad night, tossing and turning, and plagued by dreams about a wolf that kept shifting into a man.

It was nothing a shit-ton of coffee wouldn't fix. Making a beeline for the kitchen, she got a pot brewing, adding extra coffee grounds to make it stronger. If the obnoxious sounds of materials being unloaded from a truck were any sign, she was going to need it.

Heading to her bedroom to get dressed, she tried to decide what would be acceptable for renovations. Going into her closet, she grabbed a long-sleeved shirt and a pair of overalls from back when she'd gone through a painting phase.

Moving to the bathroom, she splashed some cold water onto her face and tied her hair up into a three-bun style, one she wore when stuff needed to get done.

She could hear the coffee maker beeping in the kitchen, signalling the end of its cycle. The least she could do was bring Ben some, too. Honestly, she had no idea if he even liked coffee or how he liked it if he did.

Rubbing her face as she moved down the hallway and to the kitchen, she headed to the cabinet that stored all of the mugs. Grabbing two, she filled them both and added heaps of sweet cream to hers, leaving Ben’s straight black incase he preferred it another way.

Opening the front door, she stood there stunned for a second as she took in the view. Ben was helping unload what looked like shingles from the back of the truck, carrying a bundle over one of his broad shoulders. Her gaze dropped down the contours of his chest to see where his shirt had lifted just enough to reveal a sliver of skin above where the waistband of his jeans slung low along his hips.

Her mouth went dry at the sight, and she licked her lips nervously. So he was attractive. So what? She'd been around attractive guys before. Why should this be any different?

Maybe because she hadn't had those attractive guys in her house. And they weren't currently fixing her house free of charge. And they weren't generally sweet, and--

Snapping herself out of her thoughts, she glanced down at the mugs in her hands and took a deep breath before stepping away from the door and out into the chaos.

She took a quick headcount, coming up with five men total. She hated to think it, but the only ones that stuck out were Ben and a very pale red-headed man. She gave them all small smiles and a slight nod as she made her way to Ben just as he set down the load he had been carrying. She handed him the coffee mug, and he took a minute to take off his work gloves and stick them in his back pocket before accepting it.
“Thanks,” he said, before his attention caught something on the side of the mug and he raised an eyebrow at her. “‘Mean people suck, nice people swallow’? Really? My, my, you’re full of surprises, aren’t you?”

Oh fuck, she had not meant to give him that mug! She hadn't even seen the text written on the side as she'd poured the coffee. “I-it was a gift from a friend back in my old town,” she stammered, her face flushing a brilliant shade of red. “I’m really not that...that kind of girl,” she finished lamely.

“So what kind of girl are you, Rey? Mean or nice?” he countered, his eyes suddenly predatory.

She shot a glare at him, trying not to shiver under the intensity of his gaze. “Wouldn't you like to find out?” She huffed, taking a sip of her coffee. It was delicious, as always.

He looked like he was about ready to reply, when one of the other men came over and gave an update about being ready to start whenever they were. He was an all right looking fellow. About the same height as Ben, blond hair, glasses, and just the barest hint of stubble on his chin. And he kept sliding glances at her, giving her a flirtatious smile as he introduced himself as Matt.

It was flattering, really, and she ducked her head down to stare into her coffee. “So where do you guys want me?” she asked, looking up to meet Ben’s eyes, whose darkened slightly at her question.

“You can clean out the gutters while they get started on tearing your roof up. I'm going to be working on the siding,” Ben said, casting the man beside him a frown. “I'll get you a ladder.”

Nodding once, she ran back inside to grab her own pair of work gloves. As she came back out, settling them into place, she saw Ben putting up the ladder, old shingles already raining down from up above in another spot.

Moving over to him, he nodded in approval at her gloves before holding the ladder steady while she climbed up. She was acutely aware that her ass was eye-level with his face those first couple of steps. After their exchange earlier, she wasn't afraid to wiggle her hips slightly, and she thought she heard a soft intake of breath.

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That was it. This woman was going to be the death of him. Her playful teasing was going to drive him to drinking, or to pinning her up against the nearest wall and ravaging her. That cup had obviously been an accident, but it had gotten him thinking. What would she be like in bed, with her beautiful pink mouth wrapped around his cock? Her ass was fantastic, and he held no delusions; he'd definitely been looking.

As she climbed into the roof and flipped around to begin scraping the leaves and debris out of the gutters, he stepped back and picked up his tools to begin dismantling the siding and throwing it into a pile.

After a few hours of simply working, he frowned when something fabric-like fluttered down and onto the ground beside him. It took him a minute to make sense of what it was. That was a shirt. That was Rey’s shirt. Snapping his head back up, he backed away from the house until he could see her.

She was still wearing overalls, but her shirt was definitely not on. She was wearing what looked like a sports bra, and some strands of hair had come loose around her face, clinging to her sweat-
dampened skin. Apparently she was hot, working directly under the sun. He was in the shade of the house while he worked, but even he could tell that it was a bit warmer than the previous days. Not that he was complaining, but he had to think about some mundane things like taxes or traffic to keep his body from becoming too interested.

Her tawny skin was glowing in the sunlight, glistening with the effort of shoving the last of the leaves out of the gutter.

When she climbed down from the roof, she headed towards him, only to be stopped by the same man from earlier that had been overly flirtatious. She laughed at something he told her, and Ben felt something strange curl through his chest. His hands tightened into fists, and he had the sudden urge to walk over to the pair, grab her, and rub himself all over her in front of the other man, as if to say this is mine.

Woah, where did that thought come from? Rey was a big girl; she could talk to whoever she wanted. She wasn't his girlfriend and he had no right to think that way. He barely knew her. He wasn't even sure if they were friends.

She laughed again, touching Matt's arm as she did, and he had to force himself to look away, tearing off the siding with renewed vigor.

Most of the roof had been stripped of the old shingles, and everything was going according to the schedule he'd roughly constructed the night before.

It was probably going to take a few days to cut all of the shingles and siding to size and attach them, but he figured they'd just make it in time for the storm, which had been pushed up a few days earlier by the weatherman.

He sensed her presence, more than anything, as she approached. She hovered behind him, and he couldn't bring himself to look at her; he was angry, and irrationally so. Not necessarily at her, but he didn't want to take it out on her. No, he really just wanted to take it out on Matt's face.

“Are you okay?” She asked hesitantly, and he cursed inwardly for being so transparent.

“Fine,” he growled.

Out of the corner of his eye, he could see her cross her arms over her chest. “You don't look fine.”

Throwing his tools down, he turned to her then and took a step forward, looming over her. “I said I'm fine. Why don't you go be a nice girl and bring Matt some coffee? I'm sure he'd love that.”

Fuck, he should not have said that. Regret washed over him, thick and heavy. Rey bristled instantly, her face darkening, and he knew he'd fucked up. He couldn't tell if she was flushed from anger or embarrassment but either way, it was his fault. "You know what, that's not a terrible idea. Considering I don't have any fucking experience being a nice girl or otherwise, perhaps he's just the person to help with that. At least he's not randomly becoming an unpredictable twat."

She spun on her heel and stormed away, the buns in her hair bouncing with her fury.

He watched her go, his legs urging him to follow and apologize. Instead, he turned his back to her, running his hand through his hair as he muttered curses under his breath. Well, he'd definitely screwed that up.

He'd never felt this possessive before in his life; what the hell was happening to him? The mere thought of her on her knees in front of Matt, taking him deep in her mouth out of spite had his blood
boiling. Matt? Fucking Matt?

The only thing he knew was that he needed to get out of there right now or he was going to cause even more of a scene.

Without saying a word to anyone, he stomped to his SUV, climbed in and drove off. He'd be back, hopefully after he calmed down and had a decent apology to give her.

As he drove, he drummed his fingers along the steering wheel, his thoughts churning.

She was cute, selfless to the point of stupid considering she'd patched up a wolf with its face sliced open (seriously, a normal person’s instincts told them to leave an injured animal alone), and she didn’t deserve him acting like an unpredictable twat. And she was a virgin. The thought of her letting someone like Matt touch her didn't exactly calm him down, but she hadn't deserved his reaction. What did it mean, though? Did he want to be the one to do it? No, of course not. Well, maybe that was a lie. He didn't know anymore. How did he explain that he knew her a lot more than she thought he did and that's why he was acting like he was? How was he acting? He was acting like a jealous fool. Which only made him frown harder as he found himself in the parking lot of Maz’s Deli, a quaint little mom and pop type store that had some of the best sandwiches he’d ever had. And Rey’s was good—far better than good, actually—but nothing could top Maz’s.

He got out of the car and headed inside, the little bell announcing his entrance. From where he stood, he could see a short little woman with ebony skin slicing lunch meat at one of the machines behind the counter. After work, she’d spend long hours in her garden; that's where the produce used in her sandwiches were from and what made them so damned good. She cared for her tomato plants like they were her children. They were extra juicy and provided the perfect burst of flavor, she’d said.

“Ben Solo!” she yelled as she turned around, taking off the plastic gloves she'd been wearing.

Shoving his own hands deep into the pockets of his jeans, Ben nodded once to her and wandered up to the counter, feigning interest in the selection of meats and cheeses in the display case. “Hey, Maz. How have you been?”

The woman made her way out from behind the counter, moving along on short, thin legs with surprising speed. “Good, good. Chewie’s taking me on a vacation to Naboo. You know how I've always wanted to visit.”

He nodded in response, only half listening. He was rewarded with a thump against his stomach--she really couldn't reach much higher.

“You’ve got that look again,” she commented, watching him with an intense, knowing gaze.

Frowning, he looked down at her, one hand moving to rub the spot she'd smacked him. “What do you mean?”

“What do I mean?” she repeated. “Like you've been an idiot!”

He had the grace to flush at her words and duck his head. There was no fooling Maz. She may be older than dirt, and her eyesight may be starting to go, but she saw everything.

“I...said something I shouldn't have,” he finally admitted, shuffling his feet.

Maz rolled her eyes, as if the news didn't surprise her one bit. “Just like your father,” she muttered under her breath. Ben flinched at the mention of Han, but otherwise said nothing as Maz continued.
“If he were still here, he'd probably be standing right alongside you for something he said to Leia, bless her heart.”

She fell quiet, studying him for a long moment, before asking, “So what did you say?”

Been forced himself to look away from her gaze, around the dining area of the store. There weren't any other patrons at the moment, so he could be as honest as he felt like. “There's this girl—Rey.”

“A girl? You found a girl? About bloody time, Solo! I expect no less than thirteen grandbabies.” Maz’s eyes twinkled and she looked positively giddy.

“It isn't like that. I basically accused her of being a harlot,” he said in a rush, wanting to disappear into the floor. This was embarrassing to admit, but Maz usually gave the best advice, and god knew he could use some right now.

The little woman in front of him sucked in a deep breath, rocking back on her heels for a moment as she processed the information. “And is she?”

“No, not at all, apparently.”

“Then you'd better go give her the best apology you've ever given anyone,” she told him, moving behind the counter again. She set to work, pulling a freshly baked (from scratch) loaf of bread off a rack and slicing it in half lengthwise. Piling it high with some of her best meats and cheeses, and various other toppings, she finished it with a drizzle of her famous secret sauce.

“And give her this, too,” she said as she wrapped it up and stuck it into a bag for him. “If this doesn't work, then you've truly screwed the pooch with this girl.”

Fishing out his wallet, Ben slipped her the money, a bit more than what the sandwich actually cost, and gave a small smile. “Thanks, Maz. I guess I should probably go face the music…”

As he turned and headed to the door, he heard her call after him, “I was serious about those grandbabies, Solo! Thirteen!”

The drive back to Rey’s house seemed to take longer, his guilt eating at him the whole way. He knew he should've just kept his damn mouth shut, but the words had just spilled out like verbal diarrhea.

As he pulled into her drive and surveyed the work being done, from the stacks of material to the crew milling about, he noticed a distinct lack of Rey anywhere.

Killing the engine, he climbed out, sandwich bag clenched in his hand. Well, here went nothing.

Chapter End Notes

Song lyrics are "Sorry" by Buckcherry.
What's Reylo without a little angst, am I right?
Chapter 8: Wouldn't Dream of it, Sweetheart

Chapter Notes

If you're still reading up to this point, thank you! Your comments motivate me to write more. You're all so fantastic, I can't even say how much. That being said, this chapter has been mostly beta'd, except for the end. It's about 5:15am as I post this, so there may be a few slight edits to sentence structure and grammar tomorrow. I just wanted to get it posted while AO3 is functioning~

If you have anything you'd like to see in future chapters, please feel free to suggest an idea and I'll see what I can do.

And OH, is that a little bit of plot I spy?

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

When my time comes

Forget the wrong that I've done

Help me leave behind some reasons to be missed

And don't resent me

And when you're feeling empty

Keep me in your memory

Leave out all the rest

As his SUV pulled up again, Rey frowned and moved away from the window to continue her rage-filled pacing. That pompous ass had the nerve to show up again, did he? She didn't want to see him again for the rest of her life, as long as she had an opinion on the matter.

She was not going to let some guy she had only met a few times dictate who she could or could not speak to. Matt was cute, in an adorable, dorky kind of way, but she didn't think he was boyfriend material, not that she had a lot of experience in the matter, of course. Now that that bit of information was public knowledge, she thought bitterly.

As she crossed in front of the window again, for probably the hundredth time since Ben had left,
she could see him approaching the house, something clutched in his hand. What the hell was he doing?

She didn't think she'd been this livid in her entire life. Her frown deepened when she saw his shadow block out the light coming in from the peephole on the door. Ugh, she didn't want to do this. She'd felt embarrassed when he implied she was a slut, willing to go suck a guy off just because.

She was going to smash that damned mug.

The knock on the door was tentative, as though he didn't want to be there either. Good. Maybe she'd let him stew just a bit. Or forever; she hadn't decided yet.

He did it again, harder this time, and she could hear his muffled voice through the door, “Rey, open the door, please. I know you're in there.”

Something heavy thumped the door--his head?--and Rey gave a loud, exasperated sigh as she strode over and leaned against her side, forehead pressed to the wood. She raised her forearm to brace against it over her head, “Go away, Ben. I really don't want to talk to you right now.” It came out sounding more resigned than angry. Damn it.

“Please.”

That one word was borderline begging, filled with so much regret it was almost palpable.

Groaning, she stepped back and opened the door to see Ben standing there, rubbing the back of his neck nervously, a sheepish look on his face. Rey crossed her arms over her chest and leveled her best glare at him. “What do you want?” Her voice was a bit more anger-filled than before, and she was grateful for it. She didn't want him to know how much his comment had hurt her.

He took a step forward, stopping in the threshold, gazing down at her with those big brown eyes of his. He took a deep breath, never breaking eye contact as the words tumbled from his lips, “I'm sorry for what I said. It was completely out of line, and I had no right. I don't actually think you're a...slut.” He winced at the word.

“Then why would you say something like that?” she frowned deeply, her plush lips turned down.

“I don't...know,” he finally admitted, looking a bit lost. “I just saw you flirting with Matt, and it was irritating, and I lashed out. It’s stupid.”

Dropping her arms to her sides, she tilted her head slightly at him, and she thought she had an idea what he was hinting at. Did he...like her? She didn't want to outright ask since they didn't really know each other all that well, but her curiosity was getting the better of her. “So you were jealous?” She asked for clarification, raising a brow at him.

He struggled for a moment, his Adam’s apple bobbing slightly as he swallowed. “I don't know what I was. It doesn't matter, though. You're not a piece of property, and you aren't my girlfriend.” He inhaled sharply, repeating, “It doesn't matter.”

“No, I'm not,” she agreed, narrowing her eyes at him. She appraised him for a moment, hazel eyes scanning over his body before settling on the bag in his hand. “What's that?”

Seeming to remember what he was holding, he lifted the bag and stared at it for a moment before answering, “Oh, it’s uh, it’s a sandwich. For you.” He held it out to her, his long arm almost closing the space between them. “I went to my favorite deli, and the owner--Maz--made this specifically for you.”
Taking the bag, she opened it to inspect the contents. She gave him a dubious glance, “She made this for me?”

“Yeah. I told her what happened. The sandwich was her idea.”

She looked down into the bag again, then back up to him, “Where’s yours?”

“I didn’t get anything,” he said softly, slipping his hands as far into the front pockets of his jeans as he could.

She didn’t know what to think, honestly. A sandwich was a pretty lame way to apologize, but he did seem sincere, and she appreciated the gesture. “If this thing isn’t as good as my own, you’re not forgiven,” she warned, tone very slightly teasing.

Ben’s face relaxed slightly, picking up the humor in her words. “If you like it, maybe I could take you there sometime?” At her glare, he added hastily, “Not a date.”

Snorting, Rey stepped aside to let him inside, and as he passed her, she punched him hard in the shoulder. “I’m still mad at you.”

Making a show of rubbing the blow she’d landed, he nodded, “All right; I’ll make it up to you somehow. For real, and not just through food.”

“I’m not saying it’s a bad way to apologize,” she laughed as she went to plop herself on the couch. “I’m just saying maybe don’t say that shit in the first place.”

She looked up at him then, giving him a pointed look before nodding to the seat beside her. He hesitated a moment before moving to sit next to her, his movements stiff and slightly unsure. Rey shifted to face him, tucking herself into the corner of the couch—her favorite spot. He looked almost comical on the furniture, his huge body dwarfing the oversized cushions. “So, what’s your story?” she asked, pulling the food out and taking a huge bite. She groaned at the taste, immediately lifting the top piece of bread to inspect the ingredients. There was some sauce on it that was simply divine.

He was giving her a funny look, and she reached up to wipe her face, feeling something at the corner of her mouth.

Opening his mouth to answer, he glanced around the room, his attention catching on a picture on the wall by the television. “Wait a second,” he told her, standing back up to get a closer look. She followed him with her eyes as he stopped before it and leaned in.

She knew the photo he was looking at well. It was her first time at prom her junior year in high school. Obi-Wan was in the photo with her, arm wrapped lovingly around her shoulders as he hugged her, both of their faces lit up with huge grins. Rey herself had been in a sleeveless, floor-length ivory dress with floral patterns scattered across the bodice, her makeup done primly and her hair slightly curled to hang loosely just above her shoulders.

That dress alone had set her back most of her savings from the odd jobs she’d done the previous summer.

“That’s Obi.” He said, shock heavy in his tone. Rey crossed the room and stood beside him, looking at the picture as Ben turned to her. “Was Obi-Wan Kenobi your grandfather?”

“Yeah. Did you know him?” she asked curiously, meeting his eyes.

“I know of him. My granddad was friends with him, back before he fell in with the wrong crowd,”
he answered, his brow furrowing in thought.

“Was Anakin his name? Obi-Wan always spoke of him like a brother, even after what happened.” She paused and he nodded in affirmation. “What did happen, by the way?” She hoped she wasn’t being too nosy. This bit of information could help her piece together more of her grandfather’s life that he’d been reluctant to elaborate on.

“What do you think happened?” There was no snark in his tone, just a simple genuine question.

“Well, my grandfather was a police officer. From what I understand, Anakin was too. He was a new recruit, really good at what he did though.” She looked back to the picture again before continuing, “He told me that Anakin turned into a dirty cop—crooked. He started meeting the wrong people off the clock, and then it got bad enough that he did it while on the job.”

Ben frowned and then said, “Yeah, that’s basically what happened. He got messed up with the mob, changed his name, killed a lot of cops; he was killed before he was able to get out or arrested. I never got to meet him, since it was before I was born. My mother and uncle would tell stories, though. They got taken by Child Protective Services and adopted out to some families.” His voice was low, as if he didn’t want to speak too loudly about what Rey guessed was a family secret. She’d heard of Anakin Skywalker before. He was nearly as famous as Al Capone.

“They weren't kept together? What about your grandmother?” Rey asked just as quietly. She felt like an observer as he spoke, and she could tell he was reliving some memory in his head that wasn't necessarily about his grandfather.

He shook his head, “No, I guess the courts thought it would keep the kids safer to split them up. Something about rival groups retaliating, I think.” He looked down at the ground. “My grandma died in childbirth. Medicine wasn't nearly as good back then as it is now.”

Neither of them spoke for a long time, not wanting to break the silence. Unable to take it anymore, Rey finally said, “Well, that clears up a few things. But that's hardly your story.”

He turned to face her fully, then, his eyes dark with something akin to pain. “My story…” he murmured. “I've got the typical sob story, I guess. Parents were either fighting or were never home.” He shrugged those broad shoulders, trying to brush it off, but he wasn't fooling her. “Mom’s a politician, and my dad was a…” he sighed heavily, raking a hand through his hair. “He was a smuggler. He ran guns for any and everyone, and then met my mom.” He smiled faintly at that, “She made him reform, or she wouldn't marry him, even though it would've reflected badly on her political career.”

Rey smiled softly at him, trying to be encouraging as she processed this new information. She took another bite of the sandwich that had been forgotten in their conversation, relishing the flood of delicious flavor again. Whoever this Maz was, Rey was going to have to meet her and learn her secrets.

“…what happened to him?” She inquired after another long moment.

“He died.”

It was such a simple statement, and she risked a look up at him, to find his face impassive. The perfect poker face, she thought.

“I’m sorry to hear that,” she offered, reaching out with her free hand to gently touch his arm, squeezing it reassuringly. The muscle there was thick and corded, unyielding beneath her fingers. He
didn't move, and neither did she. She held on for probably what was longer than necessary, but she
couldn't seem to pull away. He was warm against her skin, warmer than the average body
temperature. “Are you okay? You're burning up.” She finally forced her hand from his arm up to his
forehead, brushing an errant lock of hair out of the way. He was warm there, too.

“I'm fine,” he said, covering her hand with his and removing it slowly. Appreciating her concern,
he lifted her hand to his mouth and laid his lips against her fingers softly, holding her gaze. “Thank
you, though,” he breathed, before lowering her hand.

“What do you mean you're fine?” she demanded, frowning as she tried to ignore the flutter in her
stomach and the way her fingers tingled. “You're very clearly running a fever! You overworked
yourself trying to help me, and now you're sick!”

He gave a deep chuckle, inching away from her as she tried to reach up and touch his forehead
again. “I promise I'm fine. I really should get back out there and help them, though. We’re running
out of time before that storm hits.”

Rey huffed and settled her hands on her hips, giving him what she thought was a good glare. It
only made his chuckle turn into a booming laugh, loud inside her otherwise quiet home. No one
outside had started using hammers or nail guns yet. It was just the faintest sound of feet scuffling
across the roof. “All right, fine. But when you come crawling back on the verge of death, don't cry at
me.”

“Wouldn't dream of it, sweetheart,” he smirked as he walked around her and headed outside.

She stared after him in stunned silence, her mouth agape at the nickname. Her feet moved of their
own accord, charging after him to go help where she could.

A few days later, her house was looking about a million times better than it had been. The siding
was completely redone, and the roof was nearing the finish line just as the first few flakes of snow
were fluttering down.

Rey had fallen into bed the past two nights, more sore than she’d thought physically possible. The
good news was that she’d passed out almost instantly after a hot shower and a handful of painkillers.

Ben had been friendly with her, and there were no more jealousy incidents; that she saw, anyway.
There was a tension between Ben and Matt when she was nearby, and she could feel both men
staring at her as she went about her work.

As it currently was, everyone else had gone home before the storm worsened and it was just Rey
and Ben up on the roof finishing up the last few sections. It was getting dangerously slick with the
flakes beginning to settle around them.

“You really need to get down,” he told her as he knelt down and fired the nail gun into certain
parts of the roof. “I don't want you to fall and break your neck.”

Afraid to stand for fear of doing just that, she crouched down near him, the arm of her puffy jacket
brushing against the light sweater he wore. “What about you?” she asked, her hair whipping around
her face in the wind.
He glanced over and she didn't miss the cocky smirk on his face, though his words didn't match, “I'd rather it be me than you.”

Rolling her eyes, she crawled over to the ladder and climbed down, hovering around the base of the house to see if she'd need to call an ambulance if Ben landed on his head.

Another gust of wind blew snow into her eyes and she used her hands to again push her hair from her face and wipe at her eyes. The cold air managed to weasel its way under her jacket and down into her bones, making her shudder. She wasn't used to this weather. Jakku had been mostly hot and dry, but there was just enough rainfall to keep the sparse plant life alive.

She paced, occasionally calling up to him when he was silent for too long. Eventually, though, he did come down, his dark hair dusted with snow, his face slightly flushed. His lips were a deep red against the white flying around them, and her eyes were drawn to them in more than one instance. “You okay?” she asked, slyly inspecting his hands for any wounds from the nail gun.

“I'm fine,” he said, his smile pulling at the scar on his cheek. Honestly, she had gotten to the point of not even noticing it. It was just part of Ben now.

Letting out the breath she hadn't realized she'd been holding, she nodded, before taking a good look around them. The snow was already about an inch deep, and the roads already looked bad. There would be no way for him to drive home in this weather, not with the snow picking up in its fury.

“You won't be able to make it home in this. Come on, I'll make you some soup or something.” She took a step around him toward the door, looking over her shoulder to see if he was following. Seeing that he wasn't, she frowned before going back to him and raising an eyebrow, “Are you coming?”

“I can make it home just fine,” he said softly, his words almost lost to the wind.

“Bullshit,” she said and reached for his hand, surprisingly warm after being exposed to the elements. “Come on. My soup isn't great or anything since it's canned, but it'll be something warm.”

He could hear his exasperated sigh as he relented and trudged along behind her. “All right, but I hope you know it could be a while before this blizzard lets up.”

“That's okay; I'm sure we can find a way to entertain ourselves.” The look she threw at him was absolutely filled with evil ideas and he couldn't help but be pulled along for the ride.

The man stood in front of a floor to ceiling length window, staring outside into the blizzard, his arms clasped behind his back, peering past the reflection of his ginger hair and cold eyes to the world beyond.

He tapped one of his fingers against his arm, eyes narrowing in as he formulated his plan. One thing was for certain; Ben Solo was going to die.

Chapter End Notes
Lyrics are "Leave Out All the Rest" by Linkin Park (RIP Chester).
Again, any and all errors in this chapter are all my fault.
The response to this story is absolutely amazing. You are all simply wonderful and I appreciate all of your comments very much! Have some ridiculous fluff!

Also, there might be some content some may consider dubcon. Rey is drunk, but she’s fully consenting. And it was her idea, so.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

I don't know

But I think I may be fallin' for you

Dropping so quickly

Maybe I should keep this to myself

Waiting 'til I know you better

“No.”

“Yes.”

Rey slapped the board game down onto the table, grinning fiercely at the man seated across from her. His arms were crossed over his chest, dark eyes trained on her, his mouth turned down into a frown. “We are not playing Monopoly,” he gritted out, hands flexing unconsciously.

“And why not? What else are we going to do?” she snorted, placing her hands on her hips as she stared him down. “You know what I think?” she asked, continuing before he ever had a chance to answer. “I think you're afraid.” She moved around beside him and poked him roughly in the arm, her tone provoking. “Afraid that I'm gonna kick your butt.”

“Actually, I'm afraid you'll hate me, after I kick yours,” he replied, his frown fading away into an easy smile. “I've never lost a game.”

“Well neither have I,” Rey answered, raising her eyebrow at him in a challenge. She was not going to let him win and lose her bragging rights. No way in hell. It would be interesting since he was a landlord in real life and had tons of experience managing real properties, but she'd win. Maybe
even play dirty, if she had to.

Smiling, she pulled the lid off the box and presented him with the instructions. “Who’s the banker?”

“Me. I don't trust you as far as I can throw you.” He reached for the little plastic tray after she lifted the board off the top and began to shuffle through the bits of fake currency, separating them into neat stacks and tucking them into their designated spot.

“Fine, but I'm picking the car for my piece.” She said, plucking the figurine and examining it between her fingertips.

“I guess I'll take the dog, then,” he said, glancing up at her as he started dealing out the required amount of starting money.

“Really? I figured you as more of a wheelbarrow guy.” She set their pieces at the start and set to shuffling the little cards they’d have to draw if they landed on particular spaces.

Ben sorted out the property pieces by color to deal out later and grumbled, “I like dogs.”

“Do you have one?” Rey asked, dropping the die from one hand to the other while she waited.

He shook his head, grunting out an answer. “No, I don't. Maybe if I move out of my apartment, I'll get one.”

“Where do you live?” She leaned back in her chair, stretching her legs under the table.

“In the city--who goes first?”

“Rock, paper, scissors?” She suggested, smiling again. She was doing that a lot around him lately, she noted. He was just so easy to get along with when he wasn't being overbearing and jealous.

He lifted his hands to meet hers across the table, and she saw how much they dwarfed hers as she counted and then they picked their options. He chose paper and she picked rock. He laid his hand over hers in victory, grinning wolfishly.

Narrowing her eyes at him, she withdrew in defeat and slumped back, watching him roll. He bought the first property, of course. “So you're one of those. The I-Have-To-Buy-Everything-On-The-Board type. I think I'm going to need a drink to keep playing.”

She lifted herself out of the chair and headed to the kitchen, grabbing two tumblers and a bottle of whiskey. It was a cheap bottle, bought with a sole purpose, and taste wasn't it.

“Are you seriously going to turn this into a game of drunk Monopoly?” She heard his deep voice from the table behind her.

Carrying her goods back to him, she scooted one of the glasses to him and poured herself a shot. “I might. We’ll see.” Bringing it to her lips, she downed it quickly, feeling the burn in the back of her throat as the amber liquid made its way down.

The lighting in the kitchen was a lot different, she realized suddenly. It was a lot brighter, even if it was later in the day, the outside light reflecting off the snow outside. Curious, she headed back to the kitchen and looked out the window over the sink, gazing into the storm. As of right now the power was still on, but it had been flickering on and off intermittently. There were some candles scattered across the counter next to a lighter, just waiting to be used. Ben had also made sure there was enough
wood stacked next to the fireplace to provide some heat when the power lines started going down.

She heard the sloshing of liquid hitting glass behind her and turned to see him pouring himself a drink. He lifted it into the air in a silent toast before downing it, cringing slightly at the horrible taste. “Now that's a purpose drink,” he told her, making a face.

Snickering, she sat back down and rolled her turn, shooting him a look when she bought the next property.

In the background, she could hear the television in the living room going, giving constant updates on the weather, only breaking every now and then to give the most recent news. Which wasn't much, honestly. There were reports of a couple car accidents, downed tree limbs; the usual, she guessed.

“What's your last name?” she asked suddenly as they kept going around the board.

Blinking at her sudden question, he answered, “Solo. Why?”

“No reason,” she laughed. “I figure if we’re stuck here for a while, I might as well get to know you a bit better. Favorite color?”

“No, you don’t get to keep going,” he chuckled, pausing and folding his hands on the table, leaning his body forward. “What about you? What's your last name?”

“Jakken.” She took another shot, her lips lifted in a smile around the rim.

“Black. Do you have a job?”

“Green. No; I’m searching for one.” Their game seemingly forgotten, she felt her heart speed up under his intense gaze. “Favorite food?”

“Steak. Where do you see yourself in five years?”

“Spaghetti. I see myself…” she trailed off, fidgeting slightly. She could already feel the whiskey going to work, making her feel light and a little more open. “I see myself happy. Married, a white-picket fence, and two-point-five kids. Successful in my career. But I’d give it up to stay at home with my family if money wasn’t an issue.” She flushed, realizing just how honest her answer had been. Ben was looking at her oddly, and she watched his attention slip from her face down to her neck. She hoped he couldn't see the way her pulse was fluttering like an anxious bird. She'd never actually just kind of...laid it all out there, and she felt vulnerable, exposed.

He nodded slowly, leaning back in the chair, assessing her. “I hope you find it. Happiness, I mean.”

“What about you?” She found herself wanting to know more. She still knew so little about him. She knew a few things, but it wasn't enough and she wanted him to explain what he wanted out of life, if he wanted marriage and kids, if he had a hobby he was passionate about.

He was quiet for a long moment, weighing his answer before giving it. Finally, he shrugged and murmured, “Alone. I see myself alone in five years, doing what I do now.”

Concern flitted over her face, and Rey tried her best to hide it, but he'd seen it. Of course he had.

“I don't want your pity,” he said, his voice hard. “My life is difficult enough. I don't need anyone getting involved and getting hurt. It’s just...better this way.”
“Hurt? Like how you got hurt? Your scar, that is,” she crossed her arms over her chest then remembered it was her turn in their game, and she rolled, moving her car piece around the board until she landed on a property he owned. Forking over the rent, she settled her eyes on his hand as he took the money. There was no wedding band, but she didn't have a hard time imagining one. Probably something simple, silver in color.

“You've got to be careful in the woods,” he grumbled, and she couldn't tell if he was referring specifically to her, himself, or to people in general.

She had the sudden sense that there was some deeper meaning to his words. Like he was hinting at something she should know already.

Their conversation trailed off, and Rey couldn't help but feel like she was purposely avoiding the answers she had thought she'd wanted. The only sounds in the house were the rolling of the die, the moving of pieces, and the television, giving a report about a missing person. He was last seen yesterday, leaving the grocery store. His family was panicking in their interview, pleading with some unknown person to *just give him back*.

“Fuck! You're bleeding me dry!” she cried out, watching as she landed on Boardwalk Avenue and the outrageous amount of hotels Ben had on the spaces. She was about four-hundred fake dollars shy of the required rent, and all of her properties were currently mortgaged, but she wasn't ready to admit defeat yet. “Would you take payment in other ways? Maybe a loan?” She'd played a few games where the rules were bent and personal items were handed over until she could ‘afford’ to buy them back.

He considered her for a moment, pursing his lips in thought. “What are you offering?”

They'd both had a few more shots, and she was feeling particularly bold. He didn't look like it was affecting him nearly as much, but then again, he was a lot bigger than she was. Her body felt warm, almost too warm against the haze clouding her mind.

“How about a piece of clothing? Like with strip poker.” The flush that appeared on his cheeks at the idea made her smirk. “Your choice.”

When he spoke, his voice was rougher. “Rey...are you sure? You've had a bit to drink. I don't want you to think I've taken advantage of you when you sober up.”

“Of course I'm sure!” she replied. “I'm out of options here, and you're *not* going to win.”

Raising his free hand, he pinched the bridge of his nose and took a deep breath. “Fine. If at anytime you want to stop, tell me.” His eyes bored into hers, suddenly very serious. “But if you land on any of my railroads, you're going to take off your pants. Is that understood?”

Biting her lip, she nodded her consent, and he continued. “For now, give me your shirt.”

Inhaling sharply at his command, she tried her best to ignore the way it ignited a fire in her veins as she complied.

Standing a bit unsteadily, she stripped her shirt off over her head and tossed it to him. He caught it
right before it smacked him in the face and he stared at it for a minute, nostrils slightly flared, before slowly shifting his gaze over to her. She was standing in her pants from earlier when they'd been working and a modest black bra, her lithe body on display. She didn’t feel embarrassed about it, but she did feel something else, stirring low in her stomach at the feeling of his eyes on her.

“You can pass this round,” he murmured lowly.

On his next roll, he landed on a space where he had to draw a chance card. Reading it, he groaned and moved his dog piece straight to jail.

“You know, you can pay to get out or try to roll doubles,” she giggled. “Or you could give me a piece of clothing, as well.”

He hummed in acknowledgement, eyeing the board. “I’ll try to roll and see if I can get doubles. If not, then you've got a deal.” Smirking, he met her eyes and repeated back to her, “Your choice.”

“All right, let's see what you've got. I'll even let you have all three turns right now instead of waiting for me to go.”

He did three rolls, cursing in between each one.

Rey stifled a laugh with a hand over her mouth. Leaning back in her chair, she crossed her legs and cocked her head as he frowned at her. “You know the deal; shirt off.”

Sighing, he stood up and removed his shirt, handing it to her across the table. He moved to sit back down, but Rey stopped him with a look. She twirled her finger in a circular motion, gesturing for him to turn around. His frown turned slightly smug as he spun slowly. She let her gaze travel across his torso to the expanse of muscle over his pectorals, across the various scars across his skin, silver with age, some raised with thicker tissue. Her eyes moved up his shoulders and down his arms, taking in the corded power of his biceps. He was thick, muscular, but not shredded like so many fitness models she'd seen that looked unnatural. No, his frame was one that had a purpose for more than just looks. And somehow, that made it even better.

His back was perfection, even with the scars that criss-crossed here and there, pale like the rest of him, and she whistled in appreciation, clapping her hands together and laughing as he took a bow before sitting down again.

Managing to somehow tear her eyes from his chest, she forced herself to stare down at the board to regain some semblance of thought as he moved his pawn from jail to the just visiting section.

On her next turn, Rey promptly landed on one of the railroads he owned. She glared at him over the table, and he didn’t even bother trying to hide his smirk. Huffing, she stood and unbuttoned the font of her jeans, her fingers fumbling a bit. He watched with something akin to hunger in his eyes. As she hesitated, he asked her softly, “Are you all right?”

Do you want to keep going, was his unspoken question. She nodded and he relaxed slightly, his eyes settled on where her fingers were. “Take them off, Rey.” His voice was a demand, with no room left for argument.

He lifted his eyes to hers, then, and she saw how dark they were. Holding his gaze, she wiggled the pants off her hips, down her thighs, and kicked them off. She bent to pick them up and handed them to him. He folded them neatly and set them on top of her shirt. She did feel a bit exposed, goosebumps breaking out across her flesh from the drafty windows. Yet another thing they’d have to replace in this dump, she thought. Maybe.
To make matters worse, at the exact time she thought about how grateful she was for the heater to still be on, the power went out.

It broke Ben out of whatever trance he seemed to be in, since he'd still been watching her, and he blinked for a moment before chuckling. "Why don't we call this a draw? It's about to get cold in this part of the house. Don't want you getting sick because you decided to take off all your clothes in the middle of a blizzard."

Rey looked down the line of her body at his words, shaking her head. "I guess we'll just have to get the fireplace going then, won't we?" He may have still been wearing pants, but even with his higher than average body temperature (that he kept insisting was not because he was sick), he had to get cold sometime, right?

As it was, the room was spinning slightly, making it just a little harder to get her bearings as she clumsily made her way out to the living room, ignoring his eyes on her backside as she moved. She trusted him not to take advantage of her; he'd had ample opportunity to do so thus far, and he'd been a perfect gentleman. Well, sort of. She could tell there was something inside him that needed to command and conquer, and she felt as though she'd seen the briefest glimpse of that during their game. It thrilled her, and even excited her a little bit.

She grabbed the afghan from across the back of the sofa and draped it around her shoulders as she crouched down and started moving logs into the fireplace. She needed some form of tinder or kindling to get the fire started since the logs were just a bit damp from being brought inside too late.

"Here, let me," he said as he knelt down beside her, his jeans bunching up around his thighs in a way that was hard to go unnoticed. She scooted over to make room for him, when a sudden idea occurred to her. It was brilliant, really. Maybe. He'd probably laugh at her, honestly.

Staggering back to her feet, she stumbled into the kitchen to drag out four chairs one by one. The coffee table got in the way of her plans, and that simply could not do. She pushed it out of the way, rather ungracefully, and set the chairs up in the spot to form the base of her tent.

Pulling the blanket from around her shoulders, she stared at it for a long moment to gauge whether or not it would be big enough to fit over the top and down across the sides. She doubted it. Ben was really damn tall. She didn't think he'd fit unless she spread the chairs out a bit more to give them more room underneath.

When the chairs were to her size specifications, she trudged off to her bedroom to grab the giant comforter on her bed. She disturbed Daisy, who had been decidedly ignoring their shenanigans. The cat jumped off the bed with a snort and a tail flick, her belly swaying from side to side as she waddled out of the bedroom and down the hallway.

Rey shuffled along after her, not ever lifting her feet fully off the ground. She knew she'd fall on her face, and what a sight that would be. She'd never hear the end of it from Ben. The story about how she'd decided to strip down drunk and was found with her lacy ass in the air. She knew she'd flush with embarrassment, and she felt like she'd probably made enough of a fool of herself already.

Throwing the comforter over the top of the chairs until it resembled a tent, she glanced over at Ben, who was tending to a tiny little flame, doing his best to keep it alight.

When he was satisfied it was going to last, he finally turned around and laughed loudly, his smile so wide it hurt her heart to witness. "Are you really making a blanket fort?"
She felt sluggish in her answer, the whiskey flowing through her body and making her feel heavy, nothing at all like the lightness she'd experienced earlier. She needed to lay down. Now. “Yesssss,” she hissed, grabbing one of the pillows off the couch and tossing it into the tent. Before she knew it, she was face down into the pillow without really any memory of getting there. She was vaguely aware she was still in her bra and underwear, but the fireplace was warming her body just fine.

“Ben,” she groaned into the fabric, and she could hear him shuffle down at the entrance to her fort.

“What is it? Are you okay?” He asked, concern filling his tone, and a bit closer than she'd expected.

“Sleep with me?” Her voice sounded pathetic, even to her. Their game had distracted her long enough for her to ignore the raging storm outside, but now that the power was off, and the house was eerily silent aside from the crackling of the fire and the screeching wind, she was afraid. She didn't want to admit it, but she could tell he knew. She saw it in his eyes, in the way his face softened after she turned her head to look at him.

“How about I lay out here? I won't let anything happen,” he promised, suddenly serious. He sprawled his body out in front of the entrance to her fort, clasping his hands together on his chest as he stared at the ceiling.

She listened to his steady breathing, trying to focus on that instead of the way her house was creaking, sounding a bit like nails on a chalkboard. Her eyes fluttered shut, and she managed to mumble a goodnight to him. Her eyes slid closed and she heard him shift once more before she felt her afghan from earlier settle across her body.

“Goodnight, Rey,” she heard him whisper before sleep finally took her.

Chapter End Notes

Song is "Fallin' For You" by Colbie Callait.
Chapter 10: Hello Darkness, My Old Friend

Chapter Notes

Welcome back! Heed the tags, prepare yourself for some mild descriptions of a dead body.

That being said, WE HAVE FAN ART. HOLY SHIT.

Take a look here
Isn't it so pretty? Omg.

And there's a mood board!
Which can be found here

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hello darkness, my old friend

I've come to talk with you again

Because a vision softly creeping

Left its seeds while I was sleeping

And the vision that was planted in my brain

Still remains

Within the sound of silence

There were five things Rey noticed as she slipped back into consciousness.

The first thing was the puddle. The entire left side of her face was wet and cold with drool; the pillow she'd been using wasn't fairing much better, either. It was stiff in some places from the dried saliva, drenched in others.

The second thing she noticed was the throbbing in her temples, the way that it demanded her attention with every shift of her eyes. It was followed by her parched throat; insistent and punishing,
making her regret ever drinking in excess. Her stomach felt sour, and she feared she may throw up at any moment. Grease—she needed something greasy to soak it up.

She was laying on couch cushions inside her makeshift tent instead of the hard floor she remembered falling asleep on. Somehow, they'd magically appeared underneath her during the night.

The last thing that hit her was the heavenly smell of coffee wafting through the air. And bacon. Who was making—oh.

Ben was still here. *Ben was still here.*

As if on cue, he came around the corner, out of the kitchen, holding a plate and a mug. How had he managed to cook anything?

“The power flipped on just long enough for me to get this made,” he explained, and she had a brief moment to wonder if he possessed any sort of mind-reading ability. As she crawled out of the blanket fort to go sit on the couch, she suddenly remembered she still wasn’t wearing anything more than her bra and underwear.

Cursing roughly, she grabbed her blanket and wrapped it around her shoulders. She knew she looked like a burrito with it hugging her body as she plopped down on the couch. Ben came closer with the food and it smelled and looked amazing; bacon, eggs, some toast slathered in butter. Her mouth watered, and then somehow went even more dry as he deposited two little pills into her hand. Aspirin.

He’d brought her aspirin. It shouldn’t even have been a big deal since it was pretty much guaranteed that she’d have a hangover, but it was such a surprise that it made her heart skip. He’d done so much for her over the past few weeks—ever since she had met him, really—and she hadn’t done anything in return. Guilt washed over her, thick and heavy. And she’d been an awful hostess; he’d slept on the floor. With no blankets or pillows. He wasn't a fucking dog.

Biting her lip, she looked up to Ben, who was wearing his shirt again. He looked like hell; there were dark circles under his eyes, and his shoulders were slumped forward instead of his usual straight posture. “Thank you,” she whispered, tears pricking at the corner of her eyes. “For everything, really. You’ve been amazing.”

Raising his eyebrows at her sudden admission, he watched her for a moment, perhaps trying to gauge how fast the waterworks were going to come, and if he needed to be ready. Instead, he just smiled gently, though it didn’t reach his eyes, and nodded once, turning his back to her as he strode back into the kitchen.

Picking up the pills, she popped them into her mouth and took a sip of the coffee. It had cream and sugar in it, just the way she liked it. How the hell did he know how she took it? Looking down at the eggs, she lifted the fork and took a bite.

And good god, he could fucking cook. Or maybe it just tasted that good because she was starving. Either way, she shoveled the food into her mouth as quickly as she could.

With her stomach settled a bit, she stood up and set the plate on the arm of the couch while she headed to her bedroom to find some clothes, glancing toward the kitchen to make sure Ben didn’t see her scurry across the room nearly naked. It didn't matter that he'd seen everything yesterday, that she had been face down, ass up while she passed out.

She didn’t regret it, since it had been agreed at the time, but now she didn’t have an excuse, and she wasn't in the habit of walking around the house in skimpy clothes anyway.
Coming back out in a pair of pajama bottoms and an old T-shirt with the words ‘I want to believe’ on it, she picked her plate up and headed to the kitchen.

Ben was standing over the stove, cooking what appeared to be another skillet full of eggs. He moved around the room easily, seeming to know where all the plates and utensils were. She leaned against the wall and watched him quietly, not wanting to break his concentration. He filled the space, a towering, moving statue. And yet, somehow, he looked like he belonged there, like he'd been doing this every morning for the past few years.

He turned around and stopped, looking startled that she was there, a fork in his hand. “Hey,” he finally said, his voice gravelly. “I hope you don't mind,” he said, waving his fork in the direction of the stove.

“Oh, not at all!” she said quickly, and a bit too loudly. She winced at the loudness and saw his smirk as he went back to tending the eggs. “Anytime you're here, help yourself to whatever. It’s the least I can offer,” she added a bit more quietly.

“How'd you sleep?” he asked, not looking at her.

“Like a rock.” She walked to the sink and stuck her plate in just as the power shut off again. “You?”

His eggs were a bit undercooked, but he scooped them onto a plate and began to eat anyway, not giving any indication he minded. “I didn't,” he grumbled around a mouthful.

“I'm sorry. I've been awful—I should've gotten you some blankets or something.”

He chuckled, shaking his head. “It wasn't the floor. I've slept on worse than that.”

What could be worse than a floor? “Oh really? What kept you up, then?”

Meeting her eyes, he held them as he said with a smile, “You snore.”

Rey knew she snored. Jess had teased her relentlessly about it during sleepovers at her parents’ house. “I do not snore,” she sniffed indignantly.

That tore a laugh from Ben, albeit a very tired sounding one. “Sure you don't. Then it was your cat’s snoring that kept me up, along with the animal that was lurking around outside your house in the night. It kept sniffing at the door and scratching.” His dark eyes were very serious, that same tense expression from earlier seeping into them.

An...animal? The only thing she could think of was the wolf she hadn't seen in a long while. Or the bear, which was supposed to be in the throes of hibernation. “Did you see what it was?”

He shook his head slowly, and the hand holding his fork clenched tightly, shaking ever so slightly. “No, I didn't see it. But it was something big.”

“I have some bear mace we can use if—”

“I know about the bear mace!” she snapped at her. She flinched, not used to the sudden anger coming from him. His jaw tightened and he visibly took in a deep breath, and held it for a second before slowly letting it out through his nose. “I'm sorry. I just...I was there when you got it. And it was in your bag that day I found you sleeping in the woods. I need to sleep, but I'm worried that animal might come back.”
Her head was throbbing even harder now; his yelling had not helped anything all. She took him in again, her mouth set into a tight line. “You can go sleep on the couch or on my bed. I don’t have any guest rooms, sorry. I’ll keep watch and wake you up if I see anything.”

He stared at her, and she saw something flash in his eyes. Something dark and primal, lurking beneath the surface like an animal trapped in a cage.

It made her pulse quicken, and she took a step back. His fork clattered to the plate as his hand shot out and grabbed her arm, holding her in place as he moved closer. Her eyes wide, she gasped at the sudden pain, his strength near to bruising. He loomed over her, his expression hungry.

Very slowly, deliberately, he leaned down, hunching his shoulders to close the distance as he skimmed his nose over the frantic pounding at her neck. His breath was hot against her skin, and every instinct in her brain was screaming at her to run, to pull away. Her legs wouldn’t respond, though, and she stood frozen in fear of of this man that she had trusted so inexplicably.

He inhaled deeply, and she could have sworn she felt something wet along the line of her throat—light, and tentative. A shiver wracked up her spine, and she trembled from the force of it.

Ben jerked upright, shaking his head roughly, his eyes dilated so wide the irises were nearly consumed by black. He looked at her as though he were seeing her through a haze. He looked confused, lost.

The next second, he released her so abruptly she stumbled. He took several steps away, gulping for air, the intensity in his stare making her feel...she didn't know how she felt. She was trembling from the force of his grip, her breath coming quickly, but there was something else there, as well. Like some part of her body recognized him on an instinctual level.

Without a word, he turned and stormed outside, leaving Rey to stare after him, her neck still damp from his tongue. If it had been anyone else, she would have pushed them away, would have fought back any advances. But it was Ben, the one man who made her feel strangely secure. She frowned after him, wondering why she wanted him to do it again.

What the *fuck* was that?

He’d never had a reaction like that before. He’d smelled her fear, and that dark part of his being had goaded him into action, to hold her close and let his presence as an alpha soothe her. Of course it hadn’t worked—she wasn't a werewolf, and had no concept of such things.

Normally, he'd brush off his irritability as being a lack of sleep. He'd experienced the signs enough times to recognize it for what it was. His rut was coming, off schedule, at that. And he was trapped here with her. *Fuck.*

He had to get out of this house *now*, or he was going to follow her, throw her on that bed, and have his way with her. Something about her was calling to him, and it was taking everything he had to deny answering.

Without grabbing his sweater, he threw open the front door and left, trudging out into the blowing snow.
He needed to distract himself, and finding the person responsible for the scratching—because it was a person—seemed like a good way to do it. He knew it had been one of Hux’s wereanimal henchmen, another wolf, as it turned out to be.

He knew they were after him for killing Snoke, and now that they’d found him at Rey’s house, she was in danger, as well.

He needed to shift quickly; it would help unleash some of his anger from his impending rut and with the improved sense of smell, he’d be able to track them more quickly.

He reached the treeline and stripped down as quickly as he could, settling his clothes against the base of a tree so he’d be able to find them later.

It was a comfort to exchange forms, to feel the way his bones would realign and shorten, how muscles would snap and reknit around his new structure. It had been excruciating the first couple of times, and now it was like greeting an old friend. There were times when he felt more at ease in his wolf form than he did on two legs.

Black flowed out from his body, his hands and feet turned into paws as he hunched down in the snow. To a human it would be freezing, but to Ben it was only a mild cold, kept at bay by the insulating fur.

His head lifted, scanning his surroundings before glancing back at the house once. Rey was at the window, watching him. He didn’t know how much she’d seen, but it was too late now. Either his secret was out, or it wasn’t.

Lifting his snout into the air, he inhaled deeply, letting it sit against the sensory glands for a moment to process every bit of information the wind held.

Something was wrong, that much was clear. He recognized two people out here in the woods with him, and the stench of blood and death wafted along after.

He raced toward it, one word repeating through his mind. No, no, no.

Skidding to a stop, he growled low in his throat, aimed directly at the woman standing nude in the snow. Her body was much smaller than his, but she was still a werewolf, still very powerful in her own right. If she felt any hint of the cold, she didn’t show it. Her black hair fell in long waves to her waist, coated through with a thin layer of white. She’d been waiting for a while then, it seemed. Waiting for him, if he was able to read the leer on her lips correctly.

What drew his attention most of all were the crimson splatters strewn across the ground, sparse to begin with, but quickly gaining in intensity until most of the ground around her bare feet was stained with it.

What the hell had happened here? The woman’s cold voice rang out, “So good to see you again, Kylo.” His growl deepened; he wasn’t Kylo anymore and no amount of taunting was going to change that fact. He’d fought tooth and nail to get out of that lifestyle, and he was not going to be dragged back into it, much less pull Rey along with.

“You know, we had difficulty finding you for the longest time. Hux was extremely displeased,” she began to stalk around a mass covered in snow. It smelled wrong—dead. Even in the cold air, the scent carried.
“Luckily, we were able to find one of your coworkers, and he told us where he'd last seen you.” She smiled, then, a cruel thing with no hint of remorse as she dropped to the form hidden under the snow. Using her fingertips, she brushed them across the form, sweeping the snow away from the body. Or what was left of it.

Kylo’s eyes didn’t want to make sense of what he was seeing. There was a tuft of blond hair whipping in the wind, refrozen from ice crystals after the snow had melted from the last bit of body heat as it left him.

Three of Matt’s limbs were twisted at odd angles, and the fourth was missing completely, torn away at the shoulder. His throat was torn out, his eyes wide and terrified.

The sight made Ben want to vomit. His stomach churned, his body tensed.

While he hadn't particularly cared for Matt after the incident with Rey, he didn't want the guy to die. Death wasn't even the right word, really. It implied that he'd gone peacefully, when this looked anything but. He'd been tortured, probably screamed the entire time. And he'd been too far away, locked in the safety of Rey’s house, sleeping by the warm fire.

His amber eyes returned to the woman crouched next to his body, looking at her handiwork with a sort of reverence.

Yvetri Ren had been his second in command when he'd been under Snoke. She was ruthless, efficient, and a borderline sociopath. And apparently she was mad about Ben getting out.

She turned to look at him then, eyes glinting with malice. “And you've found yourself a human bitch. How sweet.” She moved away from the body at Ben’s snarl of warning, drifting closer. She tilted her head at him, her expression one of intrigue. “You know, we could have shared something, you and I. I would have given you everything.” Her face hardened, resolve replacing her curiosity. “But no, you don't want your own kind, do you? I wonder if you'll try to turn her. Rey, right? You know she won't survive. She's too weak. She'll die like all the other females.”

Yvetri was a marvel in her own right, born into this world as a wolf, rather than trying to go through the change. She would have been the ideal mate, if she wasn't an alpha, or certifiably insane.

There was a low rumbling coming from somewhere, sounding like thunder, and dimly, Ben realized it was emanating from him. His back legs bunched, launching him forward, jaws open to lock onto whatever piece of flesh he could manage, preferably her throat.

Yvetri backed away, moving much more quickly than any human. She was a blur of motion, weaving in and out between bare trees. Her little body dodged his first attack, retaliating with a firm kick to his chest. He felt his sternum crack, not enough to incapacitate, but enough for his breath to leave him in a rush, hacking through his muzzle like a cough.

God, she was strong. Even in practice fights, Yvetri had always given him a run for his money. A real fight was no different, but now he had something to fight for, to drive him. He had to protect Rey. His Rey. Even if she wasn't truly his, he was now responsible for her.

The woman sneered at him, darting closer and striking at him before backing away, taunting. Ben knew this trick of hers, and he wasn't going to fall for it like he had so many times before. She was trying to rile him up even more, to make him forget that he was a being capable of coherent thought and planning.

Suddenly, he stopped, his head lifting to the wind, inhaling sharply. He saw the woman mirror
him in her human form a second later. A fierce smile spread over her face and she slid a glance at him before bolting off, kicking up a flurry of white powder.

*Rey!* What the fuck was she doing out here?! He tore after Yvetri, heading for the one person he couldn't let anything happen to.

He pushed his legs faster, stretching his neck out to lock his canines around the female werewolf's calf. She let out an animalistic bellow of pain as she toppled to the ground, her unwounded leg flying out to try and land a blow against this face. He moved aside easily, her blood staining across his muzzle, steam rising from the heat.

The pair of them jerked their heads to the side to stare at Rey, who was slowly approaching with wide, shocked eyes, clutching Ben’s clothing to her chest.

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She’d watched Ben’s retreating back as he headed towards the woods. He was a crazy person, she'd decided. He was absolutely insane, to go outside in this weather. She squinted the further he got, frowning when she saw he fully intended to go fucking hiking at this time. She ran to her bedroom to get some warmer clothing, donning them quickly as she moved back to the window, winding her scarf securely around her face. When she looked back outside, she didn't see any sign of Ben. Instead, she was greeted by the sight of a wolf—her wolf—standing there, his amber gaze flickering back to her for a moment before he turned and disappeared.

What if he didn't react to Ben the same way he did to her? What if he mauled him and left him bleeding out in the harsh environment? Fuck, she couldn't just let him run off like that, especially with just his shirt.

Moving as quickly as she possibly could, she shoved her feet into her boots and laced them up before running outside. She called for him, but her words were lost to the wind. Her hair whipped around her face, and her cheeks burned against the frigid air. Ben was so fucking stupid, she thought.

Moving past the treeline, she spotted what looked like a pile of clothing sitting at the base of a large trunk. She bent down, her hands shaking from the cold. Those were Ben’s clothes. Ben was naked. In the woods.

“Ben!” she yelled, twirling around in place, scanning the woods for him.

She saw the imprints of bare human feet in the snow, leading to a spot where the ground was disturbed and hard for her to read clearly. There were paw prints leaving the area, larger than the width of her hand.

Following them, pushing her way through the heavy snow banks, Rey looked around, feeling prickling at the base of her spine. Something was...off. Looking ahead, she saw the woman first, running through the cold, naked as day. Her face was murderous, her legs a blur, running with speed she'd never seen before. Behind her, she saw the wolf, proud and fierce in his fury. His scar identified him, and the more she stared, the more suspicious she grew. It might have seemed crazy, but the way the black of his fur matched the color of Ben’s hair so succinctly, down to the amber gaze made her half-believe it could be possible.

Part of her mind questioned *what* could be possible? As much as she might have wished it,
werewolves were myths and fairytales, meant to scare young children at night.

She didn’t know what she expected, but it definitely wasn’t for the giant wolf to grab ahold of the woman’s leg and drag her down to the ground.

Rey rushed forward, not quite sure what she’d intended to do, wincing from the woman’s scream.

The wolf backed up, his ears pinned back against his head as he snarled, missing the kick that was thrown near his face.

The woman screamed again, reaching a hand out toward Rey, “Help me, please!”

Gasping, Rey took a step closer, only to jump back when she was stopped by a movement by the wolf. He moved forward, growling deep in his throat, lips curling back, his breath coming in ragged pants.

Instinctively, Rey stopped, torn between the need to help and being stopped by a wild animal.

The woman laughed suddenly, a loud, rattling sound, and Rey looked down at her, thoroughly confused.

Ignoring her guard, Yvetri lifted herself to her feet, only slightly unsteady with one good leg, and turned to the animal beside her. “I knew it! You do care about her, Ben.”

Without warning, she took off again and Ben moved to follow.

Rey felt like she was falling in reverse, her world dropping out from under her as she stared between the two. No, it couldn’t be. It wasn’t possible. Her heart raced again, and her mind offered up all the clues she’d been presented with thus far. She watched the way his shoulders moved, and something about the gait seemed familiar. No. No.

“Ben?” she felt herself whispering. He stopped and turned his head to look at her. His eyes were pained, pleading.

Entirely too intelligent for an animal.

Ever so slightly, he nodded once, his gaze lingering for a long moment before he jerked his attention back to the woman running away. He took off after her, faster than she had ever dreamed possible.

Rey watched him until he disappeared, her hands tightening their grip on his clothes, and then she ran. She ran faster than she’d ever run before, back to her house, her boots crunching heavily across the ground. Faster than the first night she’d met him. For some reason, there were tears in her eyes; she tried to blame them on the cold wind.

Chapter End Notes

Song lyrics are "The Sound of Silence" by Simon and Garfunkel, but I prefer the live version by Disturbed.

RIP, Matt.

Also, feel free to come say hi to me on Tumblr! @thewayofthesith
Chapter 11: Riding in Cars with Wolves

Chapter Notes

This chapter is fucking massive compared to others. Thank you for reading this far! Your comments give me life and purpose, and I would love to hear your thoughts! The next update may take a little longer since I'm going to take a few days off from the fic. I haven't been in a good head space lately and don't want it to show in my writing.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

_I don't mind spendin' everyday_

_Out on your corner in the pourin' rain_

_Look for the girl with the broken smile_

_Ask her if she wants to stay awhile_

_And she will be loved, and she will be loved_

_____________

Her heart was thundering as she flew through the snow, trying to get as much traction as she could. She slipped, her hands shooting upwards to grasp a frozen branch. It snapped under her weight, dumping her onto her back, her head cushioned by the snow. It still hurt from the force of it, and the base of her skull throbbed.

She sat up slowly, her mind foggy for a brief second. Rubbing her hand across her face, she glanced down beside her, spotting a shirt half buried from the powder she'd kicked up. Ben's shirt...oh god. She hadn't just imagined all that, had she? It truly had happened; Ben was a werewolf. And what about that woman? Clearly she had known his secret. Was she one, as well? She had to be, in order to move as quickly as she had.

She looked again, finding a pair of pants as well. Grabbing them, she stood slowly, looking over her shoulder for any sign that she'd been followed. Aside from the snow coming down in huge, fat flakes, and the gusts of wind bending the trees, she didn't see anything. Bending down, she picked up Ben's shirt and pants, staring at them for a long moment before wadding it up and shoving it into the large pocket of her jacket.

She picked up the pace, though slower this time, and headed back to her house. This was all too unreal. She needed to be somewhere familiar, preferably within the confines of her home where
werewolves didn't exist, and her life wasn't any more complicated than it had to be.

She was just Rey; not Rey, Befriender of Werewolves, not Rey, Attracted to Werewolves. Just...Rey.

Pushing open her front door, she was met with the lingering scents of breakfast. It seemed like such a lifetime ago, when in actuality it had probably only been an hour or so. The bacon on the stove was still fresh enough to eat (who really refrigerated their leftovers right away, anyway?). Shedding her coat, she slung it over one of the kitchen chairs before walking shakily the rest of the way to the pots and pans left out.

She leaned heavily against the counter, her eyes unfocused as she stared at them. Was she going into shock? Maybe.

Shaking her head, she tried to jerk herself out of the haze, and set to cleaning the pans as best she could. The water was still working, thankfully, and she set to scrubbing the cast iron skillet with a fury, ignoring the fact that it was not the proper way to clean the damned thing. She'd just reseason it later, she reasoned.

As she scrubbed, her mind kept flashing back to the scene in the forest. The woman, the way the wolf—no, Ben—had grabbed ahold of her leg and bitten. The way she had called to Rey for help…

And finally, the way Ben had denied that help. That was what confused her just as much as the idea of him being more than human. From everything she knew about Ben, and obviously it wasn’t much, he was a rather helpful, kind individual. He had to have a reason to stop her from helping, right?

Which brought her back to the way the woman had spoken to him. She knew him, that was clear, and had called him by name. It was taunting, though, a clear disdain between them.

Groaning, she shoved the skillet aside. What she needed were answers and it didn't have them. Rubbing her eyes with her forearm, she sighed heavily and dried her hands off.

The thought of being alone that night terrified her. Not necessarily because of Ben, but because of the strange woman. If Ben had wanted to harm her, he'd had ample opportunity to do it when they'd been alone together. Hell, she'd been drunk off her ass and he'd been nothing but a gentleman.

She had the feeling that her life was at risk, and she didn't want to face it alone. She had no way to contact Ben, and she felt it best to be around other people she trusted until her mind sorted this mess out.

Dumping some food into Daisy’s bowl, she checked that the cat would have enough water for a little while, since she didn't know how long she'd be gone for.

Making her way to her bedroom, she dug out a small duffle bag from under the bed and threw a few sets of clothes into it.

As she stepped into the bathroom to retrieve her toothbrush, she frowned. It felt like she was running away, but really, what choice did she have? She didn't own a gun, and she doubted she'd win in a hand-to-hand fight against someone obviously much faster than she was.

Finn and Poe would understand, she hoped. Not that she planned to tell them exactly what was going on. She knew how far-fetched it seemed.

Yeah, can I stay here for a while because some werewolf lady is trying to kill me?
Rey grabbed her keys and went to the living room to put out the smoldering remains in the fireplace. She'd forgotten to do it earlier when she'd gone out after Ben, and the idea that her house could have gone up in flames with Daisy still inside made her sick.

Once she was satisfied it wouldn't relight itself, she grabbed her jacket from the chair and left the house, locking the door behind her. It was about a mile or so down the road to Finn and Poe’s place, and she didn't think hiking the distance would be a great idea.

She headed toward her car, hoping it could push through the thick layer of snow. She hadn't seen any snow plows out yet, though they had put some salt down before the weather had started the day before. There had to be about six inches or so on the ground already, and the skies didn't look like they'd be letting up anytime soon.

Her car was basically a white rectangle in the driveway, and she dug into the pocket of her coat for her gloves, sliding them over her hands. She set to work clearing off her car, making it barely passable for driving. She had to pry the door open, as covered in a thin layer of ice as it was.

Once she was inside, Rey stuck her key in the ignition and prayed to whatever higher power there may be that it started.

The engine sputtered roughly before dying, and she yelled. “Fuck!”

She tried it again, and it sounded a little stronger this time, starting up briefly before sputtering out once more.

“Come on, baby,” she muttered as she fired it one last time, revving the gas once the engine turned over. Her car had never experienced a snow storm before, and it seemed like the battery had just been a bit weak. She'd get a replacement after this storm passed.

She backed out of the driveway slowly, not bothering to let the air blowing out of the vents warm up. It was just a short drive; she could handle the cold for that long.

Finn and Poe’s house was a small, quaint thing. It looked like a Christmas postcard picture, without the twinkling lights. It was still too early in the season for that, but it was beautiful nonetheless. There were lights on inside, casting a warm glow across the icy landscape outside.

Grabbing her bag from the passenger seat, she slung it over her shoulder as she got out of the car, carefully making her way up the driveway. It looked like it had been shovelled earlier, as the snow coating it was much thinner than what was across the lawn.

She knocked hesitantly, looking around again to make sure no one had followed her.

The door swung open to reveal Poe, clad in a pair of flannel pajamas and a mug in one hand. He looked surprised to see her, his eyebrows shooting skywards. “Rey? Everything okay?”

She tried to smile, but it felt more like a grimace. “Yeah, I just...I didn't want to stay alone at my place tonight. I was hoping it would be okay if I crashed on your couch?” She looked past him to the inside of the house, feeling warmth float out to greet her. “You guys have power...?”

He blinked but moved aside to let her in. “Yeah, of course you can. We have a generator I grabbed from the hardware store when talks of this storm started.”

Nodding, she looked around the house. She'd visited so frequently in the weeks prior, but for some reason, she felt like a stranger here now.
She was greeted by BeeBee, who ran up to her and started to sniff at her shoes, slowly making his way up her legs. Suddenly, he sat down, eyes trained on her waist. It was unlike him. Usually he was bouncing around like a young puppy.

Finn came around the corner a second later, a towel wrapped around his waist, his chest bare and glistening with the remnants of his shower. “Hey babe, we need to grab more--oh, hey Rey.” His face turned a few shades darker as he clutched the towel more tightly to make sure it didn't fall. “I'll, uh, be right back,” he mumbled before slipping back around the corner.

Stifling a laugh, she looked to Poe, who was rubbing the back of his head with a sheepish grin. “Sorry about that. We weren't expecting company.” At her guilty expression, he quickly added, “Not that you aren't welcome or anything! Sit down, make yourself at home. You look like a drowned rat. A very cute drowned rat, I might add.” He winked at her and set his mug on a counter.

He was probably right. The snowflakes in her hair were starting to melt, leaving it wet and clinging to her face. One thing she had learned about Poe was that he was a giant flirt. It didn't matter who he was speaking to--man, woman, young or old--he was shameless. It was completely harmless, though. Poe was so in love with Finn, anyone could see it.

Whenever Finn wasn't around, he'd ask her opinion on how he should propose to the man. She'd give her opinion, he'd nod like it was the best idea in the world, and then the next time the topic came up, he'd ask again.

Eventually, she was just going to tell him to do it, situation be damned. Do it in the kitchen on a Thursday morning after they'd both just woken up or something. Life was too short to try and wait for the perfect dinner, or to plan something out. Sometimes you had to just do it when the timing was right, even if it wasn't picture perfect.

A sharp nudge to her thigh made her look down, meeting the brown eyes of BeeBee. “What is it?” she asked curiously, bending down to pet his head. He nosed insistently at the pocket of her jacket.

Did she have a stain or something on it? She examined the area for a second, not seeing anything out of the ordinary. It was a little bumpy from the shirt inside it, but--oh.

Cautiously, she withdrew the fabric of Ben’s shirt and held it out for the dog to inspect. BeeBee shoved his nose into it, his eyes going glassy as he inhaled. She wondered how a werewolf smelled to a dog, and if they would recognize each other on some instinctual level.

Suddenly, he growled, one corner of his mouth lifting to expose his teeth. Rey stood up quickly, withdrawing the shirt from the dog’s face. She hadn't been expecting that at all.

“Hey, knock it off!” Poe scolded him, coming closer. Never before, in all the times she had visited, had he acted like that. She knew it had everything to do with the shirt. It had to have smelled differently, she guessed.

Finn came back a moment later, fully dressed in pajama bottoms and a T-shirt, smiling shyly at Rey. He gave her a one-armed hug, saying, “Sorry about earlier. Didn't mean to scar you for life.” Rey laughed at that, hugging him back. He smelled like soap, a brand that he'd compared with her at the store to see which one was more suited to his body chemistry. “It's all right,” she told him, pulling away after a minute. “Poe said I could crash here for the night. I hope that's okay.”

“Of course!” He said, looking her over. She still had her bag and jacket on, and she took off both, hanging her coat on the peg by the door, stuffing Ben’s shirt back into the pocket. “Where have you
been? We haven't seen you recently.”

_Been trapped in my house with this really nice guy. Turns out he's a werewolf._

BeeBee moved to lay underneath her jacket, his deep brown eyes looking up at it longingly. Rey frowned at him, but he wasn't destroying anything, so it was probably best to just leave him be for now.

“I've been having some work done on my house, finally.” She mustered up a smile--a real one this time--and flopped herself down on one of their large couches.

“Hey, that's great!” Poe said, disappearing into the kitchen. He came back a second later with a giant, steaming cup of something. Handing it to her, he jerked his head to the kitchen, “You know you're welcome to any food you want.” He flopped down on an adjacent sofa and reached for the remote. “We were just about to watch a movie, so you're right on time.”

A movie was a good distraction. She could lose herself in the story for about two hours before reality set back in. Looking into the cup he'd given her, she blinked when she saw a creamy looking liquid with copious amounts of marshmallows scattered along the top.

Hesitantly, she took a sip, and moaned at the taste. “What is this?!” she asked, immediately going back for more. It was rich and chocolatey, warming her body enough that she finally relaxed.

Poe looked at her like she'd grown a second head, one hand flung up to clutch his chest as though she'd physically wounded him. “You’ve...you've never had hot chocolate?”

Rey blinked slowly at him, clutching her mug a little more tightly, “…No?”

Finn gasped, his eyes wide as he sat down beside Poe, tucking himself under the other man’s arm. “What do you mean you've never had hot chocolate? Rey, I don't think we can be friends anymore.” He was teasing her, of course, and she shot him the glare it deserved.

“So, what's on the menu, movie-wise?” she asked as she curled up into the corner of the couch, pulling the woven blanket from the back of it to wrap around herself.

Poe flipped the television on, navigating to the DVR system, and then quickly surfing through entirely too many recordings. There was _Animal Planet, National Geographic, Hell’s Kitchen, Barefoot Contessa_, and some shows on _BBC_ all waiting to be watched, along with copious episodes of _Ancient Aliens._

Finn would never admit it, but he had a pretty severe infatuation with conspiracy theories. If anyone had asked him, he would have called it a passion, not an obsession.

Poe enjoyed all sorts of outdoorsy shows, like _Survivor_, and _Doomsday Preppers_ or anything to do with custom cars being made. In the basement, he had all sorts of prepping items--MRE’s, gallons of water, you name it. Rey and Finn teased him mercilessly about him being the only survivor in an apocalypse because of it.

The only genre they seemed to completely agree on was anything food related. Finn liked to fancy himself a cultured chef in the making, and Poe seemed happy to try just about any food set in front of him.

“We were planning to watch _Underworld_. It’s Finn’s night to pick.” The older man hit play on the movie, squeezing Finn’s thigh briefly before getting up to go make some popcorn.
Oh, great. Here she was, hoping to get away from werewolves, and she was going to be subjected to the idea of them for another two hours and fourteen minutes. Well, maybe it would give her some insight about them. Who knew, maybe Hollywood was filled with them, going around living their lives as actors and actresses.

She settled back into the couch, casting uneasy glances toward the door every now and then. She hoped Ben was all right, wondering if he was warm. She'd have to ask him what it was like to shift his body, and she'd be lying if she said she didn't want to watch. Maybe it was a bit voyeuristic, but honestly, she was just too curious at this point.

Her eyes were on the screen, but she wasn't really watching. It all made perfect sense now. The possessive, almost territorial way she sometimes caught him looking at her. And whatever he'd done in the kitchen...it was almost like a nuzzle, but with tongue. Her neck still tingled at the thought of it.

In the background of her thoughts, she could hear Finn and Poe having some conversation about Kate Beckinsale and some drama about the director of the movie leaving his wife for her. Stupid Hollywood issues that didn't concern her.

“I swear, she's a fucking vampire. The woman doesn't age! Have you seen her recently? She's still amazingly hot!” Finn dodged Poe’s light-hearted smack, laughing. “Hey, I'm serious! But she's got nothing on you, babe. No worries. Stuck in a room with both of you, I'd go for you any day.”

It was so good to see Finn opening up. When they'd first met, he was kind of shy and let Poe do most of the talking. Maybe it was the comfort of being in his own home, but it warmed her heart.

“I bet Rey's a vampire too. She has that skin that looks like she's never going to see a wrinkle,” he added, shooting Rey a smirk that said I know your secret.

Poe sat up a bit straighter, shaking his head. “Nah, she looks more like a werewolf. Just look at that bedhead.” He smiled to take the sting out of it, but Rey suddenly remembered that she hadn't done anything with her hair since waking up.

She’d been too distracted with Ben making her breakfast to care, and then there was that pesky werewolf fiasco…

“Hey! I object to that. Besides,” she snorted, flipping her messy, damp hair over one shoulder. "Do you guys actually believe in this stuff?"

"What, about vampires and werewolves?" Finn asked. The two men exchanged a look before Poe finally shrugged and Finn pursed his lips for a moment, clearly trying to think of a safe answer to give her. Finally, he huffed and said rather quickly, "Yeah, I do. Hear me out, though." He adjusted himself, lifting his hands for added effect. "It makes more sense to assume that we haven't discovered enough concrete evidence about them than to just write them off."

Rey's eyebrows rose at him, and she gave him her best dubious look. "So you think they're just hiding?"

He nodded, "If they're smart, yeah. Would you want to go from the top of the evolutionary food chain to being some pasty old dude's lab rat? Because you know that's exactly what would happen."

"It seems like you've done a lot of thinking about this kind of thing," she said finally, looking back to the television screen, where Selene and Michael were at his apartment, only to be attacked by werewolves almost immediately after. She cringed mentally at the really poor look of the suits used for the creatures. It was worse than bad, really. Modern CGI could be pretty iffy though, too,
sometimes.

“I have,” he agreed after a moment. “I’m completely against animal testing. And if you think about it, they’re still humans with emotions and reasoning. They just have some...inhuman tendencies. It would be cruel to just allow them to become someone’s science experiment, or worse--exterminated.” He paused a minute, glancing out the window, his brow furrowed. “I do think they're out there,” he said softly. “And I hope they stay a secret.”

“I didn’t expect you to see it that way,” she admitted, finishing the last of her hot chocolate.

He looked back to her then, his expression stern. “Why not? Humans deserve the same rights as other humans. I mean, look at me and Poe. We’re a biracial gay couple. Do you know how long it took for us to be able to have the same rights as everyone else? And even then, it’s still taboo in some places. Why shouldn't werewolves and vampires? They're humans too, even though they're slightly...more.” At that, Poe leaned forward and wrapped an arm around his shoulders, draping himself over Finn’s body reassuringly.

Guilt rolled over her in waves. She hadn’t even considered that, to be honest. He had a point.

After dinner, they watched the second *Underworld* movie--with greatly improved costuming--and then called it a night. The boys retreated to their bedroom after giving her an obscenely comfortable pillow and some extra blankets.

Sometime after dozing off, Rey woke with a start, hearing BeeBee whine near the door. He wasn't one to make noise, usually; today was just full of surprises. Maybe he needed to use the bathroom or something. Frowning, she sat up against the couch and stretched a bit, feeling a bit more rested now that she’d slept on an actual couch, and not just a bunch of cushions on the floor.

BeeBee whimpered, loudly, and then let off a bark, scratching at the door, pacing anxiously. “Hey, shush!” she hissed, not wanting him to wake anyone else. He looked at her as she got up and slipped her boots on, circling restlessly. She donned her jacket and grabbed his leash from another peg by the door. Clipping it to his collar, she made sure it was secure before she quietly unlocked the deadbolt. “Let’s make this quick, okay?”

As soon as the door opened a crack, he wedged his nose in and nudged it further, bolting outside. Rey let out a yip of surprise as the dog dragged her through the snow. He was surprisingly strong for a medium-sized animal.

The snow was still coming down, though not nearly as forcefully. Instead of the wind blowing it everywhere, it drifted down, landing softly against her hair and eyelashes. If she didn't have BeeBee tugging her along, she might have stuck her tongue out to catch a few.

It occurred to her then, that BeeBee wasn’t hunting for a spot to go pee. He was standing motionless, his gaze settled intently on the shadows by the garage.

Rey strained her eyes to see what he was looking at, but somehow, she knew. She knew. There was the faintest hint of movement, and a plume of steam erupted from the darkness, curling through the air like reaching fingers.

“Hold on,” she called, doing her best to tug the dog back inside. She couldn't explain it, but something in her recognized the person outside as Ben and not someone else.
BeeBee refused to move, keening loudly and pulling against the leash. He was barking again, high, strangled sounds.

The shadow in the darkness moved again, becoming more defined as it emerged into the soft lights coming from inside the house. He was just as beautiful as the first time she'd seen him. His breath was coming in sharp gasps, his front legs shaking slightly with effort.

She remembered the kick the woman had landed on him, and the grotesque snapping of a bone. Fuck.

Ben approached slowly, stopping several strides away. His gaze was trained on BeeBee, his head lowered to be level, ears pinned back. A deep growl rumbled in his chest, loud and unmistakable.

The dog immediately stopped pulling on the leash, whimpering as his tail tucked between his legs. Rey quickly put him inside, making sure the door was secure before she turned back to Ben, crossing her arms across her chest. For a long moment, she simply observed him. “So. You're a werewolf, huh?”

He blinked at her and gave a nod of his head, his eyes looking a little uneasy. He shifted his weight again, his muscles beneath his fur twitching.

“Have you always been one?” she asked, making sure to keep her voice barely above a whisper. He would hear her, she was sure.

Slowly, he shook his head, hesitating before taking a step closer. When Rey didn't move or back away, he closed the distance between them. He lifted his head to look up at her and gently nuzzled his nose under her elbow where her arms were still crossed. She sighed, smiling a little, and moved her hand to stroke across the top of his head. He leaned into her touch, eyes half closed.

Experimentally, she scratched at the crease where his ear connected to his skull and she heard a growl again, though it wasn't menacing at all. It was almost like a cat purring, but not quite. “Oh, you like that, do you?” she laughed quietly.

He groaned and sighed heavily, resting his face against her stomach as he basked in her touch.

After a long moment, she pulled away from him, murmuring that she'd be right back. Darting into the house, making sure to keep BeeBee inside, she scribbled a quick note for the guys and folded up the blankets they'd loaned her. She left the note on top of them before slipping back out, car keys in hand.

Ben was still there, but he looked wary, eyes flickering nervously to the house. Seeing his reaction, she frowned at him, “Relax. I'm not going to tell anyone.” She moved over to the car and redusted the fresh snow off. Going around to the passenger side, she opened the door and waved for him to get in. His ears went back again, and he shook his head at her. “Oh, come on. I have a lot of questions, and I can't exactly bring you in their house. I'm also not going to freeze my ass off out here.”

He visibly rolled his eyes, but walked over and hopped into the seat. He was huge in her little car, and she stifled a giggle at the sight of him as she shut the door.

The drive back to her house was almost normal, if she'd owned a dog. Ben was quiet, staring out the window, though he'd occasionally throw glances over at her.

She parked the car, then turned to look at him. He was crammed against the door, his front paws hanging off the seat as he tried to find enough room. “Are you able to...turn back human?” she asked
nervously. She didn't know how any of this worked. Was there a time limit on this stuff? Was he tied to the moon at all? She had so many things to ask.

He dipped his head at her, and she nodded to herself before remembering something. Leaning back, she dug his shirt out of her pocket and set it on the console between them. He looked down at it before back to her and she saw what would have been his eyebrow raise.

Blushing, she shrugged. “I had a lot on my mind earlier and saw it on the way home. Your pants are inside. Hang on.”

She quickly ran inside, immediately missing the warmth of Finn and Poe’s house. His pants were still hanging on the back of the chair where she'd left them. She grabbed them and quickly ran outside. He was sitting next to the car, his shirt in his mouth, waiting patiently, though he was trembling. She didn't think it was from the cold.

She had a vague moment of wondering how he opened the car door, then mentally smacked herself. He was a person; he knew how car doors worked.

Setting the pants on the hood of the car, she stood there awkwardly for a moment before finally saying, “I’ll, uhm, give you some privacy. The door is open when you're...done.”

She retreated back into the house quickly, pacing nervously around the kitchen. She had wanted to see the process of him shifting, but would wait until he said it was all right for her to observe.

When the door finally opened and she heard it click shut behind him, she froze. It was a little different to be speaking with him when he could use words, versus when he was in animal form and extremely limited in his responses. The thought was daunting, making her shiver as he came around the corner. He was fully clothed, aside from his shoes and socks.

There was an energy radiating off of his body, his demeanor entirely different. Whereas he had been kind in his wolf form, almost puppy-like, now his presence was commanding, drawing her attention.

His jaw tightened, lips pressed together into a thin line as he simply stared at her, his eyes burning with a barely repressed plea.

She held his gaze, letting out a small gasp as her body responded to his intensity. She felt warmth stir in her belly, unfolding like a cat stretching after a nap. She looked away from him to break the spell, out the window to where the snow continued on. She turned from him then, moving to the living room to gaze outside the bay window, her arms wrapped around herself. He followed her, keeping his distance.

“So how long?” she asked, ignoring the eerie quiet of the house. There was no hum of the refrigerator or the water heater while the power was out.

“Twelve years,” he rumbled, igniting goosebumps along her skin with the baritone.

“Twelve years…” she repeated thoughtfully, pinching her arm to distract herself from the warmth pooling between her thighs. She may not have had sex before, but she was no stranger to vibrators or other insertable toys. All she could think was how much better the real thing would be, especially if it was coming from someone like him.

There was the slightest shuffle of clothes behind her, a footstep coming closer. And then there was a scorching heat against her back as he pressed himself to her, fingertips trailing lightly along her arms, up to her shoulders and then back down to slip his large hands over hers across her stomach,
pulling her back against his chest. He dipped his head low, lips pressed against the shell of her ear as he murmured, “I can smell you, you know. I can smell how your body is reacting to me.”

“Oh,” she whispered, unconsciously leaning her head back against his broad shoulder, turning her gaze up to meet his. His eyes seemed to glow in the soft light, burning a brilliant umber, almost golden with fire.

He looked back at her for a long moment, then dropped his attention to her lips, his own parting in response.

“I don’t want to hurt you,” he said softly, his breath coming in hot waves against her face. He smelled of spice and man, the scent sending a wave of heat unfurling low in her core.

“Hurt me?” she asked, brow knitting together in confusion. “How would you hurt me?”

He tensed behind her, his arms tightening around her in a silent display of his strength. “I’m mid-rut,” he finally answered, his breath ghosting across the nape of her neck as he breathed her in.

It was just a little harder to breathe as a shudder made its way through her body. Whether that was from fear or something else, she couldn’t say. She didn’t know what that meant. She’d heard of deer going into rut, and that it was related to the breeding season, but she had no idea what it meant for him.

He loosened his arms, perhaps sensing her inner conflict. His chest pushed against her back as he took a deep breath, letting it out slowly through his nose. Gently, he let her go and pulled away, stepping into the shadows of the room. “It means that unless you tell me to leave right now, I am going to fuck you, Rey. I can’t be gentle right now. I can’t think past anything except ripping your clothes off and taking you. Of knotting you and filling you with my cum.”

She turned slowly to stare at his back, her heart racing. “Knotting?” she asked, going through any and all definitions of the word in her mind.

He chuckled darkly, shaking his head. “It’s another werewolf thing. It’s a claiming thing between an alpha and their omega. Something only mates do. It’s different than just sex. It’s more; long story short, my cock swells inside of you enough to keep us locked together for a while as I dump my seed into you.”

Her breath caught in her throat. As strange as it was, it sounded incredibly erotic. “...does this rut happen often?” she asked, trying and failing to keep her voice even.

“Usually, it’s once a month, the day before a full moon. This time is different, though,” he muttered into the darkness, one hand raking through his hair.

She frowned at that, following him across the room. She felt the need to comfort him, to hold him tightly for some reason she couldn’t explain. Wrapping her arms around him from behind, her hands came up to rest on his chest, and she buried her face against the woven material of his shirt, nuzzling lightly. “How is it different?”

He inhaled sharply, holding his breath for a minute. “You. There’s something about you. You’re human, but...there’s something different about you.”

She dropped her arms from around him and moved so they were facing each other. “Do you know what it is?”

His eyes positively smoldered in the dim light of her living room as he stared at her intently before
letting his gaze travel to her lips once more, lingering before slowly moving lower down her body. If she thought she'd seen heat in his expression before, he was thrumming with desire and pure want now. She let her eyes travel lower to the front of his pants, where it bulged considerably.

“No, I don’t,” he said. “Are you going to tell me to leave?” His voice was a murmur, suddenly deeper and more husky.

No one had looked at her like that before; like he wanted to devour her. Maybe that was the wolf in him, but Rey could feel heat blossoming along every inch of her body under his intensity. It reminded her that this whole situation shouldn't be happening. He shouldn't be a werewolf, he shouldn't be in her house. She shouldn't be about to do something very stupid. She had so many more questions, but for the life of her, she couldn't remember what they were.

She lifted her chin, arching an eyebrow at him in defiance. Very slowly, deliberately, she shook her head. Immediately, she was jerked toward him by her wrist. She fell against his hard chest with a gasp, eyes wide. His hand gripped her chin, a vise as he lifted her face and his mouth came crashing against hers, robbing her of breath. His lips were bruising, demanding, and very much what she wanted.

It was the only time he had ever been forceful with her, and she found herself surrendering willingly, even eagerly. His fingers were still wrapped around her wrist, and as he took her mouth, he pulled her arm up and over his shoulder to encircle his neck. She immediately tangled her fingers into the lush hair at the base of his skull, gripping tightly. A groan tore from him at the gesture, and she happily swallowed it. His hands slid down to span her waist under her jacket, clutching her tightly and pulling her closer to him.

His body was feverish against hers, his hands burning through her thin shirt. If only she could feel them against her bare skin instead.

“Please,” she sighed against his lips, opening her eyes to look up at him. His pupils were blown wide, nearly drowning out his irises, his breath coming in harsh bursts. He gazed at her for a short moment, but with him so close, it seemed to last an eternity. He gave a slight nod and moved his hands to the front of her jacket, slipping it off of her shoulders.

He ripped her shirt over her head, dropping it to pool at their feet. As his eyes roamed hungrily over the skin that was exposed to him, she felt heat rise to her cheeks, and spread across the top part of her chest. Feeling bold under his gaze, she reached behind her and unclasped her bra, letting it slide down her arms to fall to the floor before shimmying out of her jeans and underwear.

He was on her again almost immediately, gripping her beneath her thighs and lifting her up his body with ease. Her legs wrapped around him as she grasped his face between her slender fingers, pulling his mouth down to hers again. Even being lifted, he was still several inches taller than she was.

She felt his tongue slip across the seam of her mouth, begging her to open to him. God, he tasted so good. Like spice and cinnamon, reminding her of freshly mulled cider. As he devoured her, his movements almost harsh, she had the vague sense of movement before her back hit the wall, sliding up as he moved between her thighs. He was still wearing pants, but she could still feel him through the fabric as he rubbed against her center. She pulled away from his kiss with a moan, dropping her head back against the wall with a thud.

He took that as an opportunity to drop his mouth to her neck, alternating between licking and kissing along her pulse. “I need you,” he murmured against her, voice strained. “Now, tonight.”
She arched against him as he swept lower, running his tongue over the mound of her breast. Rey nodded in agreement, and when she realized he probably couldn't see, she cried out an answer as he took her pebbled nipple into his mouth and sucked hard. “Yes—please... please!” Fire flared through her veins and she found herself grinding against him, needing friction to sate the itch he'd ignited.

Propping her against the wall, he lifted a hand between them and unfastened the button to his pants. At the same time, she was already pulling his shirt out of his trousers and tugging it over his head, throwing it somewhere in the room to be found later.

His chest was a purple mass, dotted with a sickly green color, the bone and muscle in various stages of healing. “Oh my god,” she breathed, tracing one hand lightly across the marks.

He moved one hand to cover hers, pulling it away from him to pin against the wall. “I’ll be all right in a few days. Don't worry about it,” he whispered against her neck.

She didn't realize she had craved his touch this badly until this very moment, being skin to skin with him. He stepped out of his pants and kicked them away, returning his attention back to her breasts, rolling his tongue over her, his eyes lifting to meet hers as she watched.

His grip on her was hard, unyielding; somewhere in the back of her mind she knew she'd have marks in the morning. For now, it was an exquisite kind of pain, mixing perfectly with the pleasure he was giving her.

“Fuck,” she whispered, feeling her legs beginning to tremble as he stroked the head of himself against her, bumping that sensitive bundle of nerves with every languid thrust.

With a wolfish grin, he released her and snaked up to capture her mouth in another searing kiss. She ached to be filled, and he seemed desperate to fill her. Her nails clawed into his back, seeking purchase as the head of him slipped inside. He was gentle at first, but upon finding her so wet for him, he shoved into her in one hard thrust, stretching her. It drove all thought from her mind, making her gasp. It didn't hurt at all, not even close. He was hot, so hot. Everywhere he touched her, she burned. His forehead met hers, eyes locked on hers.

Normally, she would've spent ample time rubbing herself before inserting a dildo, but the way he filled her so completely pushed any protest far from her mind. It was perfect, this sense of completion. How had she managed to go this long without being with him this way?

Their breaths were mingling in the air before them, chests heaving as they got used to the sensation. After a moment, he pulled out slowly, not quite all the way, and then pushed back in with a deep groan. It was almost animalistic, and as she slid her hands along the muscles in his back, she noted the vibrations coming from him. It struck her then that he was holding himself back. For fear that he'd hurt her, or lose control, she didn't know.

On his next thrust, she rolled her hips back down against him, meeting him halfway. He seemed to sense what she wanted, and he picked up a steady rhythm, increasing the ferocity enough to have her making noises each time he hit that illusive spot deep within.

Her inner walls clenched down on him, urging him deeper, and his head fell to her shoulder as he shuddered and grunted, “Fuck, Rey. Tight, you're so tight. I need more of you.”

He slipped his body from her and she mourned the loss with a whine of protest.

He gave a throaty chuckle as he readjusted his hold on her and made his way back to her bedroom.
Gently, he laid her atop the bed, and moved one hand to her thigh, stroking it gently with his thumb as he positioned himself once again. Dropping his arms to the mattress on either side of her head, he pushed into her again, hissing between clenched teeth.

Her fingers scrambled across the sheets, searching for something to hang onto as he picked up a punishing pace. "I'm going to knot you, Rey. Look at you taking my cock so well. Gonna knot you and fill you up."

Her mind was a haze of pleasure, her vision blurry as he brought her body closer and closer to that high she needed. She could feel how wet she was, and the sounds of him slipping in and out filled her ears between the moans and pleas that fell from her lips.

Lifting her head, she looked down the line of her body to watch him moving in and out of her, and the sight alone sent another shock of arousal straight to her core. “Ben, I--” she whispered, feeling herself teeter on that edge.

In one quick movement, he moved his hand between them and roughly circled her sensitive nub with his thumb. “Come for me, Rey. Let go,” he growled, punctuating his words by ramming his hips tightly to hers.

She moved her hands from the sheets and threaded them through his hair, tugging on it as she bucked against him, needing to feel him against that one spot again and again.

He angled his hips and the next stroke struck it home, sending her crying loudly against his ear as she pulled him close to her. Her body clamped down on his and his thrusts became more frenzied, fighting her body for his own climax. He reached it before the waves of her orgasm subsided, groaning long and low, and as he came and his knot swelled within her, she pulled him in even deeper, milking him for all he was worth.

Oh God. He had filled her so well before, but now, with his added knot, she felt like she was about to burst. It felt so good to be packed to the brim.

All she could see was white, her mind foggy and unclear. Her grip on his hair loosened, and she found herself absentily stroking it as she held him against her, admiring whatever shampoo or conditioner he used that made it so luxurious.

He moved slightly above her, not wanting to crush her with his weight. His arms shook with the effort, and after some careful maneuvering, he settled behind her, still hard and thick inside of her. He encircled her in his arms, drawing her back against his chest. She felt his breath along her skin and he licked a long strip from her shoulder up to her neck, humming contentedly.

His body pulsed within her, and she felt another wave of warmth paint her walls. She gasped softly at the sensation, enjoying the feeling much more than she knew she should. It made her feel wanted, claimed.

As if reading her thoughts, he murmured against her hair, “You're mine now, Rey.”

Maybe she'd have a problem with those words in the morning, but for right now, that was perfectly fine with her.

Chapter End Notes
Lyrics are "She Will Be Loved" by Maroon 5.
So, I'm a dirty liar. I woke up today feeling a lot better, and the plot bunnies just attacked. It was the damndest thing, I tell you. So have another update, just because. Any and all typos are my own, as this chapter has been mostly unbeta'd. I'll proofread in the morning. Thank you for all of the supportive comments last chapter. Also, we broke 550 kudos! Holy SHIT. You guys are amazing!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Said it's too late to apologize

It's too late

Said it's too late to apologize

It's too late

I'm holdin' on the rope

Got me ten feet off the ground

He stroked her hair away from her face, feeling more sated and complete than he ever had. He knew the implications of knotting her. He'd told her that it was something werewolf mates did. What he hadn't told her was that once a knotting was completed, the pairing was bound together for life.

An omega could sleep with other people, but they'd never be able to accept anyone else’s knot. It was like their body rejected it somehow.

With Rey being human, he wasn't sure how that would work, but he wasn't willing to find out. He'd claimed her as his, and even if she decided she didn't want to continue with whatever this was, he had given himself to her. He hadn't finished the claiming process through a bite, but that could wait for another time. He could only infect her with lycanthropy while in his wolf form, whichever one that may be.

Ever since he'd first seen her, he'd felt this instinctual urge to protect her. It was ridiculous, really. Never before had he been so overcome by his urges about another person.
His knot had released a while ago, his softened cock slipping out of her, now pressed to her backside. She was sleeping peacefully, filled and covered in his spend, her breath deep and even. It satisfied something primal within him, to see her this way. He had done that, made her come and covered her in his scent.

She was tucked up against him, seeking out his warmth, holding his arm around her torso like a lifeline. Leaning forward, he brushed his nose against the nape of her neck, inhaling and committing it to memory. There was something else there, mingling with the faintly floral smell she naturally exuded. Something he couldn't quite place.

He was completely gone on her. Let it be known that when Ben Solo fell, he fell hard. She was unlike any other woman he'd met. She was brave, sassy, so full of life, and beautiful; even the morning before when she'd rolled out of her blanket fort with horrendous bedhead and morning breath that reeked of whiskey. He’d known at that moment that he could get used to seeing her like that every day, if she'd have him.

Her hand tightened on his, pressing it against her stomach as she shifted.

It stirred his thoughts, down to the soft skin beneath his fingers. Had he just gotten her pregnant? His more animal side preened at the thought. Instinct demanded that a rut was for reproduction, and he’d never even bothered to ask if she was on the pill. A condom had been the furthest thing from his mind, and he doubted she had any on hand.

Part of him felt guilty, but the other part of him wanted to scoop up any of his spend that had escaped and slip it back into her where it belonged.

She'd been asleep for about an hour now, and already he felt his rut coming back, even with how satisfied he'd been not long before. That was the worst part of being with a human--they simply couldn't keep up with his refractory period.

Gently, he propped himself up on one elbow and gazed down at her. Her hair fanned out across her pillow, and her gorgeous, kissable lips were parted slightly.

She shifted again, mumbling something he couldn't quite catch, rolling over onto her stomach, his hand sliding across her waist to rest on her lower back as she moved. One leg hitched up, bent at the knee and she smashed her face into the pillow, a deep sigh leaving her.

Her lower half was covered by a thin sheet, tangling around her legs. His eyes followed the lines of her back, traveling over every dip and curve, taking in her small freckles and moles. She had dimples on her lower back, and for some reason, those were exceedingly arousing.

Slowly, he slid his hand down from her back, over the curve of her ass, dragging the sheet down with him.

The light coming in from the snow reflecting off the clouds outside highlighted the downy hair covering her skin, and he traced his fingers against them, seeing goosebumps rise under his caresses. She was still asleep, though her hips shifted, her thighs parting invitingly.

Lightly, he moved lower, letting his fingers trace around that area in between. She was damp, slightly sticky from his cum, and he felt his cock twitch in response, already hardening again.

She moaned softly into the fabric of her pillow, and he leaned forward to press a delicate line of kisses down her spine. Just as slowly, he made his way back up her body, stopping at her shoulder. “Sweetheart?” he murmured against her skin, delving one finger into her.
Her body jerked towards his hand, seeming to search for more. She turned her head to him, a sleepy smile on her lips as she hummed. “Hmm? Again already?”

He added another finger, marveling at how tightly her body gripped him. He gave slow, exploratory strokes, “Mmmmm,” he agreed, feeling her dampness become more pronounced. “I need to feel you again.” His mouth hovered just over her shoulder, watching her reactions to his ministrations.

Her eyes were still closed, but she was definitely awake now, her breath coming in sharp pants as she moved against his fingers, fucking herself back against them.

“I didn't hurt you, did I?” he asked, wondering if she was too sore to go beyond what he was already doing.

“No,” she sighed, breath coming more harshly as he plunged his fingers in again, tracing them along the velvet of her inner walls. “I'm a little tender, but don't stop.”

He smiled at that. No, he wouldn't stop. With the first wave of his rut having passed, he was able to focus a bit more, able to take more time with her.

He spread his fingers, scissoring her open to ready her for him. But first…

“Flip over for me,” he murmured, pulling his fingers out and moving back just enough to give her room to move. She obeyed immediately, rolling over onto her back and resting her hands on either side of her head, watching him with lidded eyes.

He moved over her, caging her in with his arms as he leaned down to press a gentle kiss to her lips. Sliding lower, he kissed his way down her neck, down the valley that separated the mounds of her breasts and across her navel, finally reaching his destination.

He had to taste her. Slipping his hands beneath her thighs, he spread them wide, baring her to him. She bent her legs at the knee, draping one over his shoulder as he leaned forward to lay the flat of his tongue against her, licking a long line from her entrance up to her clit.

She groaned, bucking her hips forward, one hand flying up to cover her mouth. With his free hand, he reached up and wrenched it away. “I want to hear you. I want everyone within range to hear you come apart on my tongue,” he growled against her.

Satisfied, he dove back in, laving his tongue along her. He could taste both of them, her sweetness mixed with his slightly bitterness and it made him feel dizzy, drunk on the knowledge that she had been marked by him.

She gripped the pillow tightly, her other hand skimming down her body to weave itself into his hair. She pulled, sending a fresh rush of blood straight down to his cock.

Her gasps and moans filled the quiet air, her thighs trembling under his assault. Gingerly, he slid one finger back into her, curling it to hit a particularly spongy patch of flesh at the front of her inner walls. She cried out, trying to close her legs and secure his hand in place.

Smirking against her, he took that sensitive bundle into his mouth and sucked, shoving her legs back open. Her back arched, straining as he brought her closer. “That's it, sweetheart,” he purred encouragingly, nuzzling closer against her wet heat.

She came a moment later, her body stiffening as her grip on his hair became just this side of painful and she flooded his mouth, coating his lips and chin with her arousal.
He licked up every drop he could, pausing only to ghost his mouth along her inner thigh as her breathing slowed. Lifting his head, he smiled up at her. She was lovely; flushed with a light sheen of sweat glistening between her breasts. His gaze settled on the dusky rose color of her nipples, muted softly from the light filtering in.

He moved to sit, taking her hand and pulling her into his lap. She settled against him, molding perfectly as her legs wrapped around his waist, her hands gripping his shoulders.

He gazed at her for a moment taking in the dusting of freckles across her face, the way the green and golden coloring in her eyes swirled together in the dim light.

His vision was excellent, even in near perfect darkness. And to his eyes she was stunning. His lips parted, speechless, as his heart thundered more quickly.

She searched his face for a long moment, concern appearing. “Are you all right?” she asked, her voice rough from moaning for him. Gently, she brushed the backs of her fingers against his cheek, twisting her hand to cup it instead.

Nodding, unable to speak, he shifted beneath her, lining himself up. One hand tangled in her hair, pulling her forward to capture her lips as he pushed into her. She gasped into his mouth, and he groaned back as he buried himself to the hilt.

She felt so fucking good, her warmth wrapping around him like a vice, clenching him tightly. He stayed still, exploring her mouth further, waiting for her body to adjust further before he began to move, thrusting up into her with slow, calculated strokes.

Releasing his hold on her hair, he moved both hands down to her hips, using his strength to lift her body up and then to drag her back down against him, setting a steady rhythm.

She moaned again, her head falling back, exposing the line of her throat. He moved his mouth to the spot just over her pulse and sucked a long bruise into it, fighting the urge to sink his teeth into her neck and finish claiming her.

It was as though a fog lifted when he was inside her, like the stars aligned and a pathway was made clear. It reminded him of an old quote from Mark Twain, something along the lines of: The two most important days in your life are the day you are born and the day you find out why.

This was definitely the why; this woman in his arms, breathing his name like a prayer.

He fucked up into her harder, feeling his knot starting to enlarge. She felt it too, for she leaned into him and pressed her lips to his ear, whispering, “Knot me, Ben.”

He was helpless to deny her, giving her a few more punishing thrusts that bowed her spine, her nails digging into his shoulders. She came, her walls fluttering around him before bearing down, holding him in place.

He locked into her with a guttural moan, pulling her hips down even further against him, leaving the faintest imprint of teeth against the junction where her shoulder met her neck as he poured himself into her. It would fade in a few minutes, a ghost of what could have been.

She sagged against him, and he wrapped his arms around her, moving his fingers across her spine as their heart rates slowed.

“Ben?” she asked after several long moments of silence, just listening to their shared breathing, his cock occasionally twitching to spurt more into her.
He moved his face from where it had been resting against her hair to look down at her. She lifted her head from his shoulder, her eyes sleepy again as she gazed back at him. “Hmm?” His hand lifted to tuck a strand of hair behind her ear before settling on her lower back again.

“Are there others like you?”

“Yes. Not many, but there are others.” He frowned, thinking back to the others he had worked with like Yvetri. There had been eight total; himself, Yvetri, four others, Snoke and Hux. That was excluding any individuals Snoke had deemed 'expendable'.

She fell silent, twirling a lock of his hair between her fingertips. “How did it happen? With you, I mean.”

His jaw tightened, and he chewed on the inside of his cheek as he tore his eyes from hers, staring at something over her shoulder.

_How did it happen?_

He cleared his throat and adjusted her on his lap, settling into a more comfortable position for them to wait for his knot to deflate.

“I...it might be easier to start from the beginning,” he said, not able to meet her eyes as he began the story. It was replaying in his head like a movie. “When I was younger, a teenager, I went through my rebellious phase. Mom was a politician, dad smuggled guns.” She knew this part already, but she nodded along encouragingly, so he continued. “Mom was always off working, trying to pass new bills, upholding her perfect facade for the public. When she and my dad were together, they fought all the time, usually about what to do with me.” He shrugged, then gave her a small conspiratorial smile. “I got into a lot of trouble, and mom had to bail me out a lot. Fighting, drinking in public, a few break-ins. Stupid teenager stuff. I did it for attention; I was left alone a lot as a kid.”

“Didn't they leave you with a nanny or something?” She asked, a frown marring her pretty face.

“For a while, yeah,” he nodded. “But she quit after a few months. Never gave a reason why. Anyway, when I was about nineteen, I got involved with the wrong crowd.”

“That's beginning to sound like an understatement,” she snorted.

“You have no idea,” he chuckled darkly. “I had known about Anakin being a dirty cop. It was hush-hush around the house, but you’d hear whispers of how amazing he'd been. How much of a legend he was. I decided I wanted to be a legend too.”

He sighed heavily and rubbed at his eyes. He hadn't gotten much sleep in the past few days, and it was starting to catch up to him.

“So I went looking for people who’d known him, worked with him. Told them I was his grandson and it kind of got my foot in the door. I became what they call an enforcer, basically someone that protects the group while they’re out doing mob business. I liked it. The pay was great, and it made me feel important. I was good at it, and it showed. I moved up quickly, getting more dangerous jobs within the group.”

He glanced over at her, hating the way her brows were knit together in worry. Obviously he’d come out of it okay, but this was her first time hearing it. “It wasn't enough, though. Something was missing. And then Snoke found me.”

She tilted her head at him, confusion replacing the concern. His knot decided that was the perfect
time to release itself and he slipped out of her, his cum pouring out. She moved off of his lap, wincing slightly as she laid back down against the pillows. “Snoke?” she asked, watching him as he unconsciously dragged his fingers through the puddle left behind. She leaned back up, reaching for his hand. Raising an eyebrow, he gave it to her, watching as she pulled it to her mouth and sucked his fingers clean. He groaned at the sight, momentarily spent, though his length gave a half-hearted throb. She grinned wickedly at him, coming off of his fingers with a loud pop before settling back against the bed again.

It took a moment for him to regather his thoughts. “I thought he was just another mob boss trying to recruit me. He told me the truth about what happened to Anakin, and then said that I could become as great as he was. Anakin had become a werewolf, and Snoke offered me that same power, to become as great as my grandfather.” He laughed again, though it was devoid of any humor. “I thought he was fucking nuts. I mean, werewolves don't exist, right?”

She nodded silently, drawing the sheet up around her body, patting the space beside her. “Come here.”

He crawled up beside her, laying down against the cool fabric. Rey rolled over and curled her body against his, resting her head against his chest.

“But he showed me that they do. And then he convinced me that it was the only option. It was stupid. I was stupid. I never should have done it. But I let him bite me. The pain of going through your first shift is excruciating. It was easily the worst physical pain I’d ever experienced.”

“What was it like?”

He closed his eyes, remembering the agony and trying to decide how best to describe it. “It’s like...your body is on fire. Like every bone is breaking simultaneously. I don’t know how else to explain it. It’s a one-of-a-kind experience.”

“That sounds awful,” she said quietly, wrapping her arm across him. “Is it like that everytime?”

He shook his head, “No, not anymore. The first few times are the hardest. It still hurts, don't get me wrong, but it’s nothing like it used to be…” His voice trailed off, and he thought she’d fallen asleep, but she spoke again, surprising him.

“And then what happened?”

He ran his fingers through her hair, carefully working out any tangles. “And then I started working for him. It was pretty much more of the same. Running guns and other things, though it evolved quickly. Pretty soon, I was doing more than just enforcing. I was an assassin without even realizing it. Things were easy to make look like an animal attack.”

She stiffened slightly against him, and he could smell a wave of fear roll off of her. He was half-expecting her to bolt or to tell him to leave. “So you've killed people, then.” It wasn't a question.

“I have,” he murmured, staring up at the ceiling. “Mainly for self-defense. On these runs, we'd get attacked, so in those situations, it was kill or be killed.”

“Were there any that weren't for self-defense?” Her voice sounded so small, wary. He hated hearing it directed at him.

“Two.”

“What happened?” She was wide awake now, and he couldn't blame her. She was laying next to a
murderer, after all.

“My parents found out how deep I was in. My dad tried to use his connections to get me out. We were doing a run--me and my 'pack'. A bunch of other wolves Snoke assigned to me. They called themselves Knights, for some reason. They were practically family. Anyway, we were doing this run, and suddenly, my dad was there. He tried to talk me into coming home. I'm not sure what happened, but out of nowhere, there was gunfire. I have two wolf forms. One pure wolf and one a mixture of human and wolf. When I shifted into the second one, I tried to shove him out of the way…” His breath hitched and he felt the sting of tears in his eyes at the memory. He took a deep breath, trying to calm himself.

“It’s okay, you don't have to continue--”

“No, I do,” he interrupted. “I went to shove him, and in doing so, I accidentally plunged my hand into his chest. I killed him, and I didn’t mean to. The look on his face…” he choked back a sob, his free hand coming up to wipe at his eyes. His chest constricted with the pain of reliving his worst nightmare, and he vaguely registered Rey tightening her arm around him.

“Ben, it was an accident. You didn't mean to,” she offered, as if that was supposed to help.

“That doesn't make him any less dead,” he bit out. “He may have been a shitty father, but I had no desire to kill him. It was at that point I realized just how far down the rabbit hole I was. I was completely out of my league. I killed Snoke, too, for putting me in that situation. And I got out. The Knights aren't too happy with that. The woman from the woods was one of them. Yvetri Ren, is her name. She also has other personal motives for wanting me dead. But she also wants you dead, and I can't let that happen.”

She lifted herself up to look at him, meeting his gaze, her own expression serious. “So what happens now?”

There was a long period where he simply looked at her. “It’s up to you. You know my story in its entirety now. Do you want me to go? Because I will. I'll leave right now and you'll never have to see me again.”

“I don't know. This is a lot to process,” she admitted, looking away from him. He followed her line of sight, staring out the window. It looked like it had finally stopped snowing.

She shifted, sending a fresh wave of her scent toward him. It filled his nose, thick and unmistakable. He took another deep breath in, just to make sure, before asking, “Rey...why do you smell like a werewolf?”
Chapter 13: What's In Your Head?

The response to this fic just fucking fantastic. Some of you have recognized me on Facebook in groups, and honestly, that just tickles me shitless! I'm sorry this chapter was a little slower to get updated, especially after that cliffhanger. I type every chapter on my phone instead of a computer, so sometimes it gets more tedious.

That being said, we have 350 subscriptions to this story! That means 350 emails go out whenever it gets updated! This wouldn't be possible without you guys and your support.

Random aside: I also started on my Star Wars tattoo sleeve! Right now, I've got a healing Kylo Ren on my right shoulder, and I'm so fucking excited for more! (You guys probably didn't need to know that/don't care, but I had to share!)

I hope you all enjoy this installment~

See the end of the chapter for more notes

But you see, it's not me

It's not my family

In your head, in your head, they are fighting

With their tanks, and their bombs

And their bombs, and their drones

In your head, in your head, they are crying

“What?” Her body turned to stone against him, even more so than before. She was still processing through so much information from the last hour or so, trying to sort through it and make sense of it all.

“Why do you smell like a werewolf?” he repeated, slowly, maybe even waringly.

Frowning, she sat up, pulling the sheet up higher to cover her chest. “I don't know. I mean, you did just come all over me. It makes sense I'd smell like you.”

He shook his head, sitting up beside her. Lifting a hand, he pushed her hair away from her neck and leaned in close, inhaling deeply. “You do, not that I'm complaining, but there's something else.
Your scent is different.”

Her mind reeled. Oh god, was she turning into one? She didn’t want that; she was just coming to grips that this wasn’t some screwed up dream. It was reality, where werewolves truly existed, and she’d been dumped head-first into their world. No, no, no.

“I’m not like you!” she cried, a bit too loudly as she looked at him, eyes wide. He recoiled as though she’d struck him, hurt showing in his eyes, though he looked away from her to hide it. His jaw clenched as the hurt gave way to anger, his hands curling into fists against the sheets.

She bit her lip, immediately regretting her words. She hadn’t intended for it to come out like that. Like she was prejudiced against his kind. But wasn’t that the problem. Already, she was mentally separating herself from him, throwing down a line between human and not.

He unfolded himself from the bed, standing at the edge with his back to her. “Didn’t bother you when you wanted me to fuck you,” he said, his voice dangerously low.

“I didn’t mean for it to sound that way. I just...I’m not a werewolf. I can't be; I've never shifted or anything.” She followed the contours of his back, down to the slope of his backside, silhouetted against the light coming in from the window.

He was quiet, flexing his fingers in thought as she watched. “Obi-Wan...did he act strangely at all? Any behaviors that you would recognize now that you know about us?”

She considered it, shuffling through every memory she could as she scratched a spot on her neck, searching for any hint, any sign that Obi-Wan had been more than he'd appeared. “No, not that I can think of.”

“How did he die?”

“Cancer. Why?” She wasn't sure where he was going with this line of thought.

He turned to her then, frowning. “He wasn't a werewolf. We don't get sick. I was just thinking, if he passed down some genes to you, it could be something recessive.”

“...I wasn't related to him,” she said quietly, picking at a loose thread on the edge of the sheet.

“What?” he asked, his frown deepening with confusion.

“I was adopted,” She couldn't meet his eyes, shame filling her. “when I was young. I don't know who my parents are. I was in a foster home for a few years, until I was seven. The man running it, Unkar Plutt--he was awful. He'd withhold food and lock us in our room for days at a time. Obi-Wan got me out of there.”

She could practically hear Ben’s teeth grinding together at the new information, his fury rolling off of him in waves. He paced the room, his heavy footsteps somehow quiet against the carpet. “Fuck,” he snarled, shoulders tense. “Fuck!” It was a shout this time, reverberating off of the walls, lingering before dissipating. Suddenly, he turned to her, his eyes burning. “Is he still alive?”

Rey felt all of the blood drain from her face at the very thinly veiled threat in his tone. She took him in again, eyes scanning over the planes of his chest. The muscles were twitching, jumping without any provocation. He flexed his hands, and in the dim light streaming in, she thought the bones looked odd; unnaturally elongated. “I-I don't know. The last thing I had heard was that he was still running a foster home. Why?”
She scrambled out of the bed and rushed over to him, placing her hands on the sides of his neck, holding them there. His pulse fluttered against her hand, solid and alive. She trailed her hands slowly over his clavicles, her thumbs brushing against the hollow of his throat before finally coming to a stop on his chest. The tendons were still jumping erratically beneath her fingers, but they began to slow, growing weaker in their intensity until they finally died away.

He inhaled sharply through his nose, his eyes darkening further as he stared at her for a long moment before saying, “Don’t ever let me catch him, Rey. I mean it.”

She believed every word he’d just said, taking it for the promise it was. If he ever ran into Plutt, it wasn't going to end well. “You can’t kill him,” she replied, trying to choose her words carefully.

He blinked at her, a growl spilling from his throat as his eyes narrowed. “I never said I was going to kill him. But when I'm done, he’s going to wish he was dead.”

He pushed her hands from his chest and shouldered past her. Mentally, she cursed herself. She was doing it again, jumping to the wrong conclusion and assuming the worst.

“And before you start thinking I'm some kind of animal, why don't you ask me what I'm thinking first instead, especially since it looks like you're on your way to becoming one as well,” he barked, heading down the hallway and to the living room. She followed after him, shivering against the chill of the cold house. She’d been either snuggled up next to him or doing more strenuous activities and hadn't noticed just how freezing it was.

“I’m sorry,” she finally murmured, watching as he gathered his shirt from the floor and slid it back over his head. His pants went on next, and when he was finally fully clothed again, she realized just how much she missed the sight. “I shouldn't have said that. Or that I’m not like you…”

It was all too new, too real. She didn't necessarily feel any different. She wasn't any more curvy, didn't feel like she radiated heat the way he did. If anything, she was a little bit more tingly than normal, like her skin was vibrating. He’d mentioned his rut, and she’d experienced it first-hand, but she didn't have the overwhelming urge to jump his bones—not anymore more than normal, anyway.

She didn't have the urge to shed one skin for another, and she couldn't even begin to comprehend what that must be like. For all it was worth, though, she wanted to learn. She wanted him to be able to trust her, and she wanted to have enough sense to not blurt out stupid, hurtful shit.

“I can't believe you'd assume I'd go and kill someone,” he muttered, watching Daisy slink off of the back of the couch.

“I shouldn't have jumped that far, I'm sorry. With what happened to your father--”

“It was an accident!” he hissed, turning a murderous glare to her, his eyes flashing in the darkness.

“--and with what happened to Snoke,” she continued, ignoring his outburst, “it was still really fresh in my head. If I really thought you were like that, I'd have kicked you out right away.”

He said nothing, his jaw set.

Stepping closer to him, she gently slid her arms around his waist, hugging herself to him. “What I do know, is that I want you. All of you. For some reason I can't fathom.”

For a long moment, she wondered if she'd made a mistake, if he was going to refuse her apology. After what seemed like ages, he finally sighed and pulled her closer, resting his cheek against the top of her head as one hand absently stroked her hair.
“I want you, too,” he murmured, “but I wonder if you do carry some wolf DNA that might have
gotten triggered somehow.”

“Triggered?” she asked, her voice muffled against the fabric of his shirt.

“I’ve slept with other women,” he admitted, and Rey felt both a spark of jealousy and of delight at
how apologetic it sounded. “This hasn’t happened before. Then again, I’ve also never knotted anyone
else and I don’t plan to. I don’t know if maybe coming inside you or knotting you did something.”

She opened her mouth to speak, but no words came. She didn't really know how to respond to
that.

“So, what exactly does knotting signify, if you've only done it with me?”

From where her face was pressed against his chest, she could feel his heart speed up, the heavy
thump of it turning to something frantic, beating desperately against his ribs to free itself. That
couldn't be a good sign.

She pulled back from him and tilted her face up to see him better. He was flushed, his face darker
than normal. “Ben…” she prodded, finally reaching up to pull his gaze down to hers. “What did you
do?”

He shrugged helplessly, having the grace to look embarrassed. “With werewolves, once
we...claim a mate, it's for life.” It was a nice way of answering the question without actually
answering.

“That's...what you did with me, when you thought I was human.” She stepped back, her arms
folded across her chest, her eyebrow raising at him in disbelief. If she was understanding this
correctly, he had just bound them together in some sort of unofficial marriage.

“Well, I did it, since I'm for sure the werewolf here. We don't know what exactly you are yet.” He
ran his hand through his hair, nervousness making his movements jerky and unrefined. “But in
essence, yes. I bound myself to you. That doesn't necessarily mean you're bound to me since you
aren't one. Unless you want to,” he added almost hopefully.

There was a giant headache forming right between her eyes as yet more information was dumped
on her. Rey rubbed her face slowly, dragging the skin of her cheeks down as she turned and stomped
away from him. No, she was definitely in a fantasy. Some dream where this amazingly attractive,
confusing, and dominant man was making decisions for her.

“What happens if I refuse your claim?” she gritted out over her shoulder, her hair hanging over
one eye so that she couldn’t see him behind her. “What if I don't want you to be bound to me?”

She wasn't ready for any of this. To being tied to one person right away--one person that she didn’t
even know all that well, at that. Sure, he was amazingly sweet, but there were times, like this, when
he was so possessive, and it infuriated her. Her blood started to boil the longer she thought about it,
how her choice in the matter hadn't seemed to give him a second thought.

“Then you're free to live your life. You can go marry whoever you want, however you want. I
respect that,” he said softly, his voice almost lost to the darkness.

“And what happens to you?” She wanted to know everything about this strange, fucked up bond.

He shrugged. “Does it really matter?” As she turned to fully face him with a glare, he held up his
hands in surrender and continued. “I meant what I said. It’s a life-bond for us. I’ve devoted myself to
you, whether you accept that or not. There won't be anyone else for me.”

She wanted to rip her hair out, groaning loudly. “Why?! Why would you do that?! You barely know me! I barely know you!” She started stalking across the room, back and forth, ignoring Daisy’s hiss as she passed by.

“I know enough,” he countered, stepping closer. “It didn't used to mean a lifemate, though. We have different types of werewolves; alphas, betas, and omegas. Omegas are nearly extinct. I've never met one, honestly. They're submissive, and just as I go through ruts, they go through heats. Theirs are more intense than a rut, and last longer. Usually about a week or so. They generally find an alpha to protect them and help them through it before separating when the heat has passed. An alpha’s knot is the only thing that can truly satisfy the urge to mate, before the next wave hits. Aside from impregnation.” Realization dawned on him a second later. “Speaking of which, are you on birth control? I didn't exactly ask before…”

“Yes, I'm on birth control,” she snapped, ignoring the way his face fell. “I got the shot a couple months ago to help with heavy periods, if you must know.”

She mulled his words over, running her eyes up and down his frame as she thought. He was the epitome of an alpha, and he obviously had the knot to prove it. Why oh why did the thought of it make her press her thighs together? “What about betas?”

“They're neutral, the closest to human out of all of us. They shift, but they don't go through cycles like alphas or omegas.” He looked down suddenly, and she followed his gaze, watching Daisy sniff cautiously at his pant leg. Slowly, he bent down and stroked his fingertips across her spine, moving them to her face for her to inspect when she backed away from his touch.

The cat snuffled for a long moment, her mouth opening to further examine his smell. Finally, the tip of her tail twitched and she turned, padding calmly back into the bedroom.

He stood back to his towering height once more, focusing on Rey again. “The thing between an alpha and an omega now is basically a promise. Like marriage, without the ceremony.”

“I'm not ready for any of that, Ben,” she muttered, looking down at her hands. She was still furious with him, but she was starting to think she was mostly angry at herself. He had warned her. The words he'd spoken not two hours before came to the forefront of her mind.

*It's a claiming thing between an alpha and their omega.*

*Something only mates do.*

*It’s different than just sex. It’s more.*

He’d told her--maybe not explained it fully--but he had definitely told her it was more than just frantic fucking. And she'd completely discarded the information in her haste to get him undressed and inside her.

Tears began to well up in her eyes, spilling over to trail down her cheeks. She felt so stupid, so young compared to him. She didn't know exactly how old he was, but the obvious difference in their ages was staggering her, forcing her breath to come faster, breaking past her lips in sobs. It was too much, too much to process.

Somewhere in the back of her mind, she recognized this as a panic attack. She hadn't had an episode in years, and now it was hitting her like a freight train under the stress.
Another image came unbidden to her; the one of the happy family that had bought Obi-Wan’s home before she’d moved to Corellia. She remembered the intense feeling of longing she’d had when she’d seen the parents together and the way their children had run around the lawn.

And Ben was offering her that. He may not have outright said anything about kids, but she had the distinct feeling he wanted some. He’d looked so disappointed when she’d told him she was on birth control.

She dropped her face into her hands, her shoulders shaking with the intensity.

If only there was some way she could look into the future and see how this was all going to play out, then she’d be able to relax and accept it.

She sensed him move closer, felt his fingers cup her chin and raise her face to his. His eyes looked mournful, though blurry through her tears. With the backs of his fingers, he brushed the tears away before pulling her into his chest, his arms winding around her shoulders. She hugged herself closer to him, leaving wet stains on his shirt. He didn't seem to mind, though, and through the sounds coming from her, she could hear him murmuring, “I’m sorry, I'm so sorry, Rey. I never should have brought you into my mess.”

When her face was finally dry, she inhaled a shaky breath and slid from his warm embrace.

He was looking at her warily, like an animal awaiting punishment. She still hadn't decided anything, still didn't know what she was going to do about any of this. What she did know was that she hated seeing that look on his face, knowing she was the cause of it.

Finally, she reached forward to grasp his hand, so large against her own. “I’m tired, Ben,” she whispered. She turned then, leading him back down the hallway and into her bedroom.

Once they reached the bed, she took in the sight of it; rumpled sheets, the pillows smushed against one another for easier snuggling. All she wanted was to curl back up in it, and to worry about life another day.

Crawling back into her spot, she laid down and pulled the blankets up before looking over to him expectantly. He was standing by the edge, as though he wasn't sure what she wanted from him. At her look, he placed one knee on the bed to start getting in beside her, but she stopped him with a hand on his shoulder. “No clothes,” she told him softly. There was no heat to her words, no lust guiding her thoughts. She just wanted to wrap herself up in him and sleep.

He raised an eyebrow, but said nothing as he backed off the bed again, holding her eyes as he stripped his clothing away.

When they were gone, he laid down facing her, his eyes curious and slightly hopeful again. His lashes looked impossibly dark and full, the same dark shade as his hair.

She rolled away, though at the same time she wiggled herself so that he was flush against her back. Reaching blindly behind her, she grabbed his hand again and dragged it across her torso.

Her eyes closed, and she fell asleep to the thudding of his heart against her spine and his breath against her neck.

Chapter End Notes
Lyrics are "Zombie" by Bad Wolves. The original is by The Cranberries, but I love this version so much. It's so haunting, and I feel like it fits with this chapter. I really recommend a listen!
Chapter 14: Rey Jakken...

Chapter Notes

I'm total trash. Have I told you guys that yet? *snickers*
Anywho, I wrote the second half of this while drunk off my ass last night. Any errors are absolutely my fault and will be corrected.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

In the heat of the moment when fear has you frozen

You're crashing and burning when life's at its coldest

Don't fall too far from who you are

They can cut us but we'll wear our scars

---

Rey was boiling. The firm weight of Ben against her back was nearly too much to bear, although he was a fantastic cuddler. Even if he was sporting a glorious morning wood that pressed into her lower back. In any other situation, she might have enjoyed it, but right now she needed to get out of the bed and breathe. She was drenched in sweat, the salty tang of it hitting her in abundance.

Good fucking lord, she needed to shower. Maybe a cold one to get rid of this scalding heat.

Opening her eyes, she was met with the red blinking of her alarm clock, the time flashing at four-thirty six. Groaning, she pushed her face back into the pillow for a moment, listening to Ben’s deep, even breathing.

The light coming in from the window suggested it was sometime in the early morning, a stark contrast to what her alarm had claimed.

Wait, that meant the power was back on.

Sure enough, the longer she looked, the more evidence presented itself to her. The curtains were rustling with the air blowing from the vents, and she heard the clanking of ice being made in the freezer. The television had flipped back on, the quiet murmur of a news reporter filling the living room. Strange that she could make out everything the woman was saying.

They were still talking about the missing person from two days ago. Curious, she went to investigate, slowly peeling herself away from Ben, who tightened his hold on her, grumbling something in his sleep.
She looked over her shoulder at him then. His brow was furrowed, his mouth turned down slightly, and his hair was a wild mess against the pillow.

She twisted again, this time to face him, her current body temperature be damned. Stroking her fingers lightly across his face, she tried to smooth the frown away. When that didn't work, she leaned down and pressed her lips lightly to the corner of his mouth.

He groaned, eyes never opening, one hand reaching up to tangle into her hair as he pulled her up for a proper kiss. It was soft, undemanding. It was one of comfort and reassurance, a silent yearning.

Her eyes fluttered shut, and one thing she noticed now that they weren't trying to immediately tear their clothes off, was that his mouth was soft and warm, much like the rest of him. Where as he was all hard lines and firm muscle everywhere else, his lips were plush and full.

Slowly, she pulled away, taking in a deep breath. When she looked at him, he was watching her through half-lidded eyes, his gaze hungry again, though he gave her a sleepy smile.

She offered him her own smile, letting her eyes travel lower to where the sheet was tented just between his thighs. If she looked hard enough, she could almost see the darkness of his skin there through the fabric.

Biting her lip, she reached a hand out and brushed her fingers along the head of him through it, making his eyes drift closed again, his jaw falling slack even as his hips bucked up slightly.

She shot him a devious grin, her other hand sliding up to tug the sheet lower. As she wrapped her hand around his considerable length, and gave a few experimental strokes, she heard something from the television that made her heart nearly stop.

She glanced up to Ben to see if he'd heard it too, and though he looked frustrated that she'd stopped, he nodded an assent. Slipping off the bed, she hurried to the living room to see if her fears were confirmed.

There, on the screen and plain as day, was a photo of Matt. There were big bold letters beneath the photo of his smiling face that claimed he was missing, and if anyone had seen him to call the police.

One hand flew up to cover her mouth, her eyes wide. She'd seen Matt earlier that day, hadn't she? He'd been working on her house with all of the other guys, right?

Now that she thought more about it, he hadn't been there. She was getting mixed up from a previous day in the week where they'd all started blurring together.

Ben came to stand beside her, still hard and thick, but his eyes were trained on the screen with a startling intensity. He wrapped an arm around her waist, more as a comfort than anything else.

“What do you think happened to him?” she asked quietly, like if she spoke any louder the news reporter would hear her, bringing her hand up to clutch his arm.

He was quiet beside her, his jaw clenching repeatedly. “He's dead,” he finally said, turning to look at her. “Yvetri killed him in the woods.” His eyes fell to where she was gripping him, her nails leaving crescent moon-shaped imprints in his skin.

“What?!” she gasped.

“When you saw us in the woods, she was gloating about it. He was there, in the snow. If you'd
stepped any closer, you'd have probably seen his body, but I'm glad you didn't. It was...not a swift death," he finished quietly, searching her eyes with his own. Gingerly, he lifted his hands and placed them on her shoulders, seriousness obscuring his expression. “Rey, you need to understand something before you make any decisions about me, us, or any of this. This is my world; stuff like this happens all the time. It isn't some fantasyland where magic happens and everything is perfect. This is real.”

Looking up at him, she bit her bottom lip and fought the tears that were threatening to spill over. All she seemed to be doing was crying lately, and it wouldn't change anything. It wouldn't bring Matt back, nor would it make her feel any better, either.

Poor Matt. His family was obviously worried sick about him, and they'd never see this smiling face again. His parents would never be able to hug their son, and he'd never have any kids of his own.

“We need to call the police then, don't we? Tell them where his body is?” Already, she was moving away from him to root for her cell phone. It had been stashed somewhere in her jacket, useless until the signal towers had been put back up. The battery was hovering at about three percent, but it should just be enough to make one phone call. She had nine-one-one dialed, she just had to press the green phone icon to connect the call.

“No,” Ben said from behind her, approaching quickly and reaching around her to pluck the phone from her hands. She tried to snatch it back from him, glaring when he held it behind his back. “Don’t move, don’t speak, just listen to me, Rey,” he said, his voice dropping several octaves, tone authoritative, commanding.

Her body froze against her will, her arms dropping to her sides. She looked at him with wide eyes, trying to figure out what the hell he had just done to her. But she listened.

“The police can’t know about this. His family can never know, either. They have to believe he's just gone. Because then the police will launch an investigation, and it would expose us. It would start a mass panic, and we’d be hunted to extinction.” He frowned when she remained completely still, looking like she was locked in place. “Rey?” he asked, and her mouth opened to answer, but no response came out.

What the shit was going on?!

Terror crept into his eyes, and he circled her quickly, inspecting her for any sign that something was wrong, aside from the obvious. She was breathing on her own, though it was coming a bit faster with the panic. She tried to turn her head to follow him, only to find she couldn't.

Finally, he came to a stop and met her eyes again, understanding finally settling in them. His eyebrows raised, his mouth parted and rounded in a slight 'o'.

“Relax, Rey,” he demanded, and the invisible force that had been holding her lifted instantly.

She inhaled sharply, pinning him with a glare. “What was that?” she snarled, poking him roughly in the chest, right where it was still sore from Yvetri. He winced and reached a hand up to rub the spot.

“That was an alpha command. It sometimes just slips out, and I had no idea it would even work on you. I'm sorry, it won't happen again.” He looked sincerely apologetic, his shoulders hunched down a bit.
She crossed her arms under her breasts, the phone momentarily pushed to the back of her mind. She'd come back to it in a minute. “An alpha command?” she demanded. “What the hell is an ‘alpha command’?”

He sighed heavily, pinching the bridge of his nose with his free fingers. “It only works on betas and omegas. Generally, it’s only used when an omega is hurting themselves during heat. It’s to calm them down and keep them still until they can be taken care of.” He handed her phone back to her now that she’d heard him speak. “Matt’s been buried. I took care of it that night after I went after Yvetri. I chased her for a bit, but even wounded, she managed to make it out of the woods and to her car. She sped off, probably to get back to Hux and report.”

“Hux?” She clenched the phone more tightly, not liking where this was going. This was a lot more complicated than she’d thought.

“He was Snoke’s other trainee. My rival, I guess you could call it; we never got along. When I got out, he threatened to send the Knights after me, and I guess he’s finally getting around to it.” He shrugged, then added. “But now I’m afraid they’ll come after you. I’d like to stay around, if that’s okay. It doesn't have to be here. We could go to my apartment if you want, but I don't want to leave you alone.”

She was already shaking her head. She was not going to be forced out of her own home, damn it! “No,” she hissed fiercely. “I want to stay.”

He studied her for a moment, maybe to test her resolve, but she planted herself firmly in front of him, hands on her hips. “All right,” he nodded once. “If you notice anything odd around your property, let me know.” Bending down to cup her cheeks, he pressed a gentle kiss to her forehead. “I’m sorry about Matt,” he murmured against her skin before pulling away.

“Wait,” she called after him, gripping his hand and turning him back around to face her. “If you're going to stay here, you're going to need some clothes. And a shower. Honestly, I can't remember the last time I took a shower.”

A wicked smirk spread across his lips and he glanced down at her body, then to his, where his cock was slowly stirring back to life. “I don't think either of us needs any clothes for at least the next few hours.” Without warning, he hoisted her into his arms, sliding one under her thighs, the other around her back.

She squealed in protest, wrapping her arms around his neck. She clung to him, laughing against his skin. Experimentally, she licked a line across his throat. He groaned in response, walking them down the hallway to the bathroom. The door was unlatched and he kicked it open, stepping inside and depositing Rey on the counter. He flipped on the light and she blinked against the harshness, feeling his warmth disappear as he stepped away to mess with the knobs in the shower.

It was an old, ugly thing. One of those shower bathtub combinations. The tub wasn't even a claw foot to give it some character. There was a cheery bright yellow curtain to make it seem a little more homey, but it didn't match the weird, olive green tile that looked like something out of the seventies.

“I'm redoing this bathroom next,” he muttered under his breath, his deep bass echoing slightly from behind the curtain.

She laughed again before chewing her cheek. There was something she'd thought of, a nice medium between what they'd both wanted out of this relationship. “Ben?”

He lifted his body out of the shower once the water was running, slowly warming up. “Hmm?”
He walked back over to her, large hands gripping her thighs and spreading her wide so that he could stand between them.

She stared at the line where his collarbones met, swooping down to form the perfect hollow. Raising her hand, she trailed her fingertips along the smooth skin there. It caused a shudder to go through him, goosebumps appearing from her caress. His own thumbs stroked their way up to the area where her legs met her hips, dipping into that crease there. She met his eyes again, drawn in by the hungry gaze he was levelling at her. “I don't think I'm ready for that whole bonded for life thing yet—”

He tensed, his eyes losing some of their heat.

“—but I also want to be with you. So how about we date a bit first? Exclusively.”

He tilted his head at her, his dark mane of hair falling across his forehead as his face softened. Damn, that was adorable. “You mean as my girlfriend?”

She felt blood rush to her cheeks and ducked her head a bit before smiling shyly and nodding at him. “Yeah. It's just, you've been a lot of firsts for me, and I want the opportunity to do this right and really get to know you.”

He smiled then, flashing slightly crooked teeth that made her heart constrict a bit tighter. How could this man with a body to die for, hair to envy, and such soulful eyes be so god-damned cute? “I'd really like that. I've never had one before; it would be a first for me, too.”

Her blush deepened, elated by the thought that she was his first anything. Suddenly, he dropped onto one knee before her and took her hand in his, looking up at her with faux seriousness, his dark eyes sparkling. “Rey Jakken, would you do me the honor of being my girlfriend?”

She grinned so hard her face hurt, nodding and pulling him up to crush her mouth to his. “Yes,” she breathed into him as he parted his lips for her. “A million yeses.” She slipped her tongue in to dance with his like she hadn't eaten in days. Pulling back to his bottom lip, she took it in between her teeth and bit gently, giving it a tug when a small sound escaped him. Oh, he really liked that. She weaved her hands into the hair on either side of his head and pulled him closer, pressing his hot, thick cock against her inner thigh.

His hands groped blindly at her hips, kneading the soft flesh there before slipping around to dance across her lower back. Her legs wrapped around him, low enough for her calves to brush against the backs of his legs, caging him in against her.

He took her mouth like that first time, all passion and want, though there was something else mixed in there, as well.

Suddenly, he slid his hands under her ass and lifted her up against him. She shifted her legs in response to get better leverage, and he broke from her mouth panting, stepping carefully into the shower with her, the water pounding against his back.

He pressed her against the ugly tiled wall, her back slipping up as he pushed his chest to hers. Already it was looking much better. It had faded mostly to that greenish yellow color of healing bruises.

She clung to him, her fingers digging into his shoulders as she rubbed herself down against his cock. Somewhere in the back of her mind, she knew this wasn't a really good position to get knotted in, but she didn't want to stop. No, not at all. With the way he was holding her, he’d have to pull out
or not go all the way in like she desperately wanted him to. He was long enough that he hit her cervix and wide enough that the stretch burned in a way that made her ache afterward. But it was worth it, so worth every second of it. They’d had sex twice now, and while she was a fresh non-virgin, she wanted more. Her friend Jess had said she was sore for a few days after her first time. Rey knew that any sex she might have had with anyone not a werewolf wouldn’t even compare.

While Rey was a bit tender, but that didn’t make her want it any less. She felt connected to Ben when they were like this, connected in a way she never had been before.

The water from the showerhead matted his hair and his ears poked through between the drenched locks. She ran her finger along the tops of them as he kissed across the top part of her chest, his mouth open, leaving a light trail of saliva that slid down her body in the water streams. Remembering vaguely that he had enjoyed his ears being scratched as a wolf, she reached behind it, nudging the wet hair away and rubbed the spot where his ear connected to his head.

He moaned, long and low, his wet kisses turning into nips as he rutted against her, his cock sliding sweetly against her clit, back and forth, over and over. She leaned backwards, the tile cool against her skull as he moved, lifting himself from her chest to watch her. Her eyes were half closed, her entire lower half throbbing with need.

“Ben,” she whispered, groaning as one of his hands came up to pinch and pull at her nipple, tugging it to peak under his attentions. “Ben, my alpha Ben.” Her chest arched against his touch, separating from the wall behind her, coolness hitting her back from where she had been resting against it.

He froze at her words, his eyes bleeding almost fully to black, his lips parting to inhale deeply before rumbling, “Say it again.” He reached one hand down between them to grip himself, lining himself up against her entrance. She could feel him pulsing, twitching against her as he waited, his breath coming in short gasps.

Lifting her head away from the tile, she leaned down to nip at his ear, her hands digging in deeper as she whispered against it, “Fuck me, Alpha. My alpha.”

He slid into her with one firm thrust, filling her completely. She whined against his skin, already trying her best to move against him. Steam was filling the shower, collecting on the walls in droplets that fell down in moments, heavy in a way that did not compare to how she felt. He was hard, unbelievably so, inside of her, and she braced herself against his shoulders again as she began to try and lift herself off of him, only to be stopped by his hands on her hips.

She felt so full, so unbelievably stretched as he simply stayed there, enjoying her heat and her softness. It frustrated her though; she wanted him to move. A very inhuman snarl left her throat as she gripped him by the back of his hair, pulling roughly in a silent plea.

By now, she had come to learn that he liked a bit of pain, and she wasn't averse to giving it to him.

His hold on her hips tightened, and he slid back out slowly, achingly so. He looked up to her then, “Are you sure?”

It was sweet of him to ask, really. She nodded rapidly, clenching her walls as tightly as she could around him. “Yes, please. Fuck me, Alpha. I need you. Need your knot.”

He growled, deep in the back of his throat and pushed forward, asking her body to take more of him. The air left her lungs, leaving her gasping as he pulled out and did it again, and again, his arms strong and sturdy around her thighs.
It occurred to her then that he could probably just hold her up without the support of a wall and fuck her that way. The thought brought a cry from her lips, combined with the feeling of him between her thighs, buried deep within her.

He thrust in again, harder now, wrenching a moan from her. He filled her to the brim and still he fought for more, to get her to take that last little bit. Already, she could feel the knot at the base of his cock begin to swell, could feel it with every push of his hips. It rubbed against her clit, sending shockwaves of pleasure spiking through her.

She cried out incoherently for him, and he seemed to understand. Suddenly, she was dropped to her feet and spun around by firm hands on her hips. He pushed her against the wall again, grabbing her waist and pulling it toward him. He draped himself across her back, trailing his lips across her shoulders, the heavy weight of him grounding her, making her feel secure. Moving against her with a ferocity she had yet to experience from him, he groaned against her ear.

One of his hands sought hers, and as he interlaced their fingers and dragged them over her head, he pounded into her in earnest, her body taking him easily. His other hand still gripped her waist, his fingers clawing in until the point of pain as he drove himself deeper, bringing her body further, higher with need.

Already she could feel her orgasm approaching, rearing its head and making her free hand scrabble at the slippery tile by her breast. Her skin tingled everywhere, oversensitized by the hot water and the way his body rocked into hers. He found his rhythm, each stroke dragging over that one spot that had her crying out.

Her fingers tightened around his, whitening with the force of it as she pushed her rear back against him, meeting his thrusts. His breath was scalding against her neck, his nose buried in her hair as he brought her closer to the edge.

One particularly hard pump of his hips had her back arching, a loud, ragged moan falling from her as she clenched down around him, holding him within. He stiffened against her back, making a sound that was somewhere between a curse and a groan.

Instantly, she felt him swell inside of her, his knot filling her and pushing against that spongy patch of nerves. It made her convulse again, her eyes rolling as she dropped her head back against his hard shoulder.

His heart thundered against her back as he came, a low hiss coming from him with each throb of his cock as he filled her. His knot prevented most of it from escaping, but there was so much of it with nowhere else to go that she could feel some of it seeping out to trail down her thighs and get washed away in the water raining down.

He pressed a kiss against her temple before nuzzling into her hair, his arms wrapping around her to hold her close.

After a few minutes, he peeled one of his arms away to reach out and grab the shower pouf and her body wash. She watched with dazed eyes as he squirted a little onto the mesh before rubbing it into her stomach with a gentleness that rivaled his movements not long before.

She turned her head toward him as he worked and pressed her lips lightly to the part of his neck she could reach, content to let him take care of her for now.
The doors to his expansive home slammed open, and in stormed Yvetri, looking fierce and proud. She was nude, the only thing distracting from her skin was the gauzy white bandage wrapped around her calf. She put her full weight on the leg, her eyes flashing with each step as she drifted closer to where he stood by the fireplace.

“Looks like Kylo has found himself a little bitch to keep his bed warm,” she snarled, coming to a stop before him.

Hux turned away from her, his sharp mind already working out a plan. “We can use her to draw him in, although he's going to be guarding her like a dog with food.” The corner of his mouth lifted into a sneer and he turned away, arms clasped behind his back as he paced a few steps, calculating. Finally, he turned back to her, a cruel smile on his face. “Stake them out, but keep your distance. He’ll make a mistake. Once he does, use that as your opportunity to bring her here.”

“But she's just a human! I can kill her easily and if I bring the other Knights with me, we can take him down!” She protested, her hands curling into fists.

“Do as I said!” he roared, effectively silencing the woman. He inhaled sharply, curbing his temper. A bit more calmly, he said, “Kylo doesn't stay with humans. No, something about her is special. I intend to find out what it is.”

Chapter End Notes

Lyrics are "Scars" by I Prevail.
Chapter 15: Fear

Welp. I'm sorry in advance.
I also started posting another reylo fic, called "Torn Apart", if you'd like to take a
gander. It's an angel/demon AU. Let me know what you think~

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Time

Is the reason why we fight to stay alive

Until the morning comes

It's a strife

But the shimmer in your eyes just makes me know

That you and I belong

Ben’s rut period was officially over, according to him. They usually only lasted about twenty-four
to forty-eight hours, but his had gone on for at about twice that; he was unsure why. During that
time, they’d pretty much marked every available surface of her house in sweat and cum. She was
aching terribly from the aftermath, but it had been worth it. Absolutely worth every second of it.
They’d gotten to know each other a bit more during the interim between the waves of rut, and during
that time, they’d explored each other's bodies in nearly every way possible.

There’d been no sign of Hux, Yvetri, or anyone else, and for that, Rey was grateful.

Finn and Poe had been alternating phone calls, trying to convince her to let them come check on
her. She’d politely declined, because honestly, her house reeked of sex.

She pushed a button on her phone to end the call for the third time that day before turning to Ben,
who was sprawled across her couch, Daisy nestled comfortably between his legs. He stroked her
head idly, his other hand holding a book from Rey’s collection. They’d stopped by his apartment for
him to grab a few things, namely a few changes of clothes, his toothbrush, cell phone, and some of
his hair products. When asked what was so special about that brand, he’d replied that it was what
made his hair so soft. His fur also tangled easily, okay? Rey hadn’t questioned him further after that.

“Poe and Finn want us to go on a double date tonight. They want to meet you,” she told him,
coming over to perch on the arm of the couch by his head.

He set the book down on his thigh, turning his attention to her. “Really? What did they have in
mind?”
She wrinkled her nose in distaste as she answered, “There's a club they go to all the time.”

He raised an eyebrow, “And they want me to watch as other guys drool over you?” His hand slid around her waist possessively and he tugged her into his lap, instantly seizing the opportunity to kiss down the back of her neck. She squirmed against him, trying her best not to kick Daisy in the head on accident.

“They can drool all they want,” she giggled, turning her head to press a chaste kiss to his mouth. “But the only one I'll be grinding on is you.”

She could feel his smirk as he moved to her shoulder. “I love it when you talk dirty to me.”

“Bnnnnnn,” she whined as his arms tightened around her. “We’ll have to leave soon. And I'm sore, so sore! You’ve got me walking bow-legged.”

He grumbled but let her go, his expression morphing into a self-satisfied smile as he watched her stand back up and smooth out her shirt.

“All right, but if I'm meeting them, I have someone I want you to meet, too,” he said after a moment, carefully unfolding himself from the couch.

Confused, Rey raised an eyebrow. Who could he possibly want her to meet?

“My mom,” he explained. “She's been leaving voicemails on my phone for the past week. I haven't called her back yet, but she’ll be pleased to meet you.” He shrugged a bit, looking at her with hope in his eyes.

She blinked at him for a moment. He wanted her to meet his mother? The thought sent a thrill of anxiety through her. What would she be like? She was imagining a cold, ruthless politician. She had to be, right? To emotionally neglect Ben as a child like that.

Did she know her only son was a werewolf? And did she know he had been the one to kill his father? “Oh...yeah, that’d be great. Just let me know so I can make sure I wear something presentable.”

“You could wear a trash bag and she'd still think you're as amazing as I do.” He wrapped his arms around her from behind, pressing himself against her back. She felt a surge of warmth at his words, unable to keep the smile off her face. He rested his chin on her shoulder and nuzzled into her hair.

“Are you sure you want our first date to be a group date?” He asked. “I'm sure your friends would understand.”

She shook her head, resting her hands on his arms across her torso. “No,” she sighed. “I don’t, but I've lived here for a while now, and I still haven't explored the city, or even found a job.”

He shrugged against her again. “You could always work with me. I could use some help balancing the books and keeping an eye on accounts.”

Unsure why, the offer shocked her. She turned in his embrace to face him. “You're offering me a job?” What if their relationship didn't work out? She'd have to quit. She knew as well as the next person that working together after a break up usually didn't end well.

She chewed on her lip as she thought, settling on a nod after a moment. “All right, fine. When do I start?”

“Whenever you want,” he smirked and smacked his hand against her rear, making her jump with a
“You better get dressed, then. Don’t want to keep everyone waiting.”

She shot a glare over her shoulder as she headed into the bedroom. She knew exactly what outfit she’d be wearing and she’d be lucky if he could keep his hands to himself for more than thirty seconds once he saw her in it.

She’d been right. Ben hadn’t been able to stop himself from grabbing her the second she came out of her room. She’d thrown on a black dress that stopped at about mid-thigh, slid on some strappy heels and even taken the time to curl her hair so that it fell in loose waves to her shoulders, going so far as to add some make-up. Nothing fancy—just some eyeshadow and mascara, but the way his mouth had fallen open at the sight of her was enough to make her blush.

“Oh, uhm,” he mumbled as he stared at her, his hands twitching by his sides. “Wow. You look...amazing.”

She bounced up to him and leaned in to press a kiss against his cheek, trailing one hand across his chest. “Thank you!”

He grabbed her wrist and lifted her hand to his face, inhaling along her pulse point. “And you smell…really good.” His eyes were dilated, confusion furrowing his brows together. “Did you put on perfume?”

“No,” she replied, tugging gently on her hand. He released her reluctantly, looking at her pensively, his eyes narrowed in thought. “I guess it might be my body wash.”

He nodded, not seeming convinced. “Maybe.” His eyes tracked around the living room before settling back onto her. “Are you ready to go?” She nodded, smiling up at him as he held out his hand to her.

They took her car to the club on Main Street, where they’d meet Finn and Poe in line to get in.

“Hey, there’s the happy couple!” Poe yelled, beaming as they approached. He was wearing a dark brown leather jacket that was eerily similar to the one Finn was sporting. “You must be Ben! Poe Dameron. And this is Finn Soon-To-Be Dameron.” He gestured at the darker man beside him, who grinned and waved his hand, showing off the plain band on his finger.

“What?! No way! You guys got engaged?! And you didn't tell me?!” Rey screeched, stepping forward to get a closer look.

Poe was holding a flask, and he quickly tucked it into the inner pocket of the jacket before sliding a wink at Rey as he extended his hand out to Ben. Typical of him to get an early start on the night’s festivities.

“Nice to finally meet you,” he said, and they all shuffled another step in line toward the door, guarded by a bouncer. He was tall, overtly muscular, and it had that look of show muscle, not practical like Ben’s.

Ben shook it, giving him an easy smile. “She knew he’d stand no chance against Ben if he really wanted to get inside.

The outside of the club itself was made of old-style brick, a color she could tell had once been red
but had taken on a brownish tone as the fading sunlight hit it. It was in the older part of the city, but an attempt to modernize it gave it a shabby chic feel that she really enjoyed.

They paid their cover fee and the four of them slipped past the bouncer and into the darkness of the club.

It took a few minutes for their eyes to adjust to the gloom, and she clung to Ben’s arm while they waited. The dance floor took up most of the room with the bar off to the right hand side. If she squinted, she could see an even darker hallway across the sea of bodies moving in tandem, leading to what she guessed were the bathrooms. She’d have to keep note of that for later—alcohol made her have to go frequently.

There were lights strung up over the bar, warm and soft, providing enough light to keep the atmosphere intimate, but also providing enough light for the bartender to see what she was doing.

The rest of the dancefloor was plunged into darkness, swirls of colored lights strobing in and out to the pulse of deafening music.

Their group made their way to the bar, where Poe asked for four shots of their medium-grade vodka. This place was at least upscale enough to not serve the super cheap shit that was one step away from rubbing alcohol.

Taking their drinks, they toasted to Finn and Poe’s engagement, to Rey and Ben, and to a great night, filled with ‘lots of hardcore grinding and some great drunken sex’, courtesy of Poe.

“Poe, do you always say the first thing that pops into your head?” Rey asked and downed her first shot, cringing at the burn.

“Hey, I'm just keeping things honest!” he retorted, already asking for another round.

“Do you want to dance?” Ben leaned in to ask against her ear, having to raise his voice slightly to be heard above the music.

She nodded at him, smiling. “Can you dance? Because I can't!” she yelled back as he pulled his head away, his arm sliding from her waist to her hand, lacing their fingers together as he dragged her into the crowd of writhing bodies.

The second half of their group was already busy moving themselves against each other to the beat.

Ben found an area for them, which wasn't hard considering his broad frame—people gave him a wide berth. He spun her around against him, pressing himself against her back as his hands slid over her hips, guiding her how to move against him.

Oh, this was new, and somehow not at the same time. It was like foreplay with way more clothing on.

Sure, she'd been to clubs before, but had never danced with a man like this. It had mainly consisted of awkwardly swaying or jumping in place with Jess.

With Ben, it was a whole new experience. His hands were everywhere as he moved her, head
ducked low to breathe against the side of her throat. Maybe it was the alcohol starting to take effect, maybe it was just the closeness of him, the intimacy of the whole thing, but her skin vibrated, the barest of touches igniting her nerves.

Feeling more confident under the haze of vodka, she ground herself back against him, her body coming alive as one arm reached behind her to wrap around his neck. He kissed against her skin, nuzzling closer, growling lowly as he moved his lips from her neck to her ear, nipping lightly at the soft flesh.

Everyone else in the room faded away, leaving just the two of them in this moment. His hands travelled down, his fingers playing with the hem of her dress where it clung to her thighs. Her mind buzzed, and she felt so light, weightless, held up by the man against her like a searing heat. She felt warmth pool between her legs, different than anything she’d felt before. It spread upwards like reaching hands through her body, making her give an appreciative hum. He was hard against her ass, his arousal unmistakable. He seemed drawn to her neck again, where the blood flowed closest to the surface. His teeth grazed over that spot, eliciting a gasp from her as she moved against him with more fervor. His own hips moved synchrony with her, giving when she pulled away, receiving when she returned to him.

There was nothing but the touch of him, her eyes drifting closed as she lost herself in the song, its beat thumping through her blood, the blue and green lights of the club flashing through her eyelids.

The scent of sweat and lust hit her, magnified tenfold by the mass around them.

All too soon, the music ended, leaving her feeling dazed as she rested against his chest, trying to catch her breath. Her cheeks were flushed, and her body felt hot, like she’d been roasted over a campfire.

“Come on,” he murmured against her ear in the lull between tracks. “Let’s get you something to drink.”

She nodded and let him lead her back to the bar, where he ordered some iced water for her. Shooting him a glare, she sipped at his insistence, watching as his face morphed into satisfaction when she was done.

“I’ll be right back,” she said as she pressed a kiss to his cheek. “Need to use the bathroom.” Hopping off the stool, she weaved her way through the numerous sweaty bodies in the general direction she’d seen the bathrooms when they’d come in.

The room itself was nice, soft lighting above the sink just bright enough to fix make-up and hair. Each little stall had one single lamp dangling from the ceiling overhead.

She heard the door open, momentarily letting the blaring noise to come in before muting it again once it was closed. She did her business then went to wash her hands, spotting a woman standing at the sink, applying a fresh coat of lipstick. Rey averted her eyes, only glancing up to to flash a brief smile before turning her attention to the soap dispenser.

“Such a pity about that blond boy,” the woman said conversationally. Rey’s blood ran cold. She knew that voice, had heard it once before, and she would never forget the owner.

Turning fully to look at her, Rey took a step back. “Yvetri,” she breathed, wondering if she’d be able to scream loudly enough for anyone to hear.

She looked a lot different with clothes on. Black on black skin tight jeans with a leather jacket
over it, knee-high boots to complete the ensemble. “Oh, so Kylo’s told you about me, has he?” she tutted, sticking her lipstick back into a clutch she had lying on the counter. “Tell me something,” she said as she stepped closer to Rey, dark eyes glinting maliciously. “Is he a good fuck?”

Her eyes darted toward the door, mentally calculating how fast she could get to it before she was caught. The chances were very low.

“I just want to know,” Yvetri laughed as she slid a step closer. Her laugh was cold and heartless, devoid of actual humor. “When Hux is done with you, I'm going to kill you. And I'm going to take my time and enjoy every second of it.”

“What does Hux want with me?” Rey asked. Keep her talking, keep her going to stall for time. Maybe Ben would realize she was taking too long and come make sure she was okay. Maybe someone would come in to use the bathroom and see what was going on. No, that couldn't happen. Yvetri obviously had no qualms about killing people and Rey didn't want anyone else at risk.

She cocked her head to the side, assessing her with a narrowed gaze. “There's something about you...” she muttered, stepping yet another step closer. This wasn't good. Rey couldn't let her close the distance between them. Couldn't let her—

Yvetri's hand darted out to wrap around Rey's wrist. Only it wasn't a hand anymore, exactly. Her fingers were elongated, her nails sharpened into long claws where they pressed into her skin. “You're...an omega!” she hissed, leaning in to inhale the air around Rey's throat. “But how? You aren't one of us. You smell similar, but not quite. No wonder Kylo wants you. He hasn't marked you, though. Which means, if you go into heat, the other Knights will claim you. One right after the other. And you'll be begging for more.”

Rey tried to jerk her hand away, wincing as the claws pressed in more deeply.

“Ah ah ah, you pierce yourself on my claws and you'll become one of us. Or your body will try to, anyway. Females don't survive our change.”

What? How was Yvetri one, then? She had to get out of here now. She'd take her chances with potentially dying during the change over letting Yvetri take her back to wherever she was planning.

Jjerking her arm, she hissed as those claws dug into her wrist, blood welling up to drip down her fingers as she tore herself free and bolted for the door. She had one hand on the handle when she felt a hand grab her hair and yank her head back, slamming her forward until her forehead met the wood of the door, dazing her as scalding crimson dripped into her eyes. There was an animalistic snarl behind her as the blows came faster, harder.

She had no hope of being able to escape the werewolf’s strength, of trying to fight her off. Yvetri pulled her head back again and again. Thud, thud, thud. Vaguely, Rey could recognize that the thudding was her skull being pounded into the wall. She let out an agonized scream as her vision started to fade around the edges and her world went black as she sunk bonelessly to the floor.

Ben tapped his fingers against the glass while he waited. And waited. And waited some more. Their dance had been amazing. Beyond amazing, really. He’d held her against him, and as he’d done so, he’d felt himself falling even more for her. For her innocence and fiery spirit, for the way she felt in his arms. And her smell; there was something about that smell that called to his primal side. It was
new, something that had only begun to make itself known after his rut. He had his suspicions, but no way to prove it. Could she really be a rare omega? She'd certainly shown some tendencies that made him think yes.

He checked the time on his watch, frowning when nearly fifteen minutes had passed. Maybe she was throwing up? She hadn't had a ton to drink, just enough to give her a healthy buzz.

Frowning, he slid some money across the bar before leaving his glass and heading toward the bathroom. He'd see if he could at least check on her and see that she was all right.

He bumped into Finn on the way, placing one hand on his shoulder to get his attention before he leaned in and yelled above the music, “Have you seen Rey?”

Finn shook his head, seeming unfazed by his friend's disappearance. “She’s probably in the bathroom or something! I’m sure she’s fine!” He shouted back, turning away again.

Ben nodded, already moving past him to the bathroom. The closer he got, the more his gut started churning. With all of the sweating bodies on the dance floor, he wasn't able to smell her to see which way she'd gone. The closer to the bathroom went, the more a metallic scent hit him, coating the back of his throat with its freshness. Rey had come this way…

And so had someone else. Yvetri fucking Ren.

He stood outside the door to the bathroom, where the scents were strongest, his heart dropping. He pushed the door open, and a woman at the sink screamed at his sudden appearance. He ignored her as she ran out, leaving him alone to step inside as another wave of blood hit him. There were dark droplets on the floor and he crouched down, running his fingers through it. His head was pounding. That was Rey’s blood.

No. No, no, no. He stood and turned, his heart nearly stopping. There were huge splotches of scarlet staining the wall by the door, unmistakable.

His hands started shaking, his teeth grinding as his vision went red. He felt so stupid. He never should have come here with her, never should have left her alone. He roared, an ear-splitting thing as he stormed out of the bathroom. He turned right, where there was an emergency exit instead of left to go back to the dancefloor. They had to have gone out this door. He pushed it open, the alarm that sounded an annoying buzz in the back of his mind. It didn't matter. None of it mattered.

Rey had been taken, and he had to find her.

Chapter End Notes

Song lyrics are "Amaranthine" by Amaranthe.
Chapter 16: What show?

Chapter Notes

I'm sorry for the cliffhanger and then the late update! I hope you all enjoy this chapter. Rey's in a bit of a pickle right now, but it looks like help is on the way! Shout out to Finn and Poe for being awesome partners in crime!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It's a quarter after one, I'm all alone and I need you now

Said I wouldn't call but I lost all control and I need you now

And I don't know how I can do without, I just need you now

Her head was pounding, her mind foggy as she struggled to make sense of everything. Her eyes were closed, or maybe they weren't? She couldn't tell. Everything was dark, an inky blackness that consumed. She groaned, lifting her head slowly as a sharp pain stabbed its way from her forehead down to her spine. Her wrists hurt—why did her wrists hurt? Moving her hands where they were held above her head, she was met with the rattle of heavy metal. Chains, she realized a moment later. Why was she in chains?

She felt hot all over, like her very blood was threatening to boil inside her. Her dress was too tight, itching everywhere it touched. It chafed at her nipples, simultaneously sending a bolt of heat straight between her thighs and being this side of too much. She needed to take it off, needed to bare herself to the cold air. She needed to—

A moment later, a blinding light appeared in front of her, causing her to wince against the sudden harshness. She turned her head away, hiding her eyes against the side of her arm as she waited for them to adjust. There was nothing else but the single source of light aimed at her. Her heart thundered against her ribcage as it all started coming back to her. The club, drinking and dancing, going to use the bathroom, Yvetri—

Yvetri!

“Well, well, what have we here?” A male voice came from behind the light. She couldn't see who it was, but she didn't like this words. A shiver ran down her back at the coldness in his tone, the absolute lack of empathy.

“Where am I?” She asked, hating how weak her own voice sounded.

That same voice made a noise, seeming to consider before replying, “You're my guest. Welcome, little Rey.”
Well, that didn't exactly answer her question. She moved her hands again, flexing, testing the restraints. She felt something warm trickle down one of her arms. Fuck, she'd been cut by a werewolf. The flesh surrounding the area was burning, growing further irritated by the metal pressed against it. She shook her head, instantly regretting the movement as he pushed the deep scratch to the back of her mind. She'd deal with that later. Right now she just needed to get out of here.

A man appeared from the darkness, moving in front of the light so that she only saw his silhouette.

Was this the one that had spoken?

“Mitaka is going to draw some blood from you, nothing serious. We just need to do some tests,” came that mysterious voice again, still behind the light. So, not the person in front of her, then.

Somehow, she managed to narrow her eyes at the man approaching her, making out the syringe and empty vials he held in one hand.

He came close, and then froze, his muscles going rigid. His eyes bled from a pale green to almost a full black, his jaw falling slack as he lowered his eyes to her throat. His Adam's apple bobbed as he swallowed hard. His free hand came down to rub at the front of his pants and her eyes followed the movement, watching as he gripped himself through the front of his trousers.

Her own breath came faster, her mouth watering. That would sate the sudden pulsing between her legs, she was sure of it. She pressed her thighs together, sliding wetness along her skin. When had that happened?

“Mitaka!” the voice behind the light barked, and the man in front of her twitched, whirling around with an animalistic snarl.

The movement startled Rey, snapping her back into her own head again. She'd been leaning forward on her knees, searching, but now she fell back, gasping sharply when the pull of the chains ripped at her wounded wrist. What had she been trying to get to? She had Ben, she needed to find Ben. He would know what to do--he could take care of her.

“She's an omega.

In a room rapidly filling with alphas.

Mitaka moved closer to her, the syringe falling from his hand as he took up a guarding position, much like a dog with a bone. He was close, close enough for her to pull herself up to her feet and rely on the restraints to get just the right amount of leverage, landing a kick square between his legs from behind.

The blow brought the man down to one knee, clutching his groin as an agonized groan escaped him. The other people in the room came close, seemingly unaffected by her scent. Not alphas, then.

They swarmed Mitaka, dragging him to his feet as they forced his hands behind his back. He struggled, fighting to free himself against their firm grip. He may have been an alpha, but he was a weak one. A snarl left him again and his eyes darted back to Rey, burning with a look that
She'd seen that look somewhere else before, in Ben’s eyes. While she'd been against the idea of being tied to him for life at the time, when it came down to it, she would much rather it be Ben than someone like Mitaka. Why hadn't she just accepted his claim? Some primal part of her knew that if she'd been fully mated to Ben these alphas wouldn't be sparing her a second glance.

Fuck! Where was Ben? He was probably worried sick, wondering where she was at. She could only imagine his face when he found out she'd gone missing. Or maybe he had thought she'd deserted him on purpose. That thought was even worse.

He knew how she felt about him, though, and that brought some sense of comfort to her. He did know, right? Maybe she hadn't made herself clear enough.

How in the world was she ever going to get out of this mess? It was taking everything in her power to stay in her own head, even as the warmth pooling between her thighs demanded her attention. It burned, an itch that needed to be scratched.

She tried the chains again, feeling the sting against her open flesh. They were strong and heavy, no way was she getting out of them without sawing her hands off. Even dislocating her thumbs wouldn't allow her the chance to slip out; they were too tight.

With Mitaka out of the room, and the scent of alpha pheromones blessedly absent, she could concentrate a little better, focus as one of the men that had dragged him out came back, bending down to pick up the lost syringe. He smelled like nothing, nothing except for werewolf. A beta, then. A true neutral.

His face was a deep tan color, probably from spending long hours out in the sun. He kicked the bend of her knee, sending her back down into a kneeling position. His hands were calloused, rough where he gripped her hair and forced her head to the side, exposing her neck. He drove the needle in, right beneath the area where her scent gland was.

She bit her lip to keep from crying out—she would not give these people the satisfaction. He worked quickly, popping off the old vile once it was full and replacing it with another.

Once he was done, he left the room with a loud bang of the door as it swung shut.

She turned her attention back to the light, ignoring the new stream of blood trickling from her neck. It was tender there, sore in her gland area. Instinctually, she knew what she needed, and the mere thought of someone, preferably Ben, sinking his teeth into that spot as a claiming mark made her press her legs together again, unable to stop the wetness that began to leak down her thighs.

What on earth was happening to her?

Never before had she been this aroused at the thought of something, never before had she needed an alpha’s knot like she did now. Her entire body was shaking, this unbearable heat centered deep within her that couldn't be scratched by any normal means.

It overrode her fear of the situation, though that was still there. She needed to get out, needed to leave. Needed to find Ben, needed to...needed to...

Her attention was drawn to a shadow moving from behind the light, stepping out into her field of view and coming closer. Her eyes were drawn to his feet first, the rhythmic click of his boots as he allowed her to finally see him. He was wearing a navy blue suit, so dark it looked black in the dimness of the room, its true hue highlighted at the edges of his sleeves. His skin was pale, icy blue
eyes looking down at her with something akin to disgust.

She blinked hazily up at him, absorbing the details of his face, trying to remember what he looked like so she could give an accurate description when the time came. *If the time came,* her mind supplied none-to-helpfully.

His hair was a shocking red, like the flames she'd had in her fireplace not but a few days before. It seemed like so long ago now, some memory entangled within the confines of a dream.

“Where’s Ben?” she asked, hating the way her voice quavered.

The man tilted his head at her, a smug smirk touching his lips as he bent down to where she was kneeling, his face very close to hers as he inhaled, the irises of his eyes disappearing as his pupils blew wide. “Hopefully he’ll be along soon. Wouldn’t want him to miss the show.”

“What show?” Her heart was thundering faster, panic setting in again. She wrapped her hands around the chains above her, using them to help hoist herself to her feet. Her arms had started to fall asleep, and now that she was able to lower them somewhat, the blood came rushing back, sending a new wave of crimson dripping down her wrist. The redhead man smiled coldly, turning his back to leave the room. “What show?!” she yelled after him, watching as the door opened and he disappeared through it.

The sound of it clanging shut was loud and heavy, resonating ominously within her soul. “*WHAT SHOW?!”* she screamed into the now empty room, fighting against the handcuffs. Her only answer was the floodlight in front of her turning off, plunging her back into darkness.

There was a low buzzing in his ears, an incessant reminder that it was too quiet in the back alley of the club. He could hear the muffled noise of the music, but that wasn't enough. It felt like a part of him was missing, a humming constant that had become part of his life. The absence of that was enough for him to falter, to second guess if she had ever even existed or if it had just been some sort of twisted daydream.

He searched the alley, looking for tire tracks, a scent, anything that would point him in the direction Rey had been taken. He could smell that Rey and Yvetri had come this way, a light trail of blood splattered across the ground until it stopped abruptly. She'd been put into a car, then.

He turned, looking looking at the back door of the club, his gaze travelling upwards. Surely there was a camera back here for security…

There it was.

Tucked into the corner of the building to shield from the elements, its red light blinked at him reassuringly. That was his only lead so far. Now, to find the room where all of the monitors were. He’d need a distraction.

Rushing back into the club, he weaved through the bodies, searching for Finn and Poe. Finally, he found them, sitting at the bar with what looked like tequila in their glasses. Their heads were pressed close together, talking through all of the noise.

Ben stepped up behind them, feeling strangely calm as he placed a hand on each of their
shoulders, bending down. They must've seen the look on his face, because their own happy smiles turned serious.

“Someone took Rey,” he told them, his heart clenching at having to admit the words out loud. It made the situation more real and not just a horrible nightmare. “I don't have time to explain, but I need to get into the security room to see which where they went. Can you guys make some sort of distraction?”

They stared at him with open mouths, their eyes flitting around to scan the crowd, probably searching for Rey. Looking back at each other, Poe’s face shifted into a devilish grin as he clapped Finn on the shoulder. “Yeah, we can make something happen—can't we, Finn?”

Finn nodded, looking extremely serious as he got off the stool. He leaned into Ben and told him in a low whisper, “We’ve got some friends here that I'm sure we can convince to help us out.”

Poe stood, straightening his jacket as he added, “It’ll have to be something big to get security out here and not just the bouncers. Why not call police for her, though? Nevermind, I'll ask you that once we get her back. Go find our girl, Ben; we’ve got this.”

“I will,” he vowed, nodding to them as they slipped onto the dance floor. He watched them for a moment; they started whispering into other dancer’s ears, being met with nods and serious expressions. Soon enough, every person that had been spoken to began to murmur to the person beside them until a vast majority of the people on the floor had been informed of the plan.

He guessed that was one of the perks of having a close circle of friends—they were always willing to help one another, consequences be damned. He'd have to thank the guys for this later. If there was a later. He knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that there was a good chance he wouldn't be walking out of this. But if he could just get Rey out, he'd be happy.

Just as the next song was starting, there were several shouts, followed by the sounds of glass breaking. Between the strobing lights, he was able to see the масс of people writhing in a way too violent to be dancing. A giant fight then. Ben managed a grin at Finn and Poe’s plan getting set into motion, sidling up the wall to scoot to the security door. Sure enough, every bouncer in the place was rushing to go help, yelling on their radios for more people. A security guard came out of an unmarked room, hand going for his pepper spray as he ran past Ben.

Rushing into the room before it clicked shut, he ran up to the wall of monitors, searching for the right screen. He found it easily, in the top left corner just like the camera itself outside.

He found the controls, working quickly to rewind the tape. What he saw made his pulse quicken, even though he had known what'd happened.

There was an image—grainy, but unmistakable—of Rey being carried by Yvetri, her head lolling lifelessly, her arm ripped open by claw marks where it dangled.

Ben’s heart came to a screeching halt. No. She’d been scratched. Time had already been against him before, but now he had even less.

Letting loose a primal shout that had been building ever since he'd realized she was gone, he teared up and smashed his fist against one of the screens, shattering it.

Her fate had effectively been sealed. Either she would survive the change, or she wouldn't. Either way, he needed to be there with her, needed to support her as best he could. Somewhere deep down inside of him, hope stirred. What if she actually did complete the change? He’d be able to truly mate
her then. That was assuming he could get her away from Hux.

How in the hell was he even going to find her in the first place? He stared at the screen, trying to find some clue on the dark van she was loaded into. There was nothing, the sides blank. He watched as it pulled away, feeling any hope of finding her dwindle as it left.

Wait a second. He rewound the tape, leaning in close. If he squinted, he could make out the license plate number. Maybe, just maybe…

He pulled his cell phone out of his pocket, tapping down the numbers. That would have to work for now.

Leaving the office, he paused to take in the fight that was still going. He caught Finn’s eyes, and raised his phone in an acknowledgement that he’d gotten the information needed.

The other man nodded and waved for him to hurry up and go.

Ben rushed out the back door again already dialing as he went. He took a moment to inhale the crisp air, tinged with the scent of Rey’s blood. The phone rang once, then twice until the line finally picked up and there was a sleepy voice on the other side, “Ben? Is everything okay?”

“Mom, I need you to pull a favor for me. I need you to find who this car belongs to—I need their home address.” He said quickly, already setting off at a fast walk to get out of the alley.

“What? Why? What's going on? This isn't for any werewolf shit, is it?” Leia sounded tired. This wasn't the first time he'd called her at odd hours asking for a favor.

“This is different. They took my Rey, my girlfriend; I need to get her back. Please, Mom.” He begged, closing his eyes at the sudden silence on the other end. “Please.”

There was a heavy sigh on the other end. “All right, text me the plate number. And Ben?”

“Yeah?”

“When you get this girl back, I want to meet her.”

He barked a short laugh, “Already planned on it. If you don't hear from me soon, send someone to that address. You remember about silver bullets, right?”

“I remember. You better not make me have to do it, though. I mean it. Now go, go get your girl.”

He paused, throat tight. This could very well be the last time he spoke to her. “I love you,” he choked out.

“I love you too, Ben,” came her gentle reply, and then the line went dead.

Pulling the phone away from his ear, he sent her the plate number and then let it hang by his side as he waited. A few minutes later, his phone pinged and he glanced at the address. It was an address he had only visited once before, but he recalled the layout of it. Running, he headed back to Rey’s car and hopped in, revving the engine as he peeled out. In the rearview mirror, he could see the flashing blue and red lights of cops approaching the club.

He got out onto the highway, heading for the edge of the city again. Hux’s compound was located deep within the woods. He just had to hope and pray Rey could hold out for that long.
Chapter End Notes

Song lyrics are "Need You Now" by Lady Antebellum.
Chapter 17: She's Mine

Chapter Notes

If you're still reading this, I just wanted to apologize for the extremely long delay in this chapter. Truth be told, I've been working on another project as a collaboration in addition to this one. If you're interested in reading it, here's the link: The Sacred Texts.

Any typing errors in this are completely my fault and will be corrected, so I'm sorry in advance. Without further adeu, here is chapter 18!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

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Until the world goes cold

This battle’s burned all that I’ve known

Until the world goes cold

Nothing will keep me from this throne, I'll fight

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The whole drive there, Ben's hands gripped the wheel until his knuckles turned white. The car wound around every rough curve, the trees on either side looming ominously in the dark, only able to be seen due to the grace of modern technology in the form of headlights.

The closer he got, the more his pulse started racing. There were no other cars on the road, but he wouldn't be surprised if there were scouts hidden among the trees, radioing up to the compound that he was on the way.

When he was able to see the faint glow of floodlights over the hill, Ben pulled off the road and killed the engine, throwing him back into darkness, relieved only by the light filtering down from the moon overhead. It was mostly full, providing just enough light to cast even darker shadows from the trees onto the ground.

He got out of the car, planning to continue his trek on foot, his only thought centered around getting Rey back. He'd deal with the other obstacles as they came up, and he'd do whatever he needed to. His mind kept chanting over and over to protect his mate, get her back, claim her, protect her, get her back, claim her…

He lifted his face to the air, pleased to find he was downwind so his scent wouldn’t carry. His
steps on the fallen leaves were wet, heavy. The snow had just finished melting the day prior, and he was thankful for it. It would help mask the sounds of his footsteps without the crunching leaves.

He was torn between shifting forms to get inside. On one hand, it might be easier to sneak through, but on the other, if he was found out, his options for fighting were limited to tooth and claw. It was a risk he’d have to take. He supposed he could always swap back once inside. He’d be naked, but that wasn’t really his biggest concern right now.

Shucking his clothes off with ease, he let his body do what it so desperately desired this close to the full moon. That was the thing about werewolves. They could shift at any time, however, when the full moon came, his body would force the change. There was no getting around that aspect, and at times, it could be truly inconvenient. He just had to hope he could get to Rey in time to help and guide her through her first time, if she survived through it. Already, the fever would be consuming her, weakening her down to the point he’d probably have to carry her out.

His muscles twitched and strained, fighting until he let loose his control, and then they snapped and reformed, bringing him to his hands and knees with a strangled grunt.

When he reopened his eyes, he was completely shifted, his fur ruffling in the soft breeze. His senses were heightened; scents were stronger, sounds sharper. The ground was wet beneath his paws, sinking in between the pads. He lifted his head in the direction of the compound and took a deep breath before he set off at a run, leaving Rey’s car behind.

She was in there, somewhere. Who knew how many guards Hux had patrolling the place, armed with guns, loaded with silver bullets.

Normally, a werewolf healed at an accelerated pace if the damage inflicted was dealt by a cut, or a weapon not tainted with silver. The only thing that made them heal humanly slow was silver and a wound from another werewolf. If it was something that didn't puncture the skin, like Yvetri’s kick to his chest had been, then it would heal at that faster pace.

He flew over the hill, coming to a screeching stop when he was met by the floodlights of the compound. The building itself was a mansion, heavily fortified and reinforced by tall fences topped with razor wire. There were a few men patrolling the grounds, guns held securely in their arms. His eyes narrowed as he observed from the shadows, mentally calculating how best to get inside. He saw more security cameras around the perimeter, pointed in all directions. All except for one blind spot—the one he himself had personally warned Hux to fix once upon a time.

Lowering himself to the ground, he slunk forward, sticking to the shadows as much as possible.

In the blind spot, there was a small hole in the fence, just a little too small for him to fit through. He growled softly in frustration, looking around for something, anything that he could use.

The crunch of a boot step on gravel behind him had him whirling, hackles rising as he snarled.

A man stood before him, clad entirely in black so as to blend in with the night. The only thing that Ben could see were his eyes through the mask, reflecting almost silver in the light of the moon. He was holding a rifle, pointing it directly at Ben, his brow furrowed. “...Kylo? Is that you?” he asked in a hushed whisper, his gun holding steady.

Ben blinked at him, tilting his head slightly as his stance relaxed a little. He recognized that voice as one of his knights when he had been their leader. He nodded once in response, ears flattening back against his head as Neiric Ren adjusted the gun at him. The man had once been someone that
Ben would’ve called a brother. He’d been turned around the same time and had to work with each other enough to form a bond, though Ben had severed it once he’d gotten out.

Suddenly, Neiric dropped the weapon to his side, and reached up to pull the mask off, his eyes tense as he looked over his shoulder before saying, “I didn’t sign up for this shit—kidnapping and holding an omega in heat hostage.”

*That* got Ben’s pulse pounding. To have his suspicions that she was an omega confirmed and then have it added that she was in heat struck fear and a very alpha-like aggression in him. He snapped his teeth in the air in response, turning his head back to the hole in the fence. He needed to get to her.

Neiric followed his gaze, eyes widening in realization. “I’ll get you inside,” he said quickly, reaching to his belt for a tool. He stepped around Ben and put his back to the wolf, the ultimate sign of trust, as he set to work cutting the fence the rest of the way open, making a hole big enough for Ben to squeeze through. “I can’t go the whole way…” he gave an apologetic shrugged, meeting Ben’s eyes through the chain link. “Alpha instincts and all that.”

That was fine with Ben—he just needed to get inside; he would handle the rest of it, with deadly force. His omega was in danger, and it triggered the part of him he’d fought to keep on lockdown. All bets were off, and as he nodded once to Neiric in thanks, Ben slipped away, leaving Kylo to take his place.

Rey lost track of how long she’d been locked up. Her body was on fire, her thighs drenched with her own wetness, and her head still throbbed from where Yvetri had smashed it into the door. The room she was in was still dark, and no one had been in to see her for hours. Well, it felt like hours anyway. There weren’t any windows in the room to judge what time it was, nothing that gave even the slightest hint of how much time had passed.

Her feet were aching where she stood in her heels, but she didn’t want to sink back to her knees yet, didn’t want to give the impression that she’d given up. If she could just reach between her legs to satisfy the pulsing itch, she’d be okay for a while longer, but just waiting here was torture.

Bowing her head down low, she stared in the general direction her feet were, still unable to see anything in the blackness. Mentally, she was screaming. What was happening to her? What was this obscene heat building in her core and spreading throughout her entire body? Why couldn’t she shake the thought of a thick, alpha cock filling her up with his seed until it had nowhere to go but out? Somewhere in the back of her head, she pieced together that this must be the dreaded heat Ben had spoken of. But where was Ben? Where was her alpha? The one she wanted so badly? Why wasn’t he protecting her?

The door clanged back open and she winced against the light, cracking her eye open just enough to see the man she’d spoken to earlier sweep into the room, clutching some papers in his pale hand. Just as the door began to close again to plunge them back into the dark, a light flicked on over head. It was soft, much different than the floodlight that’d been pointed at her earlier.

Blinking as he drew closer, bringing with him a wave of pheromones that had her mouth watering and her thighs clenching more tightly together, she shook her head to clear the haze that settled over her.
“Do you know what this is, omega?” the man asked. Rey shook her head. He held the papers up for her to see, and she took note that his hand was shaking. “This...is a report of what your blood work has shown us.” He took a deep breath, his eyes bleeding to nearly black. Rey caught a fresh wave of his scent, her own lips parting as she processed the taste of it. He was aroused, but he wasn’t acting like that other alpha had. Part of her wondered why; was she somehow not good enough as an omega?

“What does it say?” she croaked, her voice hoarse from screaming after him earlier, as well as not having anything to drink.

His voice was deeper when he spoke, “It lists the cause of why you were starting to present as an omega before you were scratched by our lovely Yvetri. You carried a recessive gene that was triggered with Kylo’s presence, due to his alpha pheromones. And if he was in rut recently and you two had sex, that would’ve sped up the process.” He gave her a knowing look. “Regardless, you would’ve shifted into one of us, either way. Which is truly fascinating, because I want to see if you being born with the gene as a woman would help your chances of completing the change, or if you’ll die in the process. That would be a horrible shame,” he murmured lowly, scanning his eyes down her scantily clad body.

Rey managed to hold that pale gaze when he finally met her eyes again, and did her best to ignore the way her heart thundered under his intensity. “Why do females not survive the change?” she asked, her breath catching as a shiver ran up her spine.

Hux seemed to consider it, cocking his head to the side. “It seems to be related to the werewolf DNA not being accepted by the body, though the reason is unclear. You already carry the gene, so in theory, you shouldn't have any issue. However, I’m going to keep you for observation until you either change, or die. And perhaps, when you’ve deteriorated into a simpering bitch in the middle of her heat, begging for me to take you, I might. I pride myself on my control. And while you do smell absolutely delicious, I like watching you suffer.”

Rey bared her teeth at him, a snarl ripping from her throat as she lunged against the chains, “I’ll never beg you for anything!” she hissed, pain searing through her body where the chain connected with the wound on her wrist, even as another wave of wetness washed over her, her slick becoming enough to leave a thick trail on her inner thigh.

That brought a chuckle from Hux, his red lips twisting up into a sneer as he scented her, his hands flexing with the desire to touch. “Those restraints are made out of silver, perfect for werewolves. Good luck getting out of them.”

“I hope Ben kills you,” she snapped. “I hope he comes in here and tears your fucking throat out!”

Perhaps she’d egged him on too hard, because one second he’d been standing there, staring at her like he both loathed and wanted to devour her. The next, he loomed over her, his hand curled around her throat, pressing against the sensitive gland in her neck. It instantly stilled her, to have an alpha’s attentions on it. She leaned into the touch, even as her mind screamed at her, telling her two different things.

The first was that this was so nice, to finally be given something she hadn't even known she was desiring. It pulled her into a sudden sense of security, of feeling safe in this strange man’s grip as endorphins flooded her body and she relaxed.

The second was that this was not natural. This man was probably a killer by choice, and he meant to do harm to her. Her body should not respond to his as it was. This was not natural.
There was a wild look in Hux’s eyes as she calmed under his touch, an omega submitting to an alpha. His face was incredibly close—when had he gotten so close?

Her head was fuzzy, filled with the need to simply get closer. She leaned forward, not quite knowing what she was searching for.

Hux’s gaze dropped down to her lips, his eyes hardening with resolve as he began to lean down, until his lips were hovering over her own, just that little bit out of reach. If she just closed that distance between them…

Rey’s heart quickened, and that one mental voice inside of her that had been screaming was roaring now, telling her to get away. This man could not be trusted! And what about Ben?! Poor, sweet Ben, who cared for her so deeply, and who was probably going insane trying to find her.

She reeled back, shaking her head roughly, letting the throb in her skull distract her from the throb between her legs. It was beginning to hurt now as her heat intensified, shivers racking along her spine.

A crash outside the door had both of their heads whipping towards it. Hux’s hand was still around her throat, but no longer did his touch soothe her. It clamped down hard, restricting her breath, even as he glowered at the door.

She could hear snarling outside, followed by loud shots—gunshots? There was yelling, the sounds of heavy things hitting against the walls. It sounded like chaos out there, growing closer until it was right outside. What the hell was going on out there? She tried not to let her hope show on her face, but it must’ve because Hux’s hand tightened even more as his eyes narrowed at the door.

There was a high-pitched keening sound, quickly cut off, then silence. Rey held her breath, anxiety almost over taking the unbearable heat low in her belly.

The door shuddered as a loud bang hit it. More silence. Another blow, harder this time, in a different spot. The metal groaned under the pressure, a dent appearing even where she could see from across the room. Three more slams, each creating a new crater, and then one final one had it blasting off of the hinges, falling into the room to land with a loud, echoing boom.

Rey tried to make sense of what was standing there, so large and looming that it took up the entire space of the doorframe.

It vaguely resembled a man, though this stood nearly a foot taller than most. It had two feet, legs bent away at the knee rather than forwards like a normal human. He, because it was most definitely a he, was covered in thick black fur, looking like a werewolf out of a horror movie, only much more intimidating. As he stepped forward into the room, lowering his head to fit through the door, she caught the glint of bared canines.

“Kylo. Ren.” Hux snarled, moving his body behind Rey to use her as a shield.

“Let. Her. Go.” Kylo growled, the words sounding odd in an inhuman throat. They were rasping, distorted by the shape of his muzzle. His ears were pinned back against his head in fury, and as she saw his chest rise with an inhale, his eyes zeroed in on her, blowing his eyes almost entirely black.

She could feel Hux’s breath hot on her neck, and she wrinkled her nose in distaste at the scent of cigarettes. “And ruin the fun? I think not. Her heat’s begun—I know you smell it. Your little omega is going to turn soon, too. Wouldn’t you like to make sure she survives it?”

Kylo stepped forward, only to stop as Hux’s hand shifted into claws, threatening to tear her throat.
out at the slightest provocation. “Ben,” she breathed, tears forming in her eyes. She didn't want to die here, in this strange place. Flashes of a life she could've had with Ben flew before her, of living under the moon, where she'd first seen him, and of moppy haired little kids running around from the family he'd given her. She could see herself with him for the rest of her days, she realized. She'd been reluctant to return his feelings as deeply as she knew he'd felt for her, with their relationship so new, and maybe it had something to do with the hormones raging through her body. They begged her to mark him, to have him knot her and mark her gland, just as she did the same to him.

The problem was...this wasn't Ben. This wasn't the Ben who'd been so sweet and caring with her. This was Kylo, and suddenly, she understood the difference.

Kylo’s attention turned to her again, his eyes murderous. His hands were flexing, the long, sharp claws catching the soft light over head. As he stared at her, she saw the recognition in there, and also something along the lines of sorrow.

Hux shifted behind her again, claws digging into the soft flesh of her throat just a little more, snapping Kylo’s eyes back to the man. “She’s mine,” he snarled, hunching over as he let out an animalistic roar, his whole body vibrating as his hackles rose.

“Stop right there!” Everyone’s head turned to the new voice, a woman. And unfortunately, one Rey knew fairly well.

Yvetri Ren was standing in the doorway, gun pointed at Kylo's back.

Kylo looked at the woman and then to Hux, before finally settling on Rey. She could see him thinking, calculating any and all scenarios where they could get out of this in one piece. The options didn't look good; she was shackled and useless and there were two of them.

“Ben,” she tried again. “Don't do this. Get out of here! Leave!” She was straining against Hux’s hold now, feeling droplets of blood trickle down her neck.

Kylo shook his head, “No.” He paused, ears flickering slightly. “I'm not leaving you, Rey.” The conviction in his words, as garbled as they were, settled within her bones. Her alpha was going to stay and protect her.

“Isn't this sweet?” Yvetri mocked, her tone lilting and nearly childlike. “The mighty Kylo Ren wants to mate himself to this...abomination.” She eyed Rey, disgust plain on her face.

“I already have,” he said softly, focused solely on Rey.

“She will die, as will you,” Hux threatened from behind her. Rey had almost forgotten his presence, if it hadn't been for his overwhelming alpha scent and the pressure at her neck.

Suddenly, Kylo was smiling—or giving a crude imitation of a smile on a wolfish face—and he took another step forward. “I know what I have to do,” he said. “If only my brother was here to help me.”

Rey frowned at the words. Ben didn't have a brother—she'd asked. It all fell into place when a single shot rang out and Yvetri slumped to the floor, her finger pulling the trigger on her own gun as she went down. It struck Kylo in the shoulder as he lunged forward, and Rey, in her sudden terror, leapt backwards into Hux. He clearly hadn't been expecting it, because it pushed him off balance, scratching deeply into the side of her neck as he stumbled. She fell back, only to be caught against the cuffs and held up by her wrists. “Ben!” she screamed.

He didn't seem to notice her, his eyes locked on Hux as he barrelled past her, wrapping his hand
around the redhead’s throat, pushing him back into the wall and lifting him from the ground.

Kylo wasted no time waiting for the other man to shift. He tore Hux’s throat out, looking into those icy blue eyes as blood sprayed from what remained of his neck. Kylo had almost severed the man’s head from his body, crushing through the windpipe as he ripped that out, too. “She—is—mine.” He repeated as Hux gasped for air that wouldn’t come, making a sickening squelching sound as blood filled his airway, his eyes already fluttering from blood loss.

Rey stared in horror as the life was leached from his eyes, and he went boneless in the wolfman’s grasp. It had all happened so fast, within the span of a few seconds.

She slowly turned to see what had happened in the rest of the room. Yvetri was lying the floor, motionless, blood pooling from her skull, soaking her body in a puddle of crimson. As she watched, a man clad entirely in black rounded the corner and put another round in her head, immediately lifting his eyes to see Rey. He was wearing some sort of gas mask, she realized.

He lingered near the door, watching as Kylo released Hux from his hold and his body slumped to the floor, collapsing in on itself.

Kylo stood there for a long moment, staring down at what he'd done, his body shaking.

“Ben,” she gasped, a shudder of her own rolling through her. Her mind registered that he was her alpha, that he was the one she belonged to. He had come to save her, had killed for her. “It hurts,” she moaned as her body kicked into overdrive now that she was in his presence again, completely ignoring the way her neck was pouring blood. She felt light-headed and dizzy, trying to stay conscious as he turned to her, seeming to remember why he was there.

He rushed over to her and pressed a huge hand against her throat to staunch any bleeding. “Neiric!” he barked, jerking his muzzle upwards to the chains. “Help me get her down.”

She vaguely registered the other man stepping closer and her head lolled from side to side, her vision blackening around the edges. “Ben,” she whispered, more weakly this time.

“I'm here, sweetheart,” he told her, picking her up to relieve the pressure from her arms. “Stay with me, don't fall asleep. You're safe now.”

Rey tried to stay awake, but the darkness was creeping in, unable to be kept at bay. She almost welcomed it, if it would relieve the pain of this heat. It had doubled in intensity, a low pulsing as her core constricted, trying to accept a knot that wasn’t there.

Vaguely, she heard Ben urging her to stay awake, even going so far to use the alpha command on her. She felt it in her bones, the need to do as he said, but she simply couldn't. She was too weak. Her arms were released, and she rested her head against the fur on Ben’s broad chest as she felt the darkness take her.

Chapter End Notes

Lyrics are "Until the World Goes Cold" by Trivium.
Chapter Notes

An update? Holy shit! I hope you enjoy~

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Are we too grown to mess around?

Ooh and I can't wait forever baby

Both of us should know better

Ooh, ooh ooh ooh been wishin' for you

Ooh, ooh

Tryna do what lovers do ooh

The first time she had come to, Rey was floating through pale white halls, wincing against the harsh lights overhead. Is this what the afterlife was like? She turned her head, eyes squinting as tightly as possible to keep out the light while simultaneously taking in her surroundings. Her head lolled to the side and she registered men sleeping on the floor.

They weren't sleeping, though, she realized a second later. They were dead, unmoving, coated in their own blood. Their bodies littered the halls, clad in all black, their weapons at their sides, eyes open and unseeing. What had happened here?

She registered a moment later that she was not floating, but being carried instead. The body underneath her was warm and hard, unyielding against her searching fingers. She wove them through the thick fur, clutching tightly as she breathed in the smell of woodsly spice and cider. She knew that scent from somewhere, some part of her mind whispered.

There was a voice calling her name, and it sounded strange, foreign and gruff, but it was vaguely familiar.

Stay.

Stay with me, Rey.
That was a nice voice, she thought. She’d like to do what it asked, to stay, but her body seemed to have other plans.

She disappeared into the void again.

When she awoke the second time, she was surrounded by warmth. She was sore and she was boiling, and there was something heavy draped across her torso. Eyes fluttering open, she looked around the room, recognizing it vaguely as hers. Her head was fucking pounding. Her skin was so sensitive everywhere something came into contact with it. Her clothes were too tight, her face somehow flushed and and clammy at the same time. And there was something wrapped around her neck. Lifting one hand, she clawed at it, only to wince as pain lanced through the wound underneath.

Oh yeah, something had torn part of her throat out. It was sore, throbbing right below the gland on her neck that was equally sensitive to the touch, though for different reasons.

*Shit.* She was in heat. She was still in heat.

As though her body had suddenly awoken from some great slumber, a flood of arousal coated her inner thighs, and the warm pressure on her shifted.

Oh, that was Ben. His head lifted from where he’d been resting it on her stomach, his nostrils flaring slightly as he inhaled her sudden wetness. He twisted back to look up at her, his dark eyes a mixture of worry, affection, and heat.

At his movement, it sent a wave of his scent up to her, and her breath came in a harsh rush.

“Hey,” he said, voice low and rough, his body already answering the call to hers, even as she could tell he was fighting to keep his senses about him. “How do you feel?”

“Like I got hit by a truck,” she said quietly, swallowing thickly. Her throat burned with the movement, and she again brushed her fingers across the bandage.

He shifted again, moving completely off from where he’d been curled up around her. Kneeling on the bed, Rey could see that he was completely nude, and his body was ready to help see her through this heat. He was long and thick, already hard and throbbing with desire. As she lifted her eyes back to his, the sheer effort to tear them away from his cock monumental, she saw the concern in his eyes, a contrast to what his body was saying.

Her alpha was going to take care of her—*had* been taking care of her. He’d been guarding her body while she’d been asleep, and she remembered suddenly that he had killed people in order to get to her. Her alpha was strong and fierce, and she had nothing to worry about, her newly omega mind told her. He would take care of her, and he’d proven that he could. He was worthy to be with.

“I nearly lost you, Rey,” he said quietly, and her heart clenched at the anguish in his voice. “It was so stupid of me to think that you’d be safe with me. I’m so sorry this happened to you. I never would have wished this life on you like this.”

“What?” she asked dumbly, not understanding. So she was an omega now, so what?

“Your body is going to force you to change soon, sweetheart,” he explained. “You were
...scratched, not once, but twice now, and if you can survive the change, you'll be a werewolf, too.”

“...shit,” she breathed after a few long moments. How was this even possible? He'd said the change was hard for females for some reason, that they almost never survived. “I'm going to die, Ben.” Her eyes were filling with tears, even as a wave of warmth flew over her, her body trying to clench around nothing. It wanted a knot, needed Ben’s knot.

“No,” he growled fiercely, shaking his head, whipping that wonderful mane of hair around his face. “I'm going to take care of you, Rey, my little omega.”

Rey’s eyes went wide at the word, at having Ben confirm that yes, she was an omega, but more importantly, she was his omega.

It was more instinct than anything else to answer, “Yes, alpha.” Her heart was thundering, and she had so many questions about what had happened at the compound, but those would have to wait. Her body was tired of waiting, and another wave of wetness slid from her core to drench her thighs. She was nude, laying under some blankets on her bed, so that meant Ben had undressed her, probably searching for more wounds. Her wrists were rubbed raw, but none of that mattered anymore.

“Rey…” Ben whispered, his dark eyes aflame with want, but he kept himself under control, even if his beast wanted to make itself known. “I'm going to take care of you, but we need to see you through this heat first. Are you all right to move, sweetheart?”

The gentleness in his tone would have been endearing if Rey didn't feel like she was about to claw herself out of her own skin if she didn't get some relief. Already, with each passing second, her fingers were inching closer down to that area between her legs, planning to make up for lost time when she'd been tied with her hands over her head. She felt a little dizzy as she shifted, but it was nothing she couldn't handle. “Yeah, I think I'm okay. I just…”

Ben raised an eyebrow inquiringly at her, waiting for her to continue, his hands shaking slightly where they rested on his legs.

“I need your knot, Ben,” she whispered quietly, her voice trembling with need.

How was it possible for his eyes to go even darker? He inhaled shakily before speaking, deep and rough, sending vibrations through her core, “Then I'll give it to you. I'll knot you.” He crawled towards her on the bed, and her eyes traversed the expanse of his broad shoulders, rippling with every movement. “I'll knot you and give you everything you need, Rey. I'll fill you so full of my come.”

Swallowing hard as he moved to hover over her, Rey nodded gently, hearing the absolute promise in his words. God, she wanted this, even if she hadn't been in heat, she knew exactly how he felt inside of her. Now she needed it like she needed air. “Fuck me, Alpha, make me forget about everything except you.” She reached up to grip him by the back of his neck, her fingers tangling in the thick, wavy locks at the base of his skull, and pulled him down into a searing kiss.

He made a noise against her mouth before he forced her lips apart with his own and plunged his tongue deep inside, exploring every inch of her mouth with long sweeps.

Ben took such good care of her in all things. They may not have known each other for very long, but his devotion was undeniable. He’d cared for her before her omega status had made itself known, and now he was here, caring for her through it. Rey tried to pour every ounce of her emotion for him into their kiss, clutching him tightly to her with one hand still around his neck, the other skimming up
and down his bicep. Her nails dug into his skin and he growled again, a throaty, primal sound of pure pleasure.

He broke from her mouth with a groan, rolling onto his back as he dragged her on top of him. Some part of her brain—that primitive side—told her that this was her alpha submitting to her, allowing her to set a pace. It was rare for such a dominant man to do this, but something told her it was reserved just for her.

Looking down at Ben, his silky hair fanning out across her pillows, Rey had another moment to register just how beautiful he really was. And he was all hers for the taking.

She held his gaze as she rolled her hips down against him, feeling his hard length sliding along her wetness. His hands came home to settle on her waist, fingers digging in with bruising intensity as he fought off his own urges—ones she shared. Ones that said knot, claim, mate.

She had been unsure if she was willing to mate herself to him for life, but with his heady scent filling her, a mix of forest and musk, combined with knowing what he’d done for her, she had suddenly never been so sure in her life.

“Ben—Alpha,” she pled as she ground herself down against him. Something was telling her that for their mating to be official, they had to mark each other. “Please, please, please!” Her hands came up to palm at her breasts, fingers pinching and rolling her nipples as her free fingers kneaded at the extra tissue.

The man below her made a noise in response, his eyes blown almost completely black with desire. “My little omega needs to come—needs to come so that I can fill her up,” he said roughly as he maneuvered her hips so that she was poised above him. The only indication of what he was about to do was a flash of something in his eyes, a twitch in his jaw as he pulled her down onto him, sinking in deeply.

Rey let out a loud moan, her head falling back, baring her throat to him. Oh god, he filled her so well, stretching her body and then asking her to take more of him. He rocked her back and forth on him for a moment before he stilled entirely and looked up at her, his face strained. “Fuck yourself on my cock, Rey. Fuck yourself on your Alpha’s cock.”

“Yes, yes, anything for you, Alpha!” she panted, feeling the burn of her heat singing through her veins, sated only by the alpha beneath her, and she knew instinctively that his seed would be the balm to this unbearable fire.

Moving her hands down to place along his broad, firm chest, she lifted herself up and slammed her body back down, feeling a jolt right where she so desperately needed it.

Her nails dug into his skin as she gasped and arched, her spine contorting slightly as she sought relief. This feeling was agonizing, and she needed more. She needed him, needed his knot, his protection, his love.

Suddenly, it didn't matter that she wasn’t entirely human anymore. If she had to experience this, she would pick no other person to go through it with than Ben. Kind, funny, gracious Ben.

He was even kind enough to allow her to use his body like this, taking everything he had to offer until it just wasn't enough. “Please,” she wailed, tears beginning to form in her eyes as she tried to snake a hand down between her legs.

He groaned below her, using his strong hands to flip them over, pulling out so that he could roll
her onto her stomach, and with a firm tug on her hips, bring her up onto her hands and knees. “Is this what you need, Rey? Need me to take you from behind and pound into that pretty little cunt of yours?”

Oh god, he was so filthy, and it sent another rush of slick from her, trailing down her thighs. Never before in all of their previous rounds had he been quite this filthy, as though he was unsure if it would make her uncomfortable. She’d thought maybe it would have, but boy was she wrong. Maybe it was the heat warping her thoughts, but when Ben spoke like that to her, it just sent even more fire through her.

“Yes—oh god—yes!” she moaned, working her hips back against him, grinding into his cock.

She could practically feel his fierce smile in the dim light, and she turned her head to look over her shoulder at him. He was everything she’d thought she’d see; his skin was flushed, his eyes wild, lips slightly parted as he ran his eyes over her back.

He was trembling slightly, whether that was from anticipation, apprehension, or something else, she couldn't say. One hand left her hips for a moment to guide himself in, and then it was back in place and he was pushing into her with a hard thrust.

Rey’s head fell forward, her hair spilling into her eyes and across the mattress, a gasp leaving her at the sudden intrusion. It felt so good, so good.

He settled the weight of his body across her, his chest pressed against her back with his mouth hovering just behind her ear. His breath was hot against her neck, hitting right where the gland was on the unwounded side. She shivered, feeling a sound trying to escape her.

“You’ve set off my rut again, my little omega. Do you think you can keep up a bit more this time?” he growled, pulling his hips away from hers just enough for her to feel every delicious inch. Both of his hands came up to cover hers on the bed and he laced their fingers together, holding her down as he began to move. His thrusts were powerful, every bit of strength from his legs and back going into them. There was a loud slap of skin together with every movement, ringing out in the bedroom like a drum.

She nodded quickly, her mouth opening to answer as a moan came out instead. “Yes! Just like that—oh god, Ben!”

He pounded into her harder, the angle just right where she needed it, and she closed her eyes, soft sounds and gasps leaving her as she let him take her. He rode her body mercilessly, driving into her enough that she knew she would be feeling it come morning, heat or no heat.

“That’s it, take my cock, little omega. Let me hear you,” he demanded, removing his hand from hers for just a moment before he grasped the back of her hair and yanked, twisting her face to the side.

Rey didn’t even know if half the sounds leaving her were human anymore. She was basically whining, keening in her pleasure as she felt the base of his cock begin to swell slightly. It prevented him from filling her up completely, but in the end, she knew it would be worth it.

His knot slammed against her again and again before one particularly hard thrust pushed it into her and the feeling of it sent her over the edge, her vision whiting out as she felt herself clench down around him, and he cursed against her neck.

A second later, his knot inflated to its full size, stretching her further as he pumped his seed into
her. It was a balm to her heat, instantly soothing the ache and the burn. He groaned raggedly against her skin.

She could feel every twitch of him inside her, pumping even more of his spend into her wanting core. Instinctively, she flexed her walls around him, milking him even further.

Her body felt sated, her mind dazed as he filled her, pumping so much into her that it had nowhere to go but out, seeping down her inner thighs.

With a heavy groan, he maneuvered them so that they were laying on their sides and he reached down with one hand to rub it into her skin. Some part of her understood what he was doing; he was making her smell like him even further, as though to ward off another alpha.

She was tired, exhausted from healing and from the extra exertion of sating her heat, and he was warm, so warm, curled up against her back like that. With his come cooling between her thighs and filling her as he stayed locked inside, occasionally twitching, she felt herself begin to drift, more calm and content than she'd been in a long while.

Ben nuzzled against the back of her neck, his teeth scraping gently over her gland. “Sleep, Rey. I'll answer any questions you have when you wake up.” She felt him press a tender kiss to the back of her head and his arm snaked around her waist.

His heart was thudding in his chest, his breath coming in rapid puffs against her hair, and Rey had the single fleeting thought before sleep took her that she wouldn't mind going to sleep like this more often.

When she awoke, it was to the smell of bacon cooking. She could hear the sizzling of it even from her bedroom; apparently she was still a werewolf with super-hearing. She didn't know what she was expecting, but that was that, she supposed.

She could feel her heat threatening to return soon, her body feeling a little flushed, so she couldn't have slept more than an hour or two.

And she was hungry.

Groaning, she swung her legs over the side of the bed and stretched, her body feeling very used and yep, very sore. She felt weighted down, like someone had replaced her feet with lead replicas.

Moving stiffly, she rose and made her way over to the robe that hung on the back of the bedroom door. It was the first time she'd actually gotten up and really moved—no, sex did not count—and she was feeling the effects of it.

She could hear whistling coming from the kitchen, as well, some tune she couldn't name or place, but she liked the way it came from Ben’s lungs. As she entered the kitchen and inhaled deeply, breathing in the additional smell of biscuits and gravy as well, Rey’s mouth began to water. She hadn't eaten in like two days now, and if she didn't get something in her stomach ASAP, she was going to die, she just knew it.

The whistling stopped suddenly, and Ben turned to face her. He was nude from the waist up, probably to protect certain parts from the splatter of bacon grease. When she finally lifted her eyes to
his, she couldn't help the way her heart leapt a little bit.

Ben was giving her a crooked half-smile, his eyes sparkling with some inner joy as he set a pair of tongs back onto the counter. He approached her quickly, immediately winding his arms around her to pull her into his chest, his mouth moving down to cover her gland. He kissed it gently before running his tongue along it, causing her to shiver.

“Ben,” she tried, her voice sounding weak. No, they couldn't just jump right back into bed; she had questions to ask him, and she wanted to get them out there before the next wave of her heat hit and there would be no other thought except for knot, claim, fuck.

He didn't seem to share the same intent, and maybe it was some carnal alpha thing, but she had to repeat his name several more times before he finally lifted his head away from her, his eyes looking slightly lost. “Hey,” he said, and his voice was low and husky, as though he'd just been roused from sleep.

“You said I could ask you whatever I wanted,” she prompted gently, pulling back just enough to look up into his beautiful, dark eyes. Whoever said brown eyes were boring could go to hell, for all she cared. Uhm, hell, have you ever seen brown eyes when the morning sunlight hits them? Yeah, exactly.

“Huh? Oh, yeah,” he replied after a moment, blinking to get back to himself. “Do you want breakfast?”

She nodded eagerly, kissing his cheek before he straightened, and she slipped past him to go sit at the table. “I want to know what happened—what you did to them back there. Tell me everything.”

Ben nodded slowly, clearly thinking hard as he dished up two plates, both stacked high with biscuits, bacon, and a bit of eggs, too. Apparently heat and rut burned a lot of calories; who knew? “All right, I'll tell you. I'm sure you can figure out what mostly happened, though I guess that is a bit different than me coming out and saying it, right?”

Digging into her food, stuffing wonderfully crunchy—but not too crunchy—bacon into her mouth, she nodded. “Honesty is the best policy, especially with me. And, I mean, you did kind of do it to help me, so it would be pretty awful for me to get mad at you, because who knows what they were going to do to me.”

Ben winced, clearly not wanting to think about that potential outcome, either.

“I killed them. I killed every last one of them, except for Neiric. He was the only one that had any issue with how Hux had been running things. And he helped me get you out.”

“He was the one wearing the mask, right?” she clarified.

Ben nodded, “Yeah, it was a necessity for him to come into the room. I wouldn't let him, otherwise, not that he fought me on it. He's an alpha, as well, and well...you're an omega in heat right now. My omega, and Neiric didn't want to get in the way of that. The mask filtered out your pheromones so he could stand to be in the same room.”

“So what happens to all of the...bodies?” she asked, hesitating as she looked over the table at him.

He was watching her warily, as though afraid she was going to bolt the first chance she got. “There was a fire,” he said slowly. “Which I suppose we can thank my mother for.”

“Remind me to send her a bouquet,” Rey mumbled around another mouthful. “I still want to meet
her. And tell her what a fine boy she has.”

Finally smiling, Ben shook his head and sighed. “Fine, we'll have to go visit for dinner sometime soon, but not until your heat is over, obviously. I don't trust anyone else around you right now. If Finn or Poe were to come over here right now, they'd be regretting it. But we need to thank them, as well. They helped create a distraction so I could get to you. And...I think they should probably know our little secret—don’t give me that look, it's your secret now too.”

Rey muffled a laugh to keep from spraying food all over in a very unladylike way, “I guess it is, huh? Finn is really into werewolves, too. Wait until he finds out; he's going to lose his damn mind. Maybe we can invite them to dinner at your mother’s whenever we go.”

“That sounds like a plan. But for now, as soon as you're done eating that, I'm going to take you back to bed and have my way with you again. I can smell your next wave coming. It’s like water in a pot, just simmering on the stove.”

Rey shivered, but she knew he was right. She could feel her body growing more and more feverish as their conversation went on, but her hunger had been enough to slow it somewhat, it seemed. Feeling his intense gaze on her again, she ducked her head a bit and tried to stealthily eat faster.

She still wasn't a hundred percent done with their conversation, but biology was demanding something, and it wasn't easy to ignore for long.

Chapter End Notes

Song lyrics are "What Lovers Do" by Maroon 5.
Chapter 19: You're Shitting Me

Chapter Notes

Well, hello there.

If you're reading this, then I'm so happy you're still around. I know this is a shorter chapter and I couldn't decide how much content I wanted to cram into it, so decided just to give you all a long overdue update and I'll save it for the next chapters.

That being said, we are slowly drawing to a close with this story. We've got a few more ends to tie up here, and I just wanted to say thank you to each and every single one of you.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

I need more hours with you
You spent the weekend
Getting even, ooh ooh
We spent the late nights
Making things right, between us
But now it's all good baby

Roll that Backwood baby
And play me close
'Cause girls like you

Run around with guys like me
'Til sundown, when I come through

I need a girl like you, yeah yeah

“You're shitting me. There's no way,” Finn gasped, dark eyes large. He looked at Poe, sitting next to him and seemed to silently ask 'can you believe this?'

“We’re not,” Rey laughed, her hand holding Ben’s on the table.

“Ohay…” Poe murmured slowly. “You mean to tell me that you're both werewolves?”

“Well, technically the only confirmed one here is Ben. I haven't actually turned, but all of the signs are there that it's soon,” she shrugged. She knew Finn had a love of werewolves, as expressed by that night that she'd, ironically, found out that Ben was one.

Finn nearly cackled in delight, clapping his hands. “So that's why all the secrecy in the club. You couldn't exactly say 'my girlfriend has been taken by a hoard of werewolves and I myself as a werewolf, need to go find her'. It all makes sense now!”

Ben nodded slowly, a little on edge at revealing his secret, but he’d felt the two men sitting across from them deserved to know. They'd played a part in getting Rey back and he wanted to at least clue them in on some habits they shared, such as heats and ruts. It would explain the radio silence for
most of the last week, except for the few phone calls and texts between waves that let them know Rey was safe.

It felt odd to confide in someone else, but strangely nice, as he'd come to trust Finn and Poe to some extent.

“It’s true,” he replied with a casual shrug.

“Okay, but like...do you have to do it with the moon, or can you do it anytime?” Finn asked.

“Technically, I have to shift when it's a full moon, but I can do it at anytime, as well,” Ben replied.

Finn perked up a bit more, and if he didn't look so starstruck, he looked like he might start legitimately fangirling. “What about blood? Do you like...crave it? Like a vampire does? Only different? What about vampires? Are they real?”

Ben held up his hands at the barrage of questions to try and fend them off. He was almost on the edge of laughter as he answered, “Yes and no. My wolf form craves it, but I do not. I can eat whatever. Vampires, to my knowledge, don't exist, but I wouldn't say it's impossible.”

“No fucking way, man. This has to be some sort of elaborate prank. Can you show us?” Poe asked.

Rey glared at him. “He doesn't have to show you, Poe. That's basically the equivalent of asking him to take his shirt off so that you can ogle him.”

Poe chuckled, holding his hands up, “Fine, fine. I mean, I’ve got Finny here to take his shirt off for me whenever I want. I just wanna see this werewolf business, is all.”

“Maybe the next full moon,” Ben said with a shake of his head, a smile on his lips. “Theoretically, Rey should...Rey should have her change, as well. So that's probably not a good time, either. She’ll be unstable; I'll have to keep her in check.”

He slung his arm around Rey’s shoulders and pulled her in close with a kiss to her hair.

They'd talked in depth about what she could expect during her first change, because there was almost no question about if—it was more a matter of when. It was going to be the worst pain she'd ever felt, even more so than childbirth, if how he described it was anything to go by. Not that she had experience with either to compare the two. That, combined with the animalistic part of her brain being in control, it could go badly for anyone that got too close. She was afraid, but having someone to help her, to ground her, would be sorely needed.

“Well, all I'm saying is that whenever things settle down and you two are able to not fly off the handle and kill us, we would like to see for ourselves,” Finn continued, his dark eyes bright with excitement.

“Ohay,” Rey and Ben both agreed in unison, looking up as the waitress arrived with their orders of food.

They’d both ordered substantial amounts of food, enough for two werewolves that had spent the better part of the last week buried deep inside of each other.

Ben felt so grateful to have found Rey, the perfect match for him in nearly every way, from her passion to her stubbornness. She may be the omega his more alpha side longed for, but she was hardly submissive. Sure, she had some omega tendencies that he adored, but he loved her attitude
and snarkiness. She may seem soft and quiet at first, but he knew it was just because she was questioning this whole situation. It wasn't every day that you found out someone was a werewolf, and all of the bullshit that went along with it. In this situation, it just so happened to be weird mating rituals and getting kidnapped, but hey, who was counting?

“You okay?” Rey asked quietly, her eyes full of concern as she squeezed his hand.

He nodded once, bringing her hand up to kiss her fingers. “Yeah, I'm fine. Just thinking.”

“About?”

That was another thing he loved—they could be in the middle of a restaurant and whenever they spoke to each other, they were lost in their own little bubble, where the rest of the world just fell away.

“If it's too much for you,” he sighed softly. “If you hadn't met me, it may not have triggered your change and heats. I don't want you to regret it.”

She was quiet for a moment as she nodded, processing his words. “If it makes you feel better, something inside me, that werewolf gene, has always been there, and now it's awake, thanks to you. I don't regret it. It'll take some getting used to, but I'll have you to help show me how.”

Smiling, Ben leaned over to kiss her softly, a light, reassuring press of his lips that said he'd always be there.

Hearing the sound of two throats clearing across the table, they broke reluctantly to turn their heads to Poe and Finn.

Finn turned to Poe and slapped him on the shoulder, glaring, “Why don't you ever kiss me like that?”

Poe grinned, shrugging, “Probably because I don't have lips made for sin like some people at this table.” He shot Ben a pointed look before he winked and wrapped his arm across the back of Finn's chair.

“Well, apparently it's good enough for you to agree to marry him,” Rey pointed out, hazel eyes sparkling with humor.

“True, true, I'll give him that,” Finn conceded, snickering to himself.

Ben just rolled his eyes. He'd always been rather self-conscious about his own body. Either his lips were too full, or his ears were too big, or maybe he squinted too much; someone always had a flaw to point out about him.

Except for Rey.

She was the only one that seemed to truly love every inch of him, and his alpha side preened a bit, puffing his chest out as he basked in her presence.

His lovely little omega, his girlfriend, was perfection in its purest form. She understood him on a level more than just primal, carnal desire. It was an understanding between two souls, even if they hadn't been together all that long. If he felt confident enough that she for sure wouldn't turn him down, he'd get down on one knee and propose marriage, as well as a potential mating bite.

However, given that she'd grown up on the more human side of things, he'd wait. He couldn't
deny in his heart how he felt about her, though. Ben Solo loved her, and he'd be damned if anything happened to her that he could prevent.

With that in mind, he said, “I think we should do as much as we can to prepare you for your change.”

*I won't lose you.*

Rey raised an eyebrow at him, her gaze sliding from his to a motion behind him in the next moment.

“Here's your food,” the waitress said with a cheery smile, carrying a tray of plates.

She set down a burger and fries for both Finn and Poe, while Ben and Rey seemed to have ordered half the menu each. The waitress gave a dubious eye to the amount of food she placed in front of Rey alone: a salad, a burger, two huge slices of pizza, chicken alfredo pasta, and a large chocolate milkshake.

Ben's order wasn't much different, but there was a second burger and some extra fries. As though right on cue, both of their stomachs rumbled and they dug in like they'd been starving for the better portion of the last week.

Which wasn't true, as Ben had made more than sure that they both ate enough to tide them over, but fucking that frantically for such an extended amount of time with suppressed appetites burned a lot of calories. *Not* that either one of them was counting.

Poe sort of hid behind Finn, peeking out from behind his shoulder as he eyed the two werewolves like he was afraid he'd be smacked with a stray bit of food.

“You guys okay? Uhm... hungry, much?” he asked, the barest hint of a smile showing as the waitress disappeared.

Ben and Rey both made enthusiastic sounds, not even caring that they were barely chewing. It brought back a memory of the first time he'd seen her, actually.

His wolf form had been feasting on the carcass of a deer when she'd stepped into his life. She'd looked like an angel, with the moonlight falling around her. She'd looked like his savior, a hand in the darkness reaching out to bring him back towards the light. Even though he'd been able to smell her fear, his only thought had ever been to protect her. He had to protect that light and make sure no harm came to her, so he'd herded her home, and the next day, when she'd gone into the city, he'd followed. He'd followed her then and he would follow her now, wherever she led him.

She'd seen him at his worst, a beast with literal bits of animal flesh dripping from his mouth, and even after knowing that it had been him, she'd allowed him into her life, her bed, and her heart.

He knew that she cared about him. She cared about him deeply, and they had yet to actually admit that to one another. Perhaps it was time to stop beating around the bush. Maybe he should just ask her to move in with him full time, or he with her, and they could just jump that hurdle.

One look down at her, of seeing her stuff her face, and he felt his heart warm at the thought of seeing her do that every single day of their lives. It would be hell on their grocery bill, but it would be worth it.

After eating in relative silence, and everyone at the table finishing everything on their plates, Ben insisted on paying for everyone's meals. He worked hard in his line of business and he had no issue
with footing the bill every now and then, even despite the protests from Poe.

“You know you don’t have to do that,” Poe muttered.

Rey just rolled her eyes, “Oh hush. Consider it an early wedding present.”

Chapter End Notes

Song lyrics are "Girls Like You" by Maroon 5.

For me, this band, which is one of my long time favorites, just has so many good Reylo songs.
Oh look, it me! Seriously, I apologize so much for the late updates on this story. I promise I do plan to finish it, and the updates should be coming a little bit faster now. I've made a promise to myself and others that I have to finish this first before I can start any other big projects. That doesn't mean I can't plan for them, though, am I right? Heh. Anyway, I hope you guys enjoy this.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

I am a wild one, break me in

Saddle me up and let's begin

I am a wild one, tame me now

Running with wolves and I'm on the prowl

Rey was a mess of nerves, anxiously pacing her house, her fingers twisting in front of her.

From the kitchen, to the living room, and then to the bathroom, down to the bedroom and back again, over and over.

Tonight was the full moon, and she couldn't deny the fact that she felt it deep in her soul. It was a tingle in her bones, her body wanting to shed its skin. She felt like she was running a fever, though she knew that this was different than her heat fever. This was no less carnal or primal, some deep seated gene in her DNA triggered and set alight, yet it wasn't all consuming. She could think, could still make her own decisions, but Ben had said her animal side would be in control later.

He was off at work, trying to get in a shift before he came over before the sun set and he would guide her through it. She missed him, wanted the comfort of his strong arms around her, his reassuring scent in her nose.

He'd left her one of his shirts for comfort, and when she'd given him a questioning look, he'd given a sheepish shrug. He'd said that, as derogatory as it may sound, she was partially an animal now, a portion of her brain operating on instinct, and animals were comforted by scents. The example he'd given was a dog in a strange place, curling up with their favorite blanket because it was familiar.

Bringing the shirt up to her nose, she inhaled deeply, her eyes going unfocused as she fought to calm down. There was still more than enough time. Maybe she could settle her nerves through
jogging, burning off some of this excess energy until she was tired enough to take a nap before tonight. Ben had also warned her not to wear herself out too much, as she would need her strength to complete the change.

She was still nervous, the lingering fear that she wouldn’t even finish the change always in the back of her mind. Females that were bitten usually didn’t survive. But it seemed that she’d been born one, and not infected, so Ben had reasoned that her body had always been prepared for this. It was why she had been able to accept his knot before all the werewolf business on her end. He’d knotted her and set off some reaction deep in her biology that made that particular gene awake from its dormant state. She just had to trust that he was right. Even if he wasn’t, he would still be there with her at the end.

A glance at the clock on the microwave showed it was just a little after four, and Ben should be coming over in about an hour or so.

He was over so often at this point, that she was half tempted to just invite him to move in with her. There was something about how protective and possessive he’d been lately, how he was always on the lookout for more threats, and he wanted to stay close to his omega. It was endearing, to see this big, hulking man turn into putty for her. She tried not to take advantage of it too much, but when she was hungry and fast food sounded delicious, she seemed to have no issue letting him know. He never once complained, always bringing her what she asked for, and then extra on top of it.

Sighing heavily, she went around the house, focusing her attention on cleaning up a bit. She got the laundry going, distracting herself by debating on which detergent to use. There was the one Ben had, which gave his clothes a wonderfully fresh smell that she loved, and then there was hers, which made sure to get all the dirt and oils out.

Deciding to just say fuck it, she poured in a little of both. Whatever. They were just clothes.

A tingling in her neck made her pause. Reaching up, she prodded lightly at the wound that was still healing, wincing a bit to find it still tender. She’d had her throat nearly torn out by Hux, and again, she realized just how close she’d come to death. She still didn’t feel bad about him meeting his own end. It had been in defense, and it was hard to feel any remorse. Maybe that meant there was something wrong with her. Maybe that was just the animal part of her brain that had locked away that feeling. Whatever the reason, it was done, and she didn’t feel bad in the slightest.

She set about making a light snack, distracting herself further by playing with Daisy to pass the time. She had no idea how long she sat on the kitchen floor, pulling an old shoe string around the tile for the tabby to pounce on.

The phone ringing made her startle, her eyes going wide as she jerked her attention over to the device on the coffee table.

Picking it up, she glanced briefly at the caller ID, smiling in relief when she saw who it was.

“Hi, Leia.”

“Rey, dear, I’m so glad I caught you before tonight. How are you feeling?”

Feeling a wave of comfort settle over her at the warmth in her tone, Rey sank down onto the couch, eyes trained on the ceiling.

“I feel anxious, like I’m going to lose my mind here in a minute. I know it’s all biology, but I can’t seem to stop pacing. I want to claw my skin off and just run, but I know it isn’t time yet. It’s driving
me nuts,” she replied honestly.

It was nice to be able to talk to Ben’s mother like this, that she didn’t have to hide what she was. Leia had experience with this, had probably helped Ben through his shifts on more than one occasion, or at least knew about them. After the incident with Hux and Yvetri, Leia had called nearly every day to check on them. She was still adamant about them coming over for dinner after Rey’s change tonight, wanting to meet her in person.

“I’m sorry to hear that. I can’t say I know what it’s like, but Ben’s told me about it. He said that taking a scalding shower seemed to help. Something about the heat of the water doing something to the nerves in your body that make you feel that way. It’s worth a shot, no?”

“I’ll be sure to give that a try. How are you doing?” Rey asked, chewing on her bottom lip.

“I’m as well as I can be. I’m glad that everything seems to be calming down around here. I don’t think my heart can handle more drama at this age. I’m not going to live forever, you know. Which brings me to my next question—when am I getting those grandbabies?”

Rey barked out a laugh, shaking her head. The woman was insistent, that was for sure. “Leia, Ben and I haven’t been together for that long. I’m not sure either one of us is ready for children.”

Leia huffed, and Rey could imagine she was rolling her eyes. “Yes, well, first you two need to bite each other and get all that claiming business out of the way. Or not, I personally don’t think it matters that much, honestly. Ben’s absolutely crazy about you. I’ve never seen him like this. He’s so happy. Anytime he talks about you, he lights up like it’s the 4th of July.”

Rey couldn’t help the grin that suddenly appeared, her heart thudding faster at the thought of Ben talking to his mother about her like that.

“He’s pretty amazing, himself,” she said. “And you know, Leia, I’m pretty sure I love him.”

“Pretty sure? Well, I’ll take what I can get,” Leia laughed. “Don’t let him make you wait too long, Rey. I would like to be young enough to still watch my future grandchildren every now and then.”

“Oh, okay, I’ll be sure to let him know. I’ll talk to you tomorrow. Hopefully.”

“You’d better, Rey. If death comes for you, you tell it to fuck right off. You have unfinished business. Grandchildren, Rey. Think of my grandchildren!” Leia pressed.

Laughing even harder, Rey just shook her head. “All right, yes, I will think about your grandchildren. I’ll talk to you later.”

She hung up the phone and leaned forward to place it on the coffee table. Letting out a sigh, she slumped back against the couch, only stirring when she heard the sudden creek of hardwood.

“You love me?” Ben asked softly, gazing at her with an expression that looked timid and hopeful.

Blinking, her face suddenly flaming into what she knew was a bright cherry red, Rey gasped. “I—I didn’t hear you come in.”

He pushed away from the door frame, walking towards her with determination on his face. Kneeling down in front of her, he took her hands in his own, his dark eyes searching hers. “Please tell me I didn’t mishear you, Rey. Did you say you loved me?”

The tone of his voice made her gut clench. He looked so vulnerable right now, his eyes swimming
with questions. She looked from his eyes, down to his mouth, those plush lips of his set into an unsure line. Letting her gaze roam over the rest of his face, she took in the dark marks that scattered cross his cheeks, and above his eyes, the ones that she’d traced until she knew exactly where they were without even looking. She knew that the ones on his cheek reminded her of a starfish, and the ones on his back were some of her favorites to kiss, to run her tongue over. Beyond his physical appearance, which she found exceptionally appealing, his heart was gentle. They fit together like puzzle pieces, two halves of a whole. He completed her, and she had a feeling she completed him, as well.

Leaning forward, she pressed her forehead against his, a smile curving one corner of her mouth. “I did, Ben. I know it’s soon, but I love you. I feel something with you that I’ve never felt before, and it makes me happy. You make me happy.”

He let out a breath of air, dropping her hands to instead cup the sides of her face. His thumbs stroked over her cheeks gently before he pulled her mouth to his, surging upwards to meet her. He kissed her fiercely, stealing her breath away. Parting her lips, he snaked his tongue inside to dance alongside hers. Moaning, she threaded her fingers through his hair and pressed herself closer to him. When he pulled away, with a disappointed sigh, her stomach dropped a little.

“Rey, as much as I want to take you to bed and show you just how much I love you, too, it’s not a wise idea right now. Not with your change so close,” he murmured, leaning up to press a kiss to her forehead. “I love you, too, sweetheart. So much. So much.”

Relief flooded through her, and when she started breathing again, she hadn’t realized she’d stopped while waiting for him to say something. Smiling widely, she bent over to wrap her arms around his shoulders, pulling him in for a tight hug. His arms wrapped around her back, clutching her tight, and there was nowhere in the world she would rather be than right here with him.

Turning her head, she pressed her nose into his gland and inhaled deeply. “I can’t wait to mark you, Ben. To make it official. That, and I’m pretty sure your mother is going to kill us if we don’t do it soon,” she snickered.

He groaned, shaking his head. “Don’t tell me she’s hounding you about grandkids, too.”

“She is,” Rey replied, pulling back to look at him. She brushed some of his hair away from his eyes, capturing this moment to store away every single detail for the future. “Maybe once everything is under control, we could try. Once we’re ready.”

Ben’s face softened a bit more at that, if it was even possible, and he shifted to press a soft kiss to her mouth. “I would love that, Rey. I’ve wanted to be a father for a long time, and now that I have you, I would be honored if you were the mother of my children. Whenever you’re ready, though. I’ll wait as long as I need to.”

Breathing was suddenly hard again, and the smile that lit up her face this time was probably the brightest she’d ever given. “Soon. Let’s get this other werewolf shit, as your mom calls it, out of the way first.”

He took her into the forest when the sun began to sink below the horizon. The moon, pale and ghostly against the sky rose on the other side, not quite high enough for it to force a shift yet.
She squeezed his hand for reassurance, her nerves getting to her. Physically, she felt okay. The tingles and nerves aside, she didn’t feel like she was about to die. Then again, did one really know how that felt beforehand unless they had a terminal illness like her grandfather?

“Relax. You’ll be fine,” Ben soothed. She could tell he was just as nervous as she was, though. His scent betrayed him, but she nodded all the same.

“You said it hurts, right? The first time?”

He turned to look at her, then, his eyes sweeping briefly from her face to her naked body and then back up again. “It does. The first time is the worst. Your body has never done this before. It’ll be difficult, and it’ll feel like you’re about to break apart all at once. You can scream as loudly as you want out here. No one will here you.” He faltered for a moment, frowning. “That sounded pretty ominous, but I’m not going to kill you or anything out here. Just thought I should throw that out there.”

Rey just shook her head and rolled her eyes before swatting at him playfully.

Looking around them, she bit her lip as she noticed it was the very same clearing she’d first seen him in. If she strained her eyes, she could see the exact spot on the opposite side, and if she was curious enough, she was betting the bones of the deer he’d been devouring were still there.

“And you said the animal side will be mostly in control the first few times?” Her voice was soft, unwilling as she was to break the peacefulness around them. It would be broken all too soon, anyway.

“Yes,” he whispered, his tone matching hers. “You’ll need to eat something. Your body will be weak from the first time. I know it sounds unappetizing now, but once you’re changed, raw deer is going to sound really good. I’ll help you.”

She inhaled, allowing her enhanced senses to take in every detail available. There was the chill of the wind through the bare trees, rustling the branches against each other. The ground under her feet was frozen, but it wasn’t cold to her, her body fevered as her blood ran hot. Ben’s temperature matched hers, and when she looked at him, she could physically see steam rising off of his broad chest and shoulders. Her own were doing much the same.

“So what do we do to pass the time until the moon is higher?” she asked.

He shrugged softly. “It depends, really. We can just sit here and wait. We can walk around out here if you’d like. Whatever would be more comfortable for you, Rey. This is about you and your needs.”

Realizing that this could be the last time she had a conversation with him, should things go south, she drew him down to the ground. Waiting until he was sitting, she settled herself across his lap, ignoring how happy his body was to have her there. She trailed her fingers across his chest, tracing the marks there, as well as she asked, “Would you rather have a boy or a girl?”

The question seemed to catch him off guard. He froze for the briefest of moments, before giving a contented smile while he brushed his fingers across her hips. “I think I’d like at least one of each.”

“How many do you want?”

“As many as you’re willing to give me, Rey. I want a family with you. Be that no children or a dozen, I want to spend my life with you. I want a family.” He said sincerely, kissing her temple.
“I want children, too. I always thought of having a boy and a girl, too. I never wanted to have just one, because I grew up without siblings and it was pretty lonely. I would want them to have someone to play with,” she whispered.

“God, I am so lucky to have you and call you mine.”

“I think I’m a bit more lucky than you, Mr. Solo. It’s not everyday that you run across a super sexy werewolf that’s interested in you. Especially looking like you do,” she smirked.

“Rey, there is only one attractive person in this relationship, and that’s you,” Ben retorted with a huff.

“You really don’t see yourself like I do, Ben. You are the sexiest man I have ever seen. And I don’t know if you know this or not, but it should be illegal to have hair as soft as yours. Seriously, you must make a monthly sacrifice to the gods or something to keep it like that.”

“Maybe I’ll share my secrets with you later. We’ll see. No guarantees.”

For a time after, they simply enjoyed each other’s presence, touching the other where they could. Nothing too heavy. Rey could admit that she felt calmer with the touch, and when he stopped, she felt that same anxiety rearing its ugly head again. Thankfully, Ben seemed to understand, and he resumed his gentle caresses, saying that he needed the touch, too. They were animals, after all, and it was how they showed affection. Through mutual grooming and the like. While he wasn’t exactly grooming her, she loved it all the same. It soothed her beast, the animal she could almost physically see within her mind. It was pacing back and forth, agitated. Wanting to get out.

“It’s time, sweetheart,” Ben murmured, his face tilted up to the moon. “I can smell you so much more now. Your scent is changing.”

She moved off of him quickly, beginning to stand, only to kneel on the ground as Ben waved her back down.

“You’ll probably fall if you stand up during it. It’s safer for you to be lower to the ground,” he said, moving into a similar position himself. “The most important thing is to relax. If you fight it, that will make it harder and more painful. The thing you have to remember is that your wolf wants out, and keeping it caged will only make it fight you.”

She nodded, closing her eyes and taking several deep, calming breaths. Her blood felt like it was vibrating, just waiting for the most opportune time to become what she’d always been meant to be.

“Okay, I can do this. I can do this.”

“You can do this, Rey. You’re one of the strongest people I’ve ever met. No matter what happens, I love you,” he said, reaching over to touch her leg briefly.

She let his words ground her, focusing on his presence beside her as her neck and shoulders relaxed, her spine following until she had practically melted. It was as relaxed as she could possibly get.

It started in her fingertips first, the tingle she’d felt earlier growing stronger. Opening her eyes, but doing her best to keep her body relaxed, she watched as the digits began elongating, becoming thinner and more grotesque. Her nails sharpened into talons, and only when the bones in her hand snapped did she cry out, her arm jerking with the pain.

“Rey, stay relaxed. Don’t fight it,” Ben urged her, scooting closer.

When her spine began to bow unnaturally, she squeezed her eyes shut as agony ripped through
her. It was hot and blinding, the process speeding up as it gained momentum. She clenched her teeth together, screaming through them as more bones began to bend and break, the cracks loud and obscene.

Distantly, she heard Ben still trying to coach her, pleading with her, but she the roaring of blood in her ears was distracting. She could feel everything—the way her back split open, how as she hunched over, her hands and feet digging into the ground, they morphed from human limbs to animal ones. Where she had hands, she now had paws, and where her tailbone would be, there was suddenly a tail, helping to balance her as her body rearranged itself.

“You’re almost there, Rey. Stop fighting!” Ben yelled.

Letting out a primal scream that threatened to ruin her throat, she let it take her, let it claim her and consume her. Only when her skin seemed to explode off of her with a clear, slimy substance, did she realize that she was howling instead of screaming.

Collapsing onto her side, panting heavily, she kept her eyes squeezed shut as the pain flowed through her muscles. Everything began to knit itself back together, the agony slowly fading away until she only ached everywhere.

Feeling something bump her, she opened one eye to see a large black figure looming over her, his amber eyes serious as he looked back at her.

Still breathing heavily, she lifted her head, noticing vaguely how differently everything seemed to move. Another bump of the black wolf’s head into her made her struggle to get to her feet. She wobbled like a newborn calf on stilted legs, struggling to maintain her balance. Ben was there to catch her, though, allowing her to lean against him until she was able to hold herself upright without falling. He radiated pride, his expression pleased as he stepped back to circle around her.

When she turned her head, she caught a glimpse of her fur. Her fur. She had fur. Looking down at her legs, she those too had transformed. If she crossed her eyes, she could see her snout in front of her and she had a moment of giddy relief. She’d survived, and the first change was the worst. She was still coherent, able to think, but she understood now what Ben had meant when he said the animal instincts would take over. She was ravenous, and while she wanted to go tear into the closest prey she could find, she also wanted to cling to her sanity.

Tilting her head again, she looked back at her side, noticing how the fur was whiter than snow. It looked so soft and plush, and she had half a mind to want to know how it felt under her fingers. She imagined it probably wasn’t as soft as Ben’s.

Looking to him next, she moved towards him and pushed her head under his chin, instinct demanding she show him affection like this before she licked at his muzzle. He seemed only too happy to return her attentions, pushing his head back against hers to nuzzle and rub against.

When both of their heads snapped up to the same sound in the distance, they shared a brief look before Ben gave a look she would have thought a smile. Lifting his nose into the wind, he inhaled sharply, making a show of it until she did it, as well.

The rustic scent of leaves and dirt greeted her, along with...that was definitely a deer. She wasn’t sure how she knew, but she did.

In unison, like they were running on the same wavelength, they took off after it, being careful not to give themselves away. She let her beast guide her, with Ben showing her how to effectively take down and kill an animal that large. She felt in her zone, like she belonged for the first time in her life,
like she had found her true calling.

As they stood across from one another over the carcass between them, they both raised their muzzles to the air and howled, two songs mingling into one.

Chapter End Notes

Song lyrics are "Wild Ones" by Flo Rida ft Sia.

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