Corruption Works Both Ways

by Khawapashi

Summary

The Force bond is not gone. Sad Kylo needs a long-distance hug. Rey does not want to be the new Luke Skywalker. Or Leia Organa. Or anyone’s leader, really. She just wants to fix her lightsaber. Good thing she knows a guy through the Force. Rey and Kylo make secret plans to meet on Mandalore. The ruler of Mandalore does not want collateral damage. Poe and Finn are jerks about things. Rose is adorable. All lot of old people give some vague advice. Some dead guys give vague advice too. Eventual smut. Kylo is dramatic. Rey is annoyed by everything. Bondage and sub/dom between our favorite Force lovers in later chapters. Rey does not submit easily, like she could break out and kick his ass anytime she wanted to. Also, these poor kids have got issues, like seriously terrible back stories. There are apprentices in later chapters. Ahsoka is here somewhere too. Stay tunned for Part 2 and 3 where some more battles with laser swords and space wizardy happen. Note while I try for happy endings, there are some VERY adult villains, some scenes and characters include underage prostitution/slavery, graphic violence happens, and there is some consenting bondage, domination and inappropriate use of the Force and lightsabers.
The archive warnings are just to be safe, as there are mentions of sex slavery with one character and some relationships in part 2 are underage. All sexual encounters actually described in detail in this part are consensual, later parts will have a few more uncomfortable scenes. Major character deaths are not the traumatic kind. There are some very graphic depictions of blood and gore, I'd say R rated gore, but not the truly disturbing kind.

This is my first fanfic so please be kind, I appreciate every kudos and comment more than you know!

Edit: I have a Tumblr now @ khawapashitheelder. I don’t have a great grasp of all the social media stuff cause I tend to have an anti-technology bubble, but... :shrug: ... I do intend to post updates on my works in progress and I do food sometimes so come follow me if you wish :D

Edit Two:
Part 2 is called Absolution Comes From Within and I'm about 3/4 through, posting new chapters as often as I can.

I am really cautious about warnings, like I'd rather have spoilers than surprise triggers, so please note I will always give advanced notice in the notes section for each chapter. Not every chapter has something explicit, but I will always give warnings as needed.

Had to do some some editing, so we're back down to 29 chapters, but it's still complete.

See the end of the work for more notes.
The Supreme Leader

He sat motionless in his meditation pose, breathing slowly in and out, willing his mind to remain empty, a still, black void. But it wouldn't. For days now, he had been haunted by these images, they came in sudden bursts, completely unbidden, disrupting his work, his training, even his sleep. And he had so much to do now. He didn't have time to sort this out. It wasn't right. He had the training, his mind should not be able to betray him in such a way. But whenever he closes his eyes, he sees them. A flash of colors, black flooring and the red Praetorian armor. The hum of lightsabers crashing against the swirling vibro-blades. A blur of blue and white. Her.

He clenched his fist and opened his eyes, noting that his pulse had quickened rapidly, despite his attempt to control his breathing. A fit of rage and frustration filled him and he raised his fist to slam it into the console next to him, but abruptly stopped himself, remembering his last conversation with Hux about the First Order’s funding. Until now he’d had no reason to concern himself with such matters, and he had assumed they were a part of Hux’s job until the general had informed him otherwise. Apparently, while the allocation and transfer of funds within the First Order were directed by Hux and his underlings, the actual raising of funds was something Snoke had seen to personally. Very personally, as it turned out, since many of their sources of revenue had ceased once word got out that his predecessor was dead, and the entities behind those sources had proven difficult to pin down. Even the governors of First Order worlds had required some personal attention from the new Supreme Leader to agree to continue shipments of weapons and supplies.

It was absolutely ridiculous, and Ren was certain General Hux was enjoying every minute of it. He found it very difficult to believe all of these people had given as much trouble to Snoke, but if he was honest with himself it was not all that surprising for the First Order to feel uncomfortable supporting him as Supreme Leader. He was, after all, his mother’s son. Just as the Republic had snubbed Leia after finding out about his grandfather, the First Order was trying to snub him for his parentage. They were all the same, these petty bureaucratic weasels, nipping at any perceived weakness in the off chance they’d find something to gain. He had hated watching his mother negotiate and haggle under similar circumstances, and now that he was subjected to the same political gauntlet he had no idea how she had managed to remain so calm and composed, when he wanted to Force-choke every single one of them until they agreed to his perfectly reasonable requests.

He sighed and rose from his seat on Snoke’s dias. He still thought of it as Snoke’s throne room, even after he’d had that ridiculous throne removed and replaced with a more comfortable workstation and up-to-date data and communication consoles so he could read reports and issue orders without projecting holograms all across the fleet like a ghost pirate. Hux might hate him and take pleasure at his lack of expertise on administrative tasks, but he had a feeling the general was relieved to have a Supreme Leader who preferred to read reports in private and address issues in person without the needless spectacle. Snoke had used his tactics to keep Hux and the rest of the officers in fear of him, but Ren found he got better results with a more direct approach. His officers might not live in terror of the day they were dragged across a deck by an oversized projection, but they still did their jobs efficiently, and he made it a point to walk around the bridge at least once a day. It was enough to remind them of his existence and perhaps utilize the occasional demonstration of Force powers to keep them on their toes. A subtle wave to summon a datapad or minor maintenance of his lightsaber in a public space reminded them that he was still Kylo Ren the dark enforcer as well as Supreme Leader of the First Order. After their failure on Crait, when he lost control of himself so blatantly, he had been working to restore confidence in his leadership. It seemed to be a worthwhile effort. Despite General Hux’s petty power plays, the rest of the officers treated
him with the respect and deference due his elevated position.

At the elevator he found a pair of officers chatting amiably, probably at the end of their shift. They smartened up immediately upon seeing him and saluted, their conversation forgotten. When the cabin came, he strode forward purposefully and they stepped aside to let him through. He wanted solitude and he held up his hand to forstall them from entering.

“Take the next one,” he ordered.

“Of course, Supreme Leader.”

They saluted again, and he nodded in recognition before pressing the button to close the doors. Alone with the white-walled chamber, he found his thoughts turning again to the girl, recalling the day she had come to him. In his mind he replayed their glorious and terrible dance, felt the comfort of her body as they pressed briefly back-to-back. He had never experienced anything like it, they fought without speaking but with a pure, singular focus, as if they were one person, melded together by the Force. He had felt the connection the very first time their minds touched, when he attempted to question her on Starkiller Base, and the battle against Snoke’s guards only proved she felt it too. He knew she must. Why couldn’t she have stayed with him?

He caught his breath and tried to compose his expression as the elevator reached his landing. For years, his mask had been his shield, protecting his over-expressive face from betraying any emotion. But he was past that now. Although he still felt raw and exposed, in the depths of his heart, he knew he would never cover his face again, because she didn’t like it. The thought unnerved him enough that he was startled when the doors sprang open to reveal General Hux waiting for him, but he recovered himself quickly.

“General. Why are you on this floor?”

The entire level was his private chambers, with only the two Stormtroopers on guard beside the elevator. For once Hux did not gloat at having caught the Supreme Leader off guard. Instead, it seemed he had more important news to share.

“Captain Phasma is awake and recovering more swiftly than was originally expected. I thought you’d like to know.”

Ren’s eyebrows lifted; this was the first truly good news they’d received in days. The former captain had been badly injured after the lightspeed crash aboard the Supremacy, her whole left side and face had been ravaged by fire, so severe that when they tried to remove her armor in the med bay parts of her flesh had sloughed off with it. For the last week she had been receiving treatment in a bacta tank, but the doctors were uncertain if she would ever be able to return to active duty.

“That is...excellent news, but I fail to see why you couldn’t have simply sent it to me in a report rather than in person.”

He was more than a little annoyed at the intrusion. Previously, this entire floor had been the domain of Supreme Leader Snoke and his guards. Ren had removed most of the old furniture and fixtures, installing consoles and moving his training gear to a specially-prepared room in the back, but many of the rooms were unused, and the small atrium where the elevator stopped was dimly lit and sparsely furnished. He preferred the emptiness and solitude and had no desire to encourage company in his private spaces, so he had left it that way. He removed his gloves and cloak and
dropped them onto one of the two nearby chairs, then gestured towards the other.

“Please, have a seat, General.”

Ren turned to the wall comm unit and pressed a few buttons, ordering himself a drink in the hopes that it would help him sleep.

“Can I get anything for you?”

He hid his smirk as Hux shifted, unnerved by this sudden unexpected familiarity, his lips twitching silently before he stuttered out a ‘no, thank you.’ Ren remained quiet as he waited for his order to appear, enjoying every second of the awkward silence that lurked between them.

There was a soft whirring sound, and then a panel beside him slid open to reveal a bottle of whiskey and a small glass. Ren busied himself with his drink, his back turned as if Hux wasn’t even there. Finally, he turned to face the officer, leaning against the wall while he sipped his drink. Eventually, Hux summoned up the courage to speak.

“Ah, well. I apologize for the intrusion, but I have an idea that may help solve two of our problems at once. Phasma is not ready to resume her command, obviously, but she is loyal and devoted to serving the First Order in any capacity she is able. It seems a waste of resources to leave her down in the sick bay when there are other tasks at hand.”

Ren decided he would forgive the intrusion until Hux was done explaining whatever scheme he and Phasma had cooked up, but he must remember to instruct the operators to restrict clearance to this floor. For now he merely gazed at Hux expectantly, waiting patiently until the general coughed and continued.

“You will recall our difficulty in securing support from the previous Supreme Leader’s allies, yes?”

“Yes.”

His lack of interest seemed to really be bothering the red-haired young man, his eyes flashed with annoyance and he raised his voice.

“Well, I thought perhaps it might be worthwhile to assign Phasma to look into it. Go to the worlds we know were previously supportive and investigate potential sponsors. I believe Leader Snoke may have had sensitive information that he used to encourage hefty donations to First Order enterprises.”

His lips turned upwards in a brief smile of pride, and he straightened his shoulders higher like a parrot that had performed a particularly clever trick. It was clever, Ren had to admit.

“And you came to my chambers because this assignment is meant to be unofficial. Only you and I and the captain will be aware of it.”

Hux practically beamed with pride.

“Precisely.”

“See to it then. Have Captain Phasma report to me before she departs.”

“Yes, sir.”
The general rose to leave, but Ren could not let him off so easily. It was a good plan, and he respected the need for secrecy, but he had to make sure this intrusion did not set a precedent.

“And Hux? You have done well, but if I ever find you in my private quarters uninvited again, you WILL regret it.”

With a gesture, he gave the general a firm Force-shove into the open elevator.

“Now, get out.”

Hux smoothed his hands over his uniform and sneered at Ren, before languidly pushing a button.

“Of course, Supreme Leader.”

Kylo Ren had only been Supreme Leader for a short time, but Hux seemed determined to antagonize him at every turn. He disliked using violence as discipline, especially in front of the Stormtroopers, but he could not afford to let his authority be so blatantly mocked. Then again, Snoke had used the Force against Hux in very public ways himself. You’d think the man would have learned to swallow his pride by now, but clearly he was incapable of learning from his mistakes. As soon as the elevator was gone, Ren wanted nothing more than to take up his cloak and gloves - and the bottle of whiskey - and retreat to the sanctuary of his bedroom.

Unfortunately, there was still the matter of secrecy to attend to, and he spent an extra ten minutes erasing the memory of his conversation with Hux from the minds of his guards, so they would remember nothing other than him Force-pushing Hux into the elevator. It would seem to them that he had punished the General merely for violating the privacy of his quarters, and perhaps encourage the idea that the Supreme Leader would not tolerate uninvited guests. Snoke would probably have simply killed them, but the First Order was low on resources, and Ren was tired of killing.

Wearily, he did finally retreat to his room, where he was again alone and at war with his thoughts. He downed another couple swallows of whiskey directly from the bottle, and then a couple more, because there was no one to reprimand or care what he indulged in now, and he was really getting desperate for a good night’s rest. He at least got himself mostly undressed and stumbled to his bed before the alcohol hit him fully, and surprisingly, he even managed to find sleep. But his dreams were filled with blurred flashes of blue-white, and the most haunting of all, the hard look in her eyes as she stood framed in the doorway of the Falcon, their gazes connecting one last time through wall and rock, before she purposely closed the door in his face.
The Galaxy's Princess

Chapter Summary

The last of the Resistance found shelter, but Leia Organa has joined her brother and father, to become one with the Force. Kylo really needs to be held. Especially when Rey has just stepped out of the bath.

Chapter Notes

For me, Leia died with Carrie, so I tried to come up with a way to make her death as seemless as possible, and given the Resistance's location, it seemed fitting.

He awoke suddenly, heart pounding with a strange mix of emotions he could not identify, only that he felt...excited, somehow. Sitting up in bed, he found himself dripping with sweat and he hastily threw off his blankets, running his hands through his tangled hair. Something woke him, like a light switching on overhead, but looking around he only saw his bedroom, dark, quiet and messy. But there was light coming from somewhere and when he turned to his right, he nearly yelped in shock.

He could see her, illuminated by the light of whatever place she was in, and he jumped to his feet. He knew it was not a vision or a flashback, because... she was... unclothed. Completely. And wet. He knew it was wrong to look, he had no wish to endure her cold, righteous anger again, but he could not tear himself away. Her skin was smooth and supple, peppered in small scars on her shoulders and knees, the sort of abrasions that come from climbing through unstable wreckage and pulling things apart with bare hands. She was facing away from him, drawing a comb through her shining dark waves, and the movement of her hands and hair fascinated him, until she stopped suddenly.

Her whole body froze, and he realized with a sinking stomach that she was standing before a mirror. He could not see her expression, her surroundings were always occluded from him, but he didn’t have to imagine it for long. Her eyes flashed with the fury he expected as she whirled to face him, her loose, dripping hair whipping over her shoulders. She held her hand out for something he assumed was her lightsaber. *Not hers, however she got it.* He was surprised to see her staff fly into her hands instead.

“What do you want?”

She growled. Good stars, she was beautiful. And fierce. And very, very angry. For the briefest moment before she summoned her weapon, he caught a glimpse of the pale pink of her nipples, and he knew the memory would antagonize him later. He had no idea what to say - of course she would be angry, there was no excuse. His mouth opened, but his head could not form words. He was suddenly aware that his face was burning and flushed, and he spun around swiftly, as he should have done when he first saw her.

“I’m sorry-” he tried.
“You ought to be!”

Something slammed into his lower back, knocking him forward so he had to catch himself on his bedside table.

“Ow!” He started to turn again, but found the end of her staff against the back of his head.

“Get out!”

Her rage was so palpable, he could sense it through the Force connecting them. He laughed softly, and was rewarded with a warning jab from the staff.

“I can’t control this any more than you can!” He held up his hands so she could see he had no intention of harming her.

"I didn’t do this, I was sleeping! For once."

She pulled the staff away and he remained facing away from her.

“Wait,” she ordered.

He didn’t even think of disobeying. He heard movement and a rustle of fabric behind him, then she spoke again.

“Okay, you can turn around now. If you want.”

He did. He wished he had the capacity to appear indifferent, but it was not a luxury the Force wanted to grant them. As strongly as he felt her rage, he knew she could feel his emotions, his delight at the sight of her would be impossible to hide, even buried under all of his other conflicted feelings. She had covered up with a loose tunic, her long hair wrapped in a threadbare towel. He wondered briefly where she was, had she been in the rain or water and merely changing clothes or did the Force decide to treat him to a surprise midnight glimpse of her showering?

“Where are you?” He tried again. His voice sounded strangely unstable, but he was done trying to hide his feelings from her, regardless of her responses.

“Like I would tell you.” She glared still, and the Force surrounding them felt ablaze with her brilliant anger.

He sighed and sat down on the edge of his bed. How stupid could he possibly be? Of course she was not going to reveal her location to the Supreme Leader of the First Order.

“Nevermind. Were you… I mean, I’m sorry, if you were bathing, I did not do this on purpose.”

He wasn’t sure why, but somehow his words had calmed her, he could feel something else now through the Force, something very like what he was feeling. He wanted to smile and he shook himself; this was not some childish crush! They were adults, on opposite sides of a war, the chances of this working out in their favor were abysmal. He directed his gaze to his hands, clasped awkwardly on his knees.

“I know.” Her voice was surprisingly soft.

He looked up to see her beautiful eyes brimmed with tears.

“Oh, Ben, I’m so sorry.”
He stood up abruptly, his first instinct to go and hold her, but he stopped himself. She looked so injured, her shoulders trembling with the effort of withholding tears. Frantically, he tried to think of what could cause her so much pain. She had always seemed so strong to him, pure and independent. Was she really crying just for him? For the loss of whatever was between them? The pain in those soft brown eyes made his heart ache, a piercing emotion he had not felt in years.

He did not expect to find concern and sympathy for him radiating from her, and he found himself confused and at a loss for what to do.

“You have nothing to be sorry for.”

He meant it really. He had spent days kicking himself inwardly, beating himself up for the mistakes he had made. If he had given her time, if he had acted on his impulse to take her in his arms right then, if he had not immediately become infatuated with power and talked to her calmly… Maybe they could have left together, gone away somewhere to train, gotten away from all this war…

Her eyes locked onto his with surprise.

“Do you really not know?” She murmured with some confusion.

He frowned. He wanted so badly just to touch her, he found himself moving closer without intending to and he reached for her hand. Surprisingly, she let him take it, and for a moment they just stood together, intoxicated even in that small touch. Around them, the Force sang in harmony, and he felt that focus again. Her mind was open to him and he reached for it instinctively, his whole being craving the warmth of her light. He could feel her pain, and unbidden he searched for the source, seeking only to comfort her…

But it was he who suddenly required comfort. Because the source of her tears, her sadness… It wasn't him. That was there too, but it was an old ache. The fresh tears had a more recent source, and the knowledge of it stabbed through his core like a bolt of lightning.

Leia…

Without thinking, he reached out with the Force, as he had many times in his life, his mind instinctively seeking the first person he had ever felt with his power, the bond forged before he was even born… and found… nothing.

A void where he had always felt strength, cold empty darkness where there was once security and love. After Han Solo died, he had cut off that part of himself completely. He remembered the moment when her cruiser was hit, he had been too close not to sense her… But she had survived, he knew she had!

Then he saw it in her mind, his mother sitting tiredly on a fallen log on some heavily forested planet. Rey was seated beside her, and Leia had laid her hand gently over hers in a reassuring gesture. Something drew the girl’s attention away, only for a moment, but she felt the gentle pressure of his mother's hand disappear and the sudden, shocking breath of energy rushing through the forest. She had jerked her attention back immediately, he could feel the moment of panic in Rey’s memory, but it was too late.

In an instant, Leia had slipped away, her body dissipating into the air with a gentle sigh, leaving only an empty robe playing in the breeze. There was no warning, no sign of injury, she was just… gone.

Leia Organa, daughter of a queen and a Jedi, raised a princess on a lost planet, heart and
He dropped to his knees and she dropped with him, gathering him into her arms, a comfort he had secretly longed for since he first found her. They sat entwined on the floor, her arms around him, her light wrapped around him, a solid purity that held at bay the pain threatening to consume him.

He had been taught to reforge his pain into anger and violence, but it was impossible with her so close. Instead, he clung to her as tightly as she would let him, and tried to muffle his anguished sobs against her shoulder.

Her towel slipped down as she adjusted her arm to hold him more securely, letting her damp hair fall over his face. Instinctively, he breathed in, craving her scent, and she gave a soft sigh as he exhaled into her neck. He felt himself growing light-headed as his body responded intensely to the closeness of her skin, and he pulled away before he acted foolishly.

Their eyes met and she smiled sadly, reminding him of how they had parted the last time. A sudden panic burned in his chest and he seized her hand, lacing their fingers together.

“Why did you leave?” He demanded suddenly.

Her warm gaze clouded and she shook her head, her eyes glittering with unshed tears.

“Can we not talk about that right now?”

Her voice was hard, but also pleading, and he decided to respect her wishes. She still held his hand loosely, and something odd caught his attention. He had never seen her wear jewelry or any kind of decoration, but now she had a large ring with blueish-purple stones on her right hand. He brushed the bottom of it with his thumb. It seemed familiar.

“It is,” she confirmed, looking down at their joined hands.

He nodded and looked up into her uncertain gaze.

“It's yours now.”

She smiled gently and pressed her forehead against his. He could barely breathe. Why did she grant him such intimacy if she didn't want to be with him? Surely she was as tortured by it as he was. The loss of his mother hurt more than he'd ever expected, and he was so very grateful for her compassion, but a part of him was humming in pleasure just to be near her, touching her. She pulled him into a tight embrace even as he felt them drifting apart, the strange movement of the Force that bound them passing. In a panic, he tried in vain to hold onto her.

“It's okay,” she tried gently to reassure him. “She forgave you. I believe that.”

“If you say so.”

Even if he didn’t entirely believe it, it was a comfort to hear the words. She favored him with a faint smile before she disappeared.

“We’ll see each other again, Rey.”

Rey.

Just one syllable. But it rang in his head with the heat of a star.
He knew it was foolish, but he could still smell her scent of sun-warmed rock and cedar wood in the air around him, so he fetched a pillow from his bed and laid on the floor where they had been sitting. His mother was dead, and he hadn't seen her in more than ten years. He would take whatever comfort he could get.

In the morning, when he woke curled up on the floor alone, he felt as though he had been both broken and healed in one night. He cancelled his schedule for the day, and ordered all reports directed to his rooms.

But he could not focus, his mind swam in small circles, trying desperately to unlock the cage he had built for himself. He was the Supreme Leader, the First Order his to command, and it was the last place in the galaxy he wanted to be.

Of course, there would be a funeral. He should be there. Or at least he wanted to be, but it wasn’t possible. Just getting through the rest of the day exhausted him, and he wanted nothing more than to fall into her arms again and sleep like the dead, but the Force refused to comply. Instead, he ordered another bottle of whiskey and was halfway through it when Hux paged his personal comm unit.

“Yes, General?”

He didn’t even bother concealing his annoyance and exhaustion. Hux seemed very excited, and Ren had a pretty good idea why.

“Supreme Leader, I have just uncovered some excellent news! It seems that after your uncle perished, General Organa -”

He cut Hux off, but really, he wanted to reach through the hologram like Snoke with the Force and fling the man around like a ragdoll. You don’t even deserve to speak her name! The thought came out of nowhere. He had buried his feelings for his mother so deeply, he was startled at how fiercely defensive of her he suddenly felt.

“I know.”

“I see. I wonder - do you think there will be a memorial?”

“I would assume so.”

He had a feeling he knew what Hux was getting at, and a plan began to form in the back of his mind. He was only partially listening as the general continued.

“I was wondering if you might have any idea where a memorial service would be held? It would be an excellent occasion to truly crush the Resistance once and for all, now that their beloved princess is gone.”

“Well, Alderaan is destroyed and Naboo is under First Order rule, so your guess is as good as mine,” he snapped. "Maybe you should start by finding out where the Resistance escaped to!"

Ren was very tired of this game. Rabid cur, he sneered at the comm. More like a nervous jackal.

“Surely you have some idea where your mother’s funeral might be held?” He backpedaled swiftly, maybe he was learning. "Ahh, I have ordered all our reconnaissance agents to be on alert,
Supreme Leader, sir. I just presumed you would be able to share some insight. Are you certain you know nothing helpful about the memorial practices of your own family?"

He should have known better. Hux couldn't resist antagonizing him, and the bait was too good.

"Not at the moment." He waited, letting his unusually calm and quiet response stand against Hux’s ranting. “But, I intend to find out, if you leave me alone so I can concentrate.”

“Oh. Yes, good. Excellent.”

The bitterness in the General’s demeanor was very subdued. Ren allowed himself a small smile. Then he turned his attentions to doing exactly what he promised Hux, although he very much doubted the officer was going to like his plan, should he actually find out the location of General Organa’s memorial service. But he didn’t care. If his plan worked as intended, Hux’s posturing would no longer be his problem.
No One Here is Qualified to Lead

Chapter Summary

The new Resistance leader makes some plans. The Supreme Leader also makes some plans. Rey does not want to be a leader. Or a Jedi. She just wants a working lightsaber. Ben Solo has never been kissed?

Chapter Notes

Kashyyyk seemed like a fitting place for Leia to Force-meld. I have a special place in my heart for the beauty and otherworldliness of the redwood forests of Northern California, so that scene in my head just felt right.

I should probably note that the Wookie Elder, Khawapashi, is based on my own Edge of the Empire RPG character - you'll probably be seeing her a lot.

Also, I've taken some liberties with the whole Sabine rules Mandalore with the Darksaber thing. Just roll with me, it's fun.

"Mandalore!?

Rey stared at Poe Dameron with an expression of wild surprise, mirrored by those around her. The pilot, now general, smirked at her wide eyes. Finn was staring at him too, brows furrowed in a similar expression.

“Hey now, kids. Give me a minute to explain.”

Others nearby had heard her exclamation and stopped their work to listen. Rey stepped back to stand beside Rose and Finn as Poe hopped up on a nearby munitions crate, taking the opportunity to jump into an impromptu briefing for the rest of their ragged band of rebels and allies gathered atop the Wookies’ polished wooden shipyard.

“Listen up! I know we're all still reeling from so many losses, but unfortunately, the First Order is still out there, making plans while we sit here licking our wounds, and they're not going to give us much time to recoup. Snoke may be dead, but Kylo Ren’s black heart is still beating.”

He spared a glance for the Wookies watching with interest from the doorways of their homes and common areas in the giant wroshyr trees of the forest planet. He was still not that great at telling them apart, although thankfully Rey had no such difficulty and was happy to discreetly whisper names when necessary. He knew Chewie, of course, and Elder Pashi was easy to recognize from her unusually pale blonde fur. Unfortunately, the Wookie leader also had half a dozen sons with similar names, dark fur, and much touchier egos.

“Our friends here have been very generous and we owe them a great debt of gratitude, but I've spoken with Elder Pashi and we both feel Kashyyyk is not the best place to pay the respects
owed to our dead. Fortunately, our Princess had friends and allies in some surprising places. Senior command has talked it over, and we believe Mandalore should be our next destination. Their current leader was a friend of Leia’s, and some of you might not be aware of it, but Sabine was once a rebel herself. She’s extended an offer to organize a fitting tribute to our fallen heroes, not just Leia, but also the millions killed in the attack on Hosnian Prime and all of the Resistance members we’ve lost.”

Beside Rey, Finn’s expression had grown dark. She hastily turned and whispered to Rose so the ex-trooper couldn’t hear them, wondering if the engineer had any better information than she did.

“Isn’t Mandalore a neutral planet?”

“Yes and no. Officially yes, but, unofficially…” She held out her hand and twisted the ring she wore to display its concealed Rebel phoenix. “I don’t know for sure, but Sabine Wren is kind of a legend of the Rebel Alliance. This is supposedly her artwork.”

Rey’s eyes moved from the ring to Poe, and then to Finn, as Poe began passing orders to specific personnel. The new general stooped to whisper instructions to a chipper BB-8, who began rolling towards them just as Finn started to stalk in Poe’s direction. Rose had lifted her hand to halt or caution their suddenly irate companion, but the droid got in his way first. Together, the two women moved as one to flank Finn before he made good on his hissed threats to kick BB-8 over the nearest ledge. Rey snapped his name incredulously.

“Hey, hey,” Rose took his arm soothingly. “Whatever you’re mad about, don’t take it out on the droid.”

“I’m not taking anything out on the droid, I’m trying to get by him so I can put a stop to this!”

He feigned a kick at the round astromech, who deftly bobbed out of the way and responded with some very unfriendly beeps. Rey waited to catch the droid’s attention, then nodded her head for it to slip behind her as she put herself in Finn’s path.

“Put at stop to what?” She demanded.

BB-8 peered out from behind her making a worried noise. Finn threw his hands up in defeat.

“Listen, we can’t take the Resistance fleet to Mandalore. They’re a neutral planet full of heavily-trained warriors who design and sell weapons. To the Resistance and the First Order, and anyone else who wants to buy them. It’s not a safe place to be!”

“Finn-”

Rose tried to interject, but he ignored her, attempting to make eye contact with Poe from across the ship dock. Getting irate herself now, Rose yanked on his arm and tugged him to face her.

“Finn! Stop for a minute and listen to me! I’ve been in the Resistance since I was a child, you were raised by the First Order! There are some things you just don’t understand!”

“Have you ever been face-to-face with a Mandalorian in battle armor?”

“No,” Rey watched as Rose grabbed both of Finn’s hands and his expression softened. “Please, just listen-”

Their voices lowered, and Rey decided it was probably better to let Rose handle Finn privately. She didn’t know much about Mandalore herself, other than a few rumors and holo-pictures of their valuable armor, but she could educate herself later. Beside her, BB-8 gave a soft whistle of inquiry,
and she knelt to speak with the little droid.

“A special mission?” She frowned as the droid explained, then shook her head. “But I don’t have a lightsaber anymore, it’s broken.”

It just chirped reassuringly. She shook her head, rising to her feet.

“No, I can’t fix it. They don’t work like that.”

She began walking over to where Poe stood conversing with Chewie and Pashi. It seemed her display of Force power on Crait had elevated her to a status she did not feel she deserved, and she had no idea how to handle it. Leia had understood, or at least had enough experience with her brother and son to be sympathetic to Rey’s struggle, but to Poe and the younger Resistance members, Rey had become the next Luke Skywalker.

She took a deep breath to settle her nerves and started to rehearse her explanation to the new General, when she felt the Force swirl around her and the noise and voices of the busy Kashyyyk shipyard faded. She stopped in her tracks, her fists clenching and her jaw set. She could not do this right now. But as much as she tried to will it away, his presence just became more clear. BB-8’s whistle of concern was almost inaudible, and she waved her hand at the droid impatiently.

“Shhh!”

“Bad timing?”

She really, really didn’t want to turn, and she cursed the part of her that grew warm at the sound of his voice. The part of her that really just wanted this whole planet to disappear, so she could be alone with him, without all of these responsibilities. She closed her eyes and tried to whisper as quietly as possible, knowing he would have no trouble hearing her.

“I’m in the middle of a shipyard full of people.”

Her subconscious betrayed her and her eyes darted over to him. She could see that he was seated, in a dark room on a black couch, the glow of a datapad illuminating his face in faint blue light. Black on black on black. She rolled her eyes, a smile playing at the corners of her mouth.

“I see. Is this amusing to you somehow?” He looked startled when she turned to look directly at him for a brief moment, her eyes dancing.

“Is that your bedroom? Black walls and everything?”

She was watching for his response, so she didn’t notice Poe Dameron coming up behind her, though she was alerted by BB-8’s beeps. She turned away quickly, but not before noting his baffled frown.

Gathering herself, she faced the Resistance leader and tried to ignore the Supreme Leader watching her. Poe glanced down at his droid before turning his attention to Rey.

“BB-8 told you the plan?”

“Yes, but I don’t think you understand.”

“You told her about the Darksaber?” He addressed his droid, but it was Rey who answered brusquely, trying to end the conversation as quickly as possible.
“Yes, he told me, but it doesn’t matter. The lightsaber I have is broken, and I don’t have the training anyway. I’m sorry, but I don’t think I’m going to be of much help.”

She heard Ben moving, and felt him edge up closer. His sudden intense interest annoyed her, and it bled into her body language towards Poe.

“Oh. Well, hey, maybe just think about it, okay? We’ve still got a few days before we head out. Maybe Rose or Chewie can help you with it.”

He was trying to be encouraging, she could tell, but his tone of voice was disappointed and BB-8 gave her an unhappy chirp. Rey sighed and looked away.

“I’ll ask them.”

“Hey, you’re still an asset to the team, however you want to help. We can always use another great pilot!”

He squeezed her shoulder in an attempt to reassure her before walking away, but his disappointment was too easy to read.

She heard Ben’s sudden angry hiss. Had he actually been able to see Poe? Was he jealous? She shook her head and walked quickly into an alcove between some crates of ammunition and a small storage shed, where she could get some privacy, before dropping into a cross-legged position on the wooden floor. Somehow, through all that, the Force connection remained, and she could not hide the weariness in her eyes when she finally looked up at him.

He dropped down next to her immediately, oh-so-casually placing his hand out for balance on her shoulder, the same spot where Poe had briefly touched her. She noticed it, but chose to let it go, unwilling to confront him. She really was tired, she had been exhausted for what seemed like days, since the ragtag remains of the Resistance had arrived on Kashyykk.

“This is all too much,” she complained.

She didn’t mean to confide in him, it felt like treason to spill her troubles with her friends to the leader of their enemies, but it wasn’t as if she had anyone else to talk to.

“What’s ‘this’? Your friends asking too much of you? Or do you mean us?”

His eyes roamed over her face, his expression open, and at first she wanted to correct him. Us? There is no ‘us,’ what does he even mean? But she knew what he meant, and she again chose to let it go, in desperate need of sympathy from the one person she thought might understand.

“I moved some rocks and everyone thinks I’m Luke Skywalker.”

She absently twisted Leia’s ring on her finger, remembering their last shared moment. She stiffened at first when he took her hand in his, but she needed the comfort so badly. And she could not ignore the way the Force filled her when they touched; she closed her eyes briefly, letting it flow through her and soothe her frayed nerves.

She didn’t even realize she had laid her head against his shoulder until she felt the coarse fabric of his robes shift under her cheek.

“Why do they need Luke Skywalker? He’s been in exile for years and they managed without him.”
His tone seemed to express actual concern, the mantle of Supreme Leader set aside just for her benefit. She smiled wryly, looking down at their joined hands as he stroked her palm with his thumb.

“I think they’re just looking for anything that gives them hope. Wherever they can find it. Poe is a good leader, but no one can replace your mother.”

She sensed him stiffen slightly, but his voice was still calm and he kept ahold of her hand.

“Not even you?”

She rolled her eyes, although she knew he couldn’t see her face.

“No,” she said firmly. “I don’t want to lead anyone.”

“You’re deluding yourself. Everyone wants power.”

Rey pulled away immediately so she could see his face. Incredulously, she searched his eyes, but he seemed to believe what he said. She shook her head adamantly.

“Not everyone.”

She watched as his features shifted from certainty to baffled curiosity.

“You really don’t?” She shook her head, opening her mind to him in case he didn’t believe her. She felt the warmth of his gentle probe, and smiled at his genuine surprise. “Ah, I see.”

She was caught off-guard completely when he suddenly reached out and cupped her face with his free hand. His eyes caught hers, and with their minds joined, it was impossible for her to hide the warmth and pleasure his touch brought. She watched his pupils widen, and when his eyes dropped down her face, the thought passed between them for a mere second before he crushed his lips against hers. She thought about resisting, and he slid his hand behind her head at almost the same moment, firmly holding her still.

Oh. Oh, is that what you think? She closed her eyes and leaned in, opening her mouth beneath his, and deftly took his bottom lip between her teeth, traced it with her tongue and then nipped gently.

He pulled back, startled, and relaxed his grip while he searched her face with wide eyes. She could feel desire swelling in him and his hand still held hers tightly. She flashed him a mischievous smirk.

“Oh, the dark and terrible Kylo Ren, have you never kissed anyone before?”

It was probably dangerous to tease him, but she was unable to muster the energy to be afraid. His eyes looked wounded, and she felt his mind pull away before she could tell if her guess was correct.

“Maybe you need a teacher?” She suggested. What am I doing?

But she couldn't resist. Clearly her teasing affected him, and this newfound power ensnared her curiosity.

“Is that an offer?” He retorted.

His voice was soft and wry, though his eyes betrayed some deeper, hidden emotion. He reminded her a little of his father, and a sting of sadness pierced her chest. She felt the vision
suddenly slipping away, and she squeezed his hand. He felt it too - his eyes narrowed in frustration.

“An exchange, maybe.” Their intimate moment had distracted her, now as the connection faded, she remembered that she needed something important from him. “I need to make a new lightsaber. I don't even where to start. Will you help me?”

His form dissipated in a cloud of gray-white dust, but she was able to hear his final words echo through her mind.

“We’ll see.”
Phasma Wants to Put Her Fist Through Canto Bight Too

Chapter Summary

Phasma was not trained to be a secret agent, even a bad one. And we all know Canto Bight is the worst place in the galaxy. Out of the fire and into the frying pan?

Chapter Notes

Yeah, let's burn this place down, shall we?

Canto Bight was exactly the kind of place Phasma had expected from its description in the Imperial Archives, and she hated every piece of it. So many valuable resources - from the ostentatious filigree of precious metals to the crystals powering everything - completely wasted. A single golden door from one of the smaller establishments could have ensured her entire family a lifetime of comfort. And the people!

She was certain only a handful of beings actually lived on Canto Bight, apart from the slaves and servants running the place, but it was packed daily with persons of every kind of sentient race in the galaxy. People who probably thought of themselves as the most exalted members of their societies, but to Phasma they were absolutely the dregs of the galaxy.

The Resistance, the Republic, the Empire, the First Order… none of those struggles mattered to the guests of a place like Canto Bight. They had enough wealth to weather any storm, and so long as their comfort was ensured, they couldn't care less who was in charge. Weak and pathetic fools who couldn't even wield their own blasters, employing exotic personal guards or hulking beasts in slave collars. She was certain none of them deserved the privileges they enjoyed.

From a darkened booth in the corner of an all-night gourmet restaurant, she watched their gluttonous excesses under the cover of her hooded cloak. Her flesh was still too tender for her proper helmet and armor, so in addition to the cloak, she wore a soft black mask of woven materials that she pulled over her entire head, covering everything but her eyes, and a grey data visor to hide those. The rest of her clothing was simple but elegant, made of expensive gray silk and embroidered with tasteful gold flourishes at the wrists and neck.

She felt unnatural and exposed without her armor, and she hated wasting resources on a costume she would never wear again, but Hux and the Supreme Leader had insisted. Phasma wasn't dumb, once she arrived she had understood the necessity, but it was possible to hate a thing while still accepting the need for it. She had hated murdering her parents when her family was on the brink of starvation, but ultimately it had been necessary to ensure the survival of herself and her brother.

Phasma had been on the pleasure planet only a day, but had secured a room in one of the midrange resorts for a full week. Hopefully she wouldn't need it, but Hux had sent her with very few leads, and it was a big place. Currently, she was making notes on the hospitality workers themselves. That idea had been her own, but with so little instruction she had to rely on her own instincts, and experience told her it was not the officers or leaders who trafficked in gossip and information, but
those beneath them. Generals, admirals, star pilots - the big brass came and went, while the communications technicians aboard the Finalizer predated herself, Hux and both Supreme Leaders.

She had done some research while in transit, and discovered each casino and resort was individually owned and operated, with its own workforce and security forces. There was no official government of Cantonica, however, there were a handful of people who owned multiple establishments, and it was this small group of very wealthy corporatists who really controlled the city. These people and their associates had donated generously to the First Order under Snoke, happy to fund the galactic hostilities that enriched the arms dealers and ship builders who in turn came to Canto Bight and repaid their investment with interest.

Her thoughts were interrupted by the arrival of the soup and beverage she had ordered, carried by a humanoid child with some kind of weird extensions of flesh draped over her shoulders instead of hair. Phasma’s lip curled distastefully on one side, hidden beneath her face mask. She had always disliked aliens, but she found the more human they appeared the more disgusting they seemed. She could handle Rodians and Anomids, but the Twi’lek and Togruta gave her the creeps.

As the child placed her food on the table, Phasma removed a small stack of chromium coins from her pocket.

“Look at me, child,” she ordered.

The slaves learned early to keep their faces downcast and their mannerisms neutral, a display of submission she found shameful. Phasma’s parents had acted the same, always bowing and scraping before the more powerful tribes. She had decided very early that that would not be her path in life. She would fight, die, commit any atrocity imaginable before submitting to the will of another.

She took the girl humanoid’s chin between her thumb and forefinger and examined her carefully through the visor. The data feed identified her as a Togruta of approximately ten years old, though Phasma thought she was malnourished and might appear younger than she really was. Her gaze was surprisingly steady, fearless but not defiant. She released the girl’s chin and stacked the coins one by one on the table.

“I require very little except secrecy. Come only to refill my glass and do not seat anyone nearby. If you are diligent, I will forget these coins when I go.” She swept them back into her hand and put them away, but not before the slave could get a good close look. “Do you understand?”

Her expression unchanged, the girl nodded.

“Good.”

After she scurried away, Phasma removed a small medicinal packet and a straw from her pockets. The mask had a small opening at the mouth to allow the passage of a straw and little else. She emptied the medicine packet into the thick cream soup she had ordered and stirred it with a spoon until it dissolved. She was not supposed to strain her wounds by chewing or swallowing anything solid, so the packet contained necessary nourishment in addition to the powdered opiates and antibiotics she had been prescribed.

Another woman might have remained in the med bay resting and gathering strength, but Phasma was an accomplished warrior before she joined the First Order. She was no stranger to pain. With the extent of her injuries, the doctors were uncertain whether she would be able to return to her previous duties, putting her command position in jeopardy.

Supreme Leader Snoke would not tolerate dead weight, and she did not expect Kylo Ren to be
any different. So it was imperative that she prove herself useful beyond her previous capacities, and she was determined to be successful.

She sipped her dinner, watching the wealthiest people in the galaxy feast on decadent pastries and mysterious foaming beverages and taking note of who ordered the most flamboyantly, who ordered without even seeing a menu, and who garnered the most attention from the restaurant staff.

It was very late by the time she returned to her hotel room. She passed a housekeeper busily cleaning out a vacant room, already on the morning shift. She did not answer when the woman inquired politely if she needed anything, just shook her head and continued to her room.

Despite her efforts to speed recovery and the heavy doses of narcotics, walking even short distances was painful, and she still favored her left side in a slight limp when she was tired. Today had been quite busy, arriving aboard the transit shuttle from Coruscant, settling into her room, organizing her belongings and searching out a good place to stake out her quarry. She was exhausted and looking forward to resting a few hours in the luxurious mattress and feather pillows.

Phasma swiped her key card through the access reader and pushed through the door. She did not notice the little green light above the door handle indicating it was already unlocked, so she was not prepared for what she found inside.

Five children, of differing age and race, dressed in the stained simple clothes of slaves and armed with the light-imiting taser and riding crops used to keep the racing fathiers in line, appeared out of the dark room as she flipped the light switch.

The injured officer took a step back, reaching behind her for the door handle, but before she could reach the exit to flee, she felt the sharp zap of electricity against her lower back. Determined that these miscreants would not get the best of her, Phasma yanked out her blaster and pointed it at the smallest child before her.

“Do you really think you can take me on without some of you dying?” She held her head up and straightened her shoulders. “You don't know who you're dealing with.”

“Actually, we do,” said a voice from behind her.

A female voice. The girl from the restaurant, perhaps? But, why? She had left a large enough stack of coins when she departed.

As if in answer to her unspoken question, one of the children before her stepped forward, tossing one of her chromium coins in the air and catching it. He was armed with nothing but a small pitchfork, but bigger than the rest and obviously their leader. He eyed Phasma fearlessly. An unspoken appraisal passed between them, two warriors who recognized the odds, like feral beasts circling before a fight.

The boy could tell she was in no condition to fight, and he arrogantly assumed it gave him the upper hand. But Phasma had no intention of wasting her life on this gilded hunk of rock.

“What do you want?”

She could not fight them, but perhaps she could bribe them. If they knew who she was and had set up this ambush on purpose, clearly they were no friends of the First Order. If the slaves and servants here trafficked in information like the rest of the galaxy, she had plenty of it to trade.

The boy gestured to her blaster.
“First, we put down our weapons. Then we talk.”

It was hard to tell in the dark, but she thought he was human, although his accent was unusual. She did not like the idea of dropping her blaster, but she supposed if they meant to kill her they would have done it already.

Carefully leaning forward, she laid her weapon on the ground as the boy handed his pitchfork to someone behind him. She held her hands up so he could see she had no other hidden weapons anywhere. He nodded to whoever was behind her, and she felt the vibration of the electric weapon move away from her back, although the girl stayed behind her just in case.

“Now. What's the First Order want here? If you're lookin' fer sponsors, you'd be meeting up with the magnates on the barges, not lurkin' in dingy restaurants.”

Phasma laughed. For once, General Hux was right. Snoke had recruited financial support from the elites here. But whatever channels he had used to gain access to them were lost upon his death.

“You seem to be very knowledgeable about what goes on here.” The boy shrugged and raised his eyebrows, waiting for her to continue. “The First Order is under new management. Unfortunately, the previous leader was unable to pass on all of his contacts before his untimely demise.”

The children shared looks of surprise and murmured whispers. The leader nodded his head at the child behind her.

“Looks like you were right, Shaya.”

“Just using my eyes AND ears, like you taught us.”

If this was the same girl who had served her, there was nothing shy or servile about her voice. Phasma had to admit, the little casino rats were impressive. She felt a gentle tap from the shock weapon, now turned off.

“Who's running the First Order now?”

“General Hux,” she replied automatically. Then added, almost as an afterthought; “And Kylo Ren.”

In actual truth, she doubted the two men would share power for very long, and she planned to avoid their cold war until a clear victor emerged. Phasma’s loyalty was to the First Order, not any particular person, and she had trained her Stormtroopers with the same philosophy.

“Is that all you wanted?” She demanded, growing impatient.

The boy seemed hesitant, but Shaya again gave orders before he could make up his mind to speak.

“Go through her stuff. Take anything useful.”

Phasma immediately reached to retrieve her blaster from the ground, but was stopped by a sharp jolt of pain from behind her, directly into her scarred and sensitive left side. Wracked with pain after her exhausting day, she dropped to her knees with a muffled cry.

Shaya strode by, quickly bending to collect the blaster, which she then pointed at the stricken captain, handing off her electric prod to another child. Now that she could see the girl through her
visor, Phasma's earlier suspicions were confirmed. It was the Togruta from the restaurant.

She held the blaster, keeping the injured woman at bay while her friends emptied every possible container onto the bed and swiftly sorted through them. They bypassed her medicine packets and personal items, but collected her second blaster, her First Order formal uniform, keycards, datapads and most of her money. They did all of this in less than three minutes, shoving their loot in a tattered burlap sack.

“We’re done here,” the boy informed Shaya.

The girl nodded, then took a handful of coins from her pocket and carefully counted them out on the table next to Phasma.

“Ten for the hotel, five for the shipyard ferries plus two for tipping, and fifteen to get you passage off planet. If you barter with the Rodian pilot, you can probably trade some of those medicine packets to get you as far as Dathomir, that’s First Order space.”

“You can't possibly expect me to just leave without reporting you!”

She pulled the visor up to get a good look at the girl’s coloring, since the visor only displayed shades of red and black. Her gruesome burn scars and the ugly stitched up mess of her left eye socket brought some gasps from the other kids, but Shaya met Phasma’s one good eye fearlessly.

“You can try that if you like, but I wouldn't recommend it. Tomorrow half of this city will be in ashes.”

Her eyes burned with the tempered hate forged of long-term suffering. Phasma recognized it well. Her own strength was born of suffering early in life and the hard choices she made to survive it. She had no doubt the child spoke truthfully, although she doubted the ultimate success of a slave revolt. She took the coins and nodded once to indicate her understanding.

“I am Captain Phasma.” She held the girl’s eyes as the rest of the children slipped out the windows and ventilation shafts they’d come from. “When you are done playing revolutionary, the First Order is always open to recruits of a certain caliber. The Supreme Leader has made slavery illegal.”

She noted the way the girl held her gaze just a moment longer than necessary before slipping out the window after the others. Phasma sighed. What terrible timing! And now she would have to report to the Supreme Leader and the General, and probably receive conflicting orders.

She imagined Hux would demand she stay and attempt to complete her mission even in the midst of a violent revolution, while Ren would sneer with disinterest and probably throw darts at the star charts until he hit a random planet with some arcane Sith/Jedi significance.

She decided to take the decision out of their hands and contact her superiors after boarding passage to the nearest population center. She might serve the First Order, but Phasma’s ultimate loyalty was to herself. She had almost died in a fiery explosion once. She had no intention of risking that fate again, even if it meant demotion, or leaving the First Order until true leadership returned.

Her loyalty had been tested, and so far she had passed every test without hesitation. If the same was true of the two men leading them now, she had not seen it. Rumors flew that Ren had struggled with himself after murdering his father, but he had done it. Hux had even less acts of bravery to his name. His father was killed, but he was a coward and had bribed her to do it. Perhaps this mission was a blessing in disguise.
She left immediately, taking the revolutionary’s advice and bartering for passage to a less-assuming, but potentially more profitable planet. If she was going to succeed in securing funds for the First Order as quickly as Ren required, perhaps it was time to evaluate every option. They may not be able to demand “donations”, but there were always people in the galaxy willing to make loans, and they weren’t hard to find.
Rey is just trying to meditate, should be easy on a forest planet like Kashyyyk, right?

Rey settled into her meditation pose, hands resting open on her knees, and closed her eyes. Just breathe. She loved Kashyyyk. Not only was the entire planet a vibrant, glorious green, the huge trees had deep roots delving into the bright, living core of the forest world. It was impossible not to feel alive, and the Force poured in tiny streams and great rivers throughout every plant, tree and living creature.

She was amazed no one else could sense the Force with how intensely it felt, for her it was like standing on the crashing shore of Ahch-To. She occasionally had to concentrate just to hear people speaking over it, and it was wonderfully easy to close her eyes and find herself at peace.

She opened her mind and let it course through her body, the slow, long breath of the trees, more ancient than anything she had ever seen, the bright, vibrant trills and footsteps of the multitude of birds and little forest creatures, the slower, but vigilant predators stalking the ground, and the strong, steady heartbeats of the Wookies. She had been surprised to find out how long their lifespans were, especially those that lived within the embrace of their home, and she understood why they were so uncommon in the outside galaxy when there were so many of them here.

Everyone, herself included until now, simply assumed Wookies were just a less prolific race, and that their home planet of deep forest was only sparsely populated. She knew now that wasn't the case at all. There were millions of people living on Kashyyyk, she could sense them spread out across the whole planet, even though less than a tenth lived around the most ancient trees where their only spaceport was. And they lived a long, long time, but that lifespan was shockingly shortened with too much time spent away from home.

Breathe.

“Rey.”

Startled, she lost her focus and felt her consciousness recede back into the confines of her own head. That voice, she was sure she'd never heard it before, and yet…

Opening her eyes, she found the strangest thing she had ever seen. An elderly man, a human, his gray hair and beard at odds with his bright, amused blue eyes. All around him there was a faint shimmer, a glowing mantle of the living Force. She noticed as he met her eyes and smiled, his image was ever-so-slightly transparent. She got up quickly, Force-summoning her staff, although she didn't feel threatened.

“Who are you? What are you?” She demanded.

He made no move towards her, keeping his distance on a nearby wooden railing, but the vision unnerved her.

“A vision. A ghost, if you like.” His mild voice held amusement.
“A...a ghost...?” She stuttered.

She wasn't expecting him to simply come out and say it so plainly. His blue eyes twinkled.

“Oh, yes. We've been watching you for a long time, Rey.”

The sound of him speaking her name echoed strangely in her head. For some reason, she thought of Maz Kanata’s basement, where she had first touched Luke’s lightsaber.

“Am I supposed to know you?” A thought occurred to her and she nearly choked over it. “Are you my father?”

He laughed and shook his head.

“No. Jedi are supposed to be celibate, although I think we forgot to tell Anakin that.”

He smiled at his own private joke. Rey’s thoughts raced. Anakin Skywalker? Who was he to speak so familiarly of Luke and Leia’s father, the man who became the most infamous Force-wielder the galaxy had ever known?

“You still haven't answered my first question.”

She gripped her staff loosely, though she doubted it would be of much use against a ghost.

“Ah. I see Luke didn't mention me. I must not have left a very good impression.”

This man may have been a Jedi, but his sense of humor was starting to annoy her. He had known Luke, though. The thought gave her pause.

“I thought Luke was the last Jedi. I didn't know there were others.”

“When he died, we were long gone. But not, I thought, forgotten. Surely Luke mentioned me. Or Leia, or Han? They did name their son after me, unfortunately.”

Her eyes widened at him. How could she forget that? Leia had told her, before she even met Luke, she had reached out to her father's old friend…

“Obi-wan? You're Ben Kenobi?”

“Well, I'm not Ben Solo, obviously.”

She glanced away, trying to hide the sudden flush spreading over her cheeks. The ghost Jedi raised his grizzled eyebrows.

“Hmm. Perhaps you’d be more friendly if I were Ben Solo.”

Rey had had just about enough of this sarcastic old ghost. Jedi or no, she found him utterly infuriating. She refused to acknowledge the jibe.

“Ben saved my life. Snoke wanted him to kill me, but he killed Snoke instead. And then-”

“You saved him too, didn't you? I think that debt has been repaid.”

“What do you want from me? If you're dead, why’s it you and not... not Luke?”

She fixed him with a hard stare, even as the tears formed in the corners of her eyes. Old Ben
smiled sadly.

“You parted ways on uncertain terms. Perhaps Luke thinks you'd rather not see him again.”

His blue eyes regarded her sympathetically, his voice even and soothing.

“No,” she heard herself whisper, her voice hoarse. She swallowed, and tried to gain control
over her tears. “I… I'm not angry with him. I understand.”

Old Ben gave her an approving look.

“No, you don't stay angry very long, do you?”

He seemed to mean it as a compliment, although she wasn't sure she saw it that way.
Inwardly, she cringed at how weak-willed she was, how easily she forgave Ben, how desperate she
was for Finn’s friendship and Leia’s approval.

The old Jedi shook his head, as if he could see her thoughts written boldly on her face. Was
she so easy to read, she wondered, or was this ghost just exceptionally empathic?

“It's not a flaw, child. Holding onto your pain only brings more pain.”

“And the dark side,” she added reflexively.

He shrugged.

“For some yes. Pain and anger are paths to the dark. But not for you, I don't think.”

She heard footsteps on the wooden stairs behind her, though she had sought this place out to
be alone, a scenic resting place, high up in the thinner branches of the wroshyr, above the levels
where the Wookies built their homes and larger structures.

She turned, recognizing the slow steps as human, and waited as Rose Tico made her way
over the last steps, leaning against the rail and panting for breath. Rey glanced behind her before she
made her way over to her friend, but it was just a reflex. She had felt Obi-wan’s departure as soon as
she became distracted.

“Rose, what are you trying to do? I thought you were supposed to be taking it easy!”

She helped her friend to one of the polished benches before she collapsed, but Rose spoke in
quick bursts between gasps of air.


“Don't tell me-”

Rey’s eyes narrowed, putting together quickly why Rose had come running all the way up
here for her help directly against medical orders. She patted her friend's hand and leapt up to balance
on the top of the railing. The other woman's eyes grew wide.

“You. Crazy?”

She squeezed Rose’s hand reassuringly.

“It's okay, I can do this. No time for the stairs.” I think.

Reaching out with the Force, she summoned one of the thick, ropey vines the Wookies used
to travel rapidly through the forest levels.

“Wait here, I'll send Chewie to help you down!”

_I hope this works_, she thought as she leapt from the platform, feeling the vine take her wait. _I don't think Chewie will be very happy if he has to rescue me AND Rose._

Swinging and rappelling from vines wasn't all that different from the makeshift climbing ropes and cords she'd used scavenging large pieces of wreckage on Jakku. It did require some focus, as she couldn't navigate the masses of branches and vegetation with the benefit of the Wookies' strong sense of smell and direction, instead using the Force to guide her swings. But Rey was a fast learner, and it didn't take very long for her to notice some of the vines were more than a little well-used, with natural landings on branches that were worn smooth.

On the way to the War Room, a big single-room hall hewn from the inside of one of the oldest and largest trees, she passed one of Pashi’s younger sons, causing him to swing wide of his intended landing and stumble onto a lower platform right into a group of Resistance pilots who were innocently enjoying their morning coffee. She giggled at his embarrassed warbling apology, nearly missing her own landing. Thankfully, she could use the Force to regain her balance and hide any small miscalculation.

Her lingering feelings of amusement and pride were quickly subdued by the sounds of an angry shouting match, however, and she could even hear Chewie’s exasperated grunting. The two Wookie hunters standing outside turned as she landed, their momentary unease broken by her unorthodox entrance. The smaller one with a scarred lip and a quiver full of short hunting spears she recognized as the elder’s son, Graawasha, chief engineer of the spaceport. She had not met his companion, also equipped for hunting, but she assumed they had been in the middle of heading out for the day when the racket caught their attention.

She understood immediately what the source of their discomfort was. Chewie was highly respected here, and he had asked to use this room as the Resistance headquarters, technically claiming it as his territory. In their culture, barging into an elder’s residence or property without very good reason would be disrespectful. The Wookies were a private people, they handled their disputes quietly within the family if at all possible, and although their tempers could be fearsome, most followed Khawapashi’s example of limited physical violence. This kind of immature name-calling was worrisome, but they didn't want to interfere unless absolutely necessary.

Rey sighed.

“Washa, can you go up to the star viewing platform and carry Rose down? She ran up to get me and I don’t think she should be running anywhere in her condition.”

The Wookie nodded, happy to be of some use, and handed his quiver and supplies to his friend before taking off up the vines. The other Wookie gestured at the noisy room.

“The dark-colored one keeps trying to hit the skinny pilot. He seems very angry. Will they hurt each other?”

Rey shook her head, striding past him.

“Don’t worry, they're friends. I'm sure we'll work it out.”

The towering gray-brown beast gave her a concerned growl.

“Best for me to wait out here then.”
Rey wished she had had the Wookies’ sense and stayed out of the argument as well. Finn struggled in Chewie’s iron grip while Poe Dameron brushed his bottom lip with a thumb that came away red. The other Resistance leaders wore expressions of shock and disgust.

Chewie was bellowing at them both for being idiots. Rey's quick eyes caught a pilot reaching for his blaster, and she instinctively raised her hand and yanked it out of his grasp with the Force, causing everyone in the room to turn at once at the sight of the weapon floating through the air into her hand.

Well, that got their attention.

She swallowed and tried to flash a bright smile to cover her nervousness. She had mixed feelings about the whole Mandalore idea, but she didn’t want to undermine Poe’s authority in front of all these people. Finn, impatient as ever, caught her eye immediately.

“Rey. Tell these idiots we're not going to Mandalore!” The ex-trooper demanded.

Rey tried to give a subtle headshake, indicating that now was not the time, but Finn either didn't notice or chose to ignore it. He jerked his head at Poe, his eyes wide.

“Tell them what you and Rose found out.”

“Finn,” she warned gently.

She looked around, her eyes catching Poe’s, and she suddenly realized why the general’s lip was bleeding. She turned her eyes back to her friend incredulously.

“Did you punch Poe?!”

“Poe started it, but he missed,” Chewie warbled.

Rey’s gaze hardened. How stupid could they get?

“Can I speak to you both in private, please?”

Some of the Resistance members waited for a nod from Poe, but she noticed a few follow her directions immediately and she frowned. She was not going to lead these people! She barely had two lessons from Luke. She was good fighter, and a decent pilot, but she couldn't be responsible for other people's lives.

As Chewie turned to leave with the rest of the room, she caught his arm.

“No, you stay, please,” she insisted.

He looked down on her, his wise blue eyes flickering with something akin to the exasperation she felt. He nodded and moved to stand by the door, blocking anyone from seeing in.

Rey advanced on her two friends, her eyes and jaw steeled in anger.

“You two are supposed to be leaders. I know it's hard and I know Leia’s gone, but you have got to try harder!”

Poe at least had the grace to look ashamed, and BB-8 gave a sad whistle from his feet. Finn sat down on one of the Wookie-sized chairs and ran his hands over his face. She raised her staff and pointed it at him.
“Apologize, now.”

“He swung first!”

“I DON’T CARE WHO STARTED IT!”

There was a low rumble of heavy wood as she Force-lifted Finn’s chair and spilled him out of it. It took more concentration than she expected, the Wookie furniture was heavy and well-built. She dropped it, panting slightly.

“You will both apologize, now! In case you’ve forgotten, we’re all the Resistance has left, we cannot fight each other.”

“Okay,” Poe closed the distance between himself and Finn and held out his hand. “I’m sorry I lost my cool, alright? Maybe next time don’t try sabotaging our ships.”

Rey shot Finn another incredulous stare, until he swallowed and looked away. She turned to Chewie, who reluctantly admitted that he had caught the ex-trooper trying to cut fuel lines in one of the three x-wings they had left. She looked down, shaking her head.

“I cannot believe that.”

Finn’s refusal to meet her eyes was an admission of his guilt. From the door, Chewie tried to explain further.

“I’m sure his heart was in the right place, but that doesn't excuse it,” she snapped.

“Rey, I can’t believe you're taking his side. You're the one who found out Mandalore has a First Order ambassador!” Finn searched her face pleadingly. She sighed and turned to Poe.

“Rose and I found her while looking up information about Mandalorians last night. But, it's just one ambassador. One single person can't possibly pose that much of a threat.”

General Dameron ran his hands through his hair nervously. He had a look on his face like he’d eaten something rotten.

“You already knew,” Rey guessed.

Poe nodded. Finn jumped at the chance to continue the fight.

“YOU KNEW!?”

He balled his hand up in a fist, and Rey reached out with the Force to hold him back gently. He looked at her with injured eyes.

“Are you seriously using the Force on me?”

Rey had a sudden vision of Kylo Ren throwing a tantrum with his lightsaber in a needlessly violent display, and let go immediately, causing her friend to lose his balance and reach out to the table for support. Just as he opened his mouth to yell again, Washa came through the door carrying Rose. He gently set her down in a chair, taking great care as if she were made of something very fragile.

She patted his arm, beaming at the Wookie with all her adorable sweetness dancing in her eyes. They hadn’t known each other for more than a few weeks, but Rose had a gentle charm that was hard to ignore, and she was quickly becoming Rey’s favorite person in the whole Resistance.
Washa stopped at the door to inquire if Chewie knew when they would be leaving Kashyyyk. Chewie replied noncommittally, and the younger Wookie favored Rose with concerned eyes.

“Your friend needs more rest,” he admonished.

“We all do,” Chewie agreed. “But I don't think we'll get it.”

“Thank you for going to get her,” Rey added.

Washa warbled sadly, bowing to his elder before departing.

Finn turned his attention to Rose as Chewie and Rey were expressing their thanks to Washa. Rey watched him kneel next her chair, placing his hand over her forehead and cheek, his expression suddenly softened.

Her eyes roved over to Poe and the pilot raised his eyebrows. She supposed he probably thought she was jealous, and her short chat with Obi-wan surfaced in her mind. She wasn't sure all the Force powers in the galaxy were worth being celibate for the rest of her life. She remembered Ben’s kiss and looked away quickly before someone noticed her face flushing red.

Rose and Finn were arguing, but their hushed whispers were too low for her to eavesdrop, and they grew quiet as she and Poe neared. Rey looked the mechanic over carefully, noticing some color had returned to her face and there was no trace of sweat beneath her dark hair.

“Are you alright?”

She chose to ignore Finn’s attempt to answer, focusing her attention on Rose. The other woman smiled, a shared moment of understanding passing between them.

“You got them to stop fighting.”

“Only because you came in. I had to hold Finn back.”

Rose turned to him with a narrow gaze that swept over Poe as well. Both men looked down at their feet. BB-8 hazarded a shrill but uncertain defense of his master.

“If you're done being idiots, can we talk like intelligent adults?”

Of course, they both tried to answer at the same time and immediately their voices rose. Chewie yowled from the doorway, prompting Rey and Rose to giggle. Finn’s eyes darted from the towering Wookie back to his girlfriend.

“What? What's funny?”

“Chewie says we could just leave you two here for awhile while the Resistance gets some better leaders,” Rose explained.

Poe sighed heavily.

“Look, buddy. I get it, okay? I do. But you've got to trust me on this one.” He held up his hand to forestall Finn's quick response. “What do you think would have happened if we'd caught anyone else sabotaging ships, huh? Chewie could have just tossed you off the nearest ledge. But he didn't, because we're not the First Order. We don't execute people. We could, however, kick you out. And then you'd be alone, no ship, no friends-”
“No me,” Rose interjected firmly.

Finn turned to her in a slight panic, grabbing her hand.

“I'm sorry.” This time he really did look apologetic.

Rose squeezed his hand encouragingly, their affection bringing a smile to Rey’s face. It was nice to see something good happening, despite their precarious situation. If only Finn would stop trying to protect everyone by himself and realize he had friends, they might actually be able to salvage the Resistance.

“Now that we're all friends again, I have a suggestion,” she offered, propping her staff against the massive table and claiming a seat next to Rose.

Poe sat across from them, still keeping his distance from Finn for the moment.

“I agree with Finn, it's too dangerous to risk taking the fleet to Mandalore. I don't care how neutral they are, and if the First Order finds out we're there, they won't care either.”

She held up her hand as everyone started talking at once, their voices rising once again. Even Chewie was watching them uneasily.

“Wait. WAIT. I AM NOT. DONE. TALKING.”

Thankfully, they shut up so she could continue. Rey was not in the mood for this, after her ghostly vision she just wanted some solitude to think, and her patience was quickly running out.

“I think we should split up. Send a small group to Mandalore for the ceremony. We can make sure to broadcast on all known Rebel channels, so everyone gets a chance to hear it. But Poe was right before, in the shipyard.”

She fixed him with her dark eyes, willing him to remember his impromptu speech the previous day.

“The First Order has us on the run. We can't fight them with a handful of fighters and one freighter - no matter how good of a ship it is,” she insisted, sensing Chewie about to speak up to defend his beloved Falcon.

“The best weapon the Resistance has now is stealth. Everywhere in the galaxy there are people being oppressed, suffering under the grip of the First Order and other equally terrible governments. Ignored places like Jakku. Places where kids dream of one day joining the Rebellion. Luke Skywalker and Princess Leia Organa are legends to kids like that. I know, I was one. Those kids are what keep the cause alive, and they are our best resource, because-”

“The First Order can't silence legends. They can blow up whole planets and the stories will still spread.” Rose finished for her. She leaned forward eagerly, her guileless eyes moving from Finn to Poe.

“Rey’s right. We can't match the First Order in open space. We need to recruit.”

Rey nodded. She had had a feeling Rose would understand. Poe and Finn had faced their own challenges in life, but they had no idea what it was like to grow up with no clear future, struggling to survive from day to day, nursing that tiny spark of hope that one day they could fight back. She knew there would always be people like that out there, struggling and starving, just waiting for the chance to break free.
Poe looked at the two women frowning, his brows knitted in deep thought. Finn was silent, his hand still clasping Rose’s gently. Finally, the new general uncrossed his arms, coming to a decision. He turned to Chewie.

“Get everyone back in here. Everyone. This is going to take a lot of planning.” The Wookie gave a surprised warble. Poe nodded, his eyes serious. “Tell them the Resistance is going underground.”
Some People Don’t Know When to Stop

Chapter Summary

Hux has no intelligence. The Force bond has terrible timing, as usual. The smut begins!!!

“Our spies on Chandrila and Bespin report nothing, sir.”

The intelligence officer handed a datapad over to Hux, who glowered down at it as if he could intimidate the device into providing more information. Ren simply nodded to the officer, dismissing her with no further instructions.

“Have you heard anything else from Phasma?”

He watched the general’s face twist in disgust, and he tossed the pad across the countertop. Ren summoned it back in his direction with a languid wave.

“Not since she arrived on Tatooine.”

“Hmm.”

He glanced over the intelligence report, his eyes falling on a familiar image taken from Chandrila. Something painful and hot bloomed in his chest, and he turned the device off.

“I thought you said she was loyal. Devoted.”

“Did I? I assure you, this is the first mistake she’s made through a very exalted career. Supreme Leader Snoke would not have promoted her if there’d been any potential for disobedience in her record.”

As usual, Hux tried to avoid fault, his eyes twitching nervously. He hadn’t used the Force on the general in days, even when they discovered Phasma’s unexpected betrayal. But he was beginning to think it was the only way to keep the man on track. Did he think Ren would miss the attempt to blame Snoke, or the insinuation that the captain’s unapproved detour was due to a lack of faith in him?

He resisted the urge to take his frustration out on Hux, despite the man’s multiple failures and poorly-concealed jibe, and instead picked up the datapad again. He zoomed in on an image, a small townhouse apartment in Chandrila, with textured white walls and a large bay window in the front. He had spent countless hours in that window, waiting impatiently for Han Solo to come up the walkway.

A sudden, familiar dimming of the sound and white light of his command chamber startled him.

No, no, not here.

“Oh, I'm sorry.” Her clipped accent bristled with sarcasm. “Shall I call again later?”

He did not respond, but Hux must have sensed something, because he was peering at the
Supreme Leader curiously.

“Are you quite alright? Ren?”

The man gulped and sputtered as Kylo Ren seized him with the Force and dragged him out of his chair. He didn't look at her, but he heard a gasp and found himself needing to justify the cruelty.

“I have been more than patient with you, General! I am your Supreme Leader! Please, try and keep up.”

He dropped the man, and of course he floundered, losing his balance and crumpling to the floor. He struggled to his feet while Ren watched impassively. He hadn't even choked him, just lifted and dropped.

“Perhaps you need a better reminder. Maybe I’ll send you to reconditioning. Captain Sloane can take over your command for a few days.”

Hux’s eyes glimmered with hate, and something that might have actually been fear. Ren coolly stared back until the red-haired general looked down, pretending to straighten his uniform.

“That’s not necessary, Supreme Leader. Sir.”

“Good. Dismissed!”

He started to turn his attention to more pressing matters, but the irritating little man was still standing there, clearing his throat to draw Ren’s attention. It took all his concentration not to ignite his lightsaber and slice the man’s tiny brain to pieces.

Behind him, millions of leagues away in some unknown place, he thought he heard a soft snicker of amusement. It made him smile inwardly, and might have saved the general’s life.

“Do you not understand the meaning of the word ‘dismissed’, General?”

“My apologies, Supreme Leader. But, I must remind you that you requested this meeting to discuss our spies—”

“I called you here to discuss intelligence. You have none. Get out.”

He could not believe the man’s incredible nerve. Snoke had been far too encouraging. He waited for the sound of the elevator whirring before giving her his full concentration. He was surprised to see her smiling, her hand pressed to her lips in an attempt to conceal it.

“Did I say something to amuse you?” Despite his scowl, he liked seeing her smile. He wasn't sure he had ever seen it before. She was radiant. Even her eyes sparkled.

“I called you here to discuss intelligence. You have none. I didn't know you could be funny! Who is that man?”

“General Hux? Surely you've heard of him,” he strode closer to where she appeared, stepping down from the platform in the center of the room. "Can you see my surroundings?"

“That’s General Hux? I never knew what he looked like.”

Her eyes peered in the direction of the elevator, and he wondered how far she could actually see. Did she recognize the room?
He froze suddenly, catching a glimpse of bright sunlight and tree trunk behind her. She moved towards him and the surroundings blurred, but the picture remained clear in his mind. Something about it nuded his memory, but he was unable to pin it down.

And then he forgot about it entirely, because Rey was standing so close he could feel electricity dancing on his skin, and the scent of heated stone and exotic wood surrounded him.

“Why do you need to build a new lightsaber? What happened to the one you had?”

She looked up at him, her eyes roaming slowly over his face, as if she were trying to memorize every detail. He confronted her gaze fearlessly, letting his desire to touch her, to feel her soft lips under his, reflect clearly in his eyes. Their kiss had emboldened him, now that he knew she shared his feelings, he refused to hide how she affected him.

She stared, her wide eyes holding a mix of emotions that were difficult to untangle, but he could sense her pulse pounding through their bond.

“It...broke…” she stammered finally. She seemed unable to speak clearly and meet his eyes at the same time, instead taking in the room. He could tell by the slight shifting of her stance that she recognized it. “We broke it. When I…. When you wouldn't let go.”

He frowned as she looked away, feeling her gathering the strength to step back to a safer distance. He couldn't allow it. His whole body ached with the need to touch her, to feel the heat of her skin against his.

He raised a gloved hand and gently lifted an escaped strand of hair out of her eyes. She gasped when his hand brushed the side of her face, startling them both. He cupped her cheek and she closed her eyes, trembling very slightly.

“Look at me,” he ordered.

Her eyes flashed open, confronting him suddenly with a tearful anger.

“Why wouldn't you let go?” She sobbed softly, her breath catching in her throat.

This time, it was Ren who stepped back, his hand falling away. She closed the distance again, grabbing his hand.

“Ben.”

He pulled his hand out of her grasp and proceeded to yank both of his gloves off with his teeth, discarding them carelessly on the floor. Then he did turn to look at her, his eyes burning with a predatory gleam as he advanced on her, his hands clutching her shoulders. Her gasp at the sudden physical contact was muffled as he firmly claimed her mouth, his fingers digging into her bare skin.

He had expected her to struggle, to fight, possibly even slap his face or attack him with her staff.

He did not expect her to yield, her arms winding around his neck with fierce strength as her body leaned into his. She buried strong fingers in his hair, drawing him down, her small tongue demanding and receiving entrance into his mouth. His hands relaxed, sliding down to hold her waist while she proceeded to caress and explore with lips and tongue, gently enticing him to respond in kind.

He had imagined this moment for days, carefully considering each detail, but he realized this
was not something he could ever have prepared for. He could feel the fire within her, building from something dark and desperate to a roaring, brilliant warmth as she allowed it to surface. It flowed into him, igniting with a painful intensity.

He felt her mind brush his, tentative and uncertain where her kiss was confident and practiced. And when he let down his barriers... holy fucking stars... Sweet, pure bliss, powerful enough to drown them both.

It was too much, too fast. He pulled himself back, drawing away from the kiss, but his wide hands remained on her hips, not quite willing to release her completely. Her smile was warm, but her eyes held a hint of sadness. He could sense remorse and confusion beneath the heady glow of desire, and he knew she could sense his guilt. There was very little he could possibly hide from her now.

“We could have had this,” she whispered, not ungently.

He knew she could see the torment in him laid across his features, and the sharp stab of pain in the pit of his stomach. She traced the scar down his face - her scar. He read the thought in her mind, and closed his eyes, leaning into her caress.

“We will have this. You know we will.” He lifted a hand from her waist and laid it over hers, pressing her palm to his cheek with an iron grip. His eyes found hers and held them. “You belong with me.”

“No.” She twisted the fingers she had wrapped around his hair in a tight fist. “You belong with me.”

A darkness flickered in her eyes, and he understood suddenly why she wielded the Force so instinctively. In the brilliance of her light, he had almost missed it. Rey had dark in her as well. A darkness she had faced, and accepted. Of course she did! He should have seen it before, when he read her thoughts on Starkiller Base, or in the brief moment they had touched hands when she was on that miserable island with his foolish uncle.

The girl who had no fear of Kylo Ren, who wanted only to kill him. Who had given herself up to him, believing in him with unwavering faith. She still believed he was worth saving, even now after he chose to pursue his own power over the affection she offered. This little scavenger girl from a nowhere planet, on the outskirts of known space, with no formal training to speak of, had instinctively mastered a task that plagued Sith and Jedi masters for thousands of years. He could only regard her in awe.

“Is the crystal intact?”

She blinked at him in puzzlement.

“The... crystal? Oh, Luke’s lightsaber. No. It broke in half.” She regarded him worriedly. “Are you... afraid of me... now?”

It took him a moment to understand. He had panicked slightly, thinking she had picked up on some of his thought process through the bond. He should have known better, she would never poke and prod if he did not invite it. He looked down into her troubled gaze, letting her feel his overwhelming sense of warmth and the subcurrent of excitement lingering from their intense kisses.

“No,” he said firmly.

Feeling the sense of her suddenly fading, he let go of her and stepped back, hoping to lessen the emptiness he knew would come once she disappeared again. She let her eyes travel up and down
his body now that they stood apart.

“You will help me then? With the lightsaber?”

There was an edge to her voice, as if daring him to refuse now. He remembered then, her offer of an exchange, and he couldn't help but smirk a little. Of course. That's why she hadn't resisted.

“Yes.” He frowned, his tired mind trying to work out logistics. “I need to see it.”

Their connection was fading quickly, though they seemed to be able to stretch their time a little if they both focused. He couldn't see her anymore, but he could hear her voice clearly.

“Come to Mandalore. Just you.”

“Where on Mandalore?” He heard himself shouting and realized how idiotic he would look if someone were to see or hear him talking to himself. Or kissing someone who wasn't there.

“Rey, tell me how to find you!”

“I'll find you!”

He barely heard her response, though he could tell from the inflection she was yelling too. Of course. An unknown scavenger from Jakku could wander Mandalore unnoticed, but even an unofficial visit from Kylo Ren, Supreme Leader of the First Order, would be noted and gossiped about for months. He gathered up his gloves and pulled them back on before he paged Hux’s comm.

“Ah, Supreme Leader. What a pleasant surprise.”

Ren considered several sarcastic retorts, but he didn't want Hux to think he was in a good enough humor to make jokes. He ignored the blatant lie, which seemed to frustrate the ginger-haired man even more.

“I believe we have an ambassador to the Mandalorians?”

He was reading the file for the first time right then, although he knew most of the planet's basic information and history.

“Yes, sir?”

“Inform the ambassador I will be making a brief visit. Unofficially. And keep my ship ready.”

He cut off the general before he’d finished the first word of his reply. “It doesn't matter, it's personal. If it becomes important, I will inform you. If you persist in questioning my every decision, Captain Sloane will get that promotion!”

He turned off his comm and spent the next hour reviewing all the information the First Order had on Mandalore and its current status. He was surprised to find how pleasureable the simple act of learning was, and he wondered if Rey had something to do with it. He certainly had not engaged in a task which interested him so thoroughly since… Since before he had come to serve Snoke.

He tried not to dwell on the years he had spent under that creature’s thrall. Let the past die… The past was dead at his hand, though no one but Rey knew the truth of it.

He had a new destiny now. A shared one.

On a whim, he pulled up all the files he could find on the elusive, pre-Republic ancient Jedi,
and anything he could think of that referenced neutral Force users. He did not expect to find quite so much. It was very late when he finally went to his quarters, and he slept soundly, without the whiskey that had become his habit.
Chapter Summary

Rey just cannot meditate in peace. The Falcon is infested with porgs. Sweet, juicy
smmuuuttt.... Who is this mystery woman with her white light sabers??

“Rey! Rey!”

Only one person would be snapping their fingers in front of her face so impatiently. She
slapped Finn’s hand away and opened her eyes.

“You do understand the purpose of meditation, right? Silent, peaceful, relaxed, uninterrupted?”

They had left Kashyyyk approximately ten hours ago by her reckoning of the astrogation
devices on the Falcon, and would be in hyperspace another two before they reached their first stop.
She wasn’t sure what the purpose of each stop was, those plans were up to Rose and Poe, but their
ambling course would set them down on Mandalore in three days.

They were building a network, supposedly, or as Poe referred to it, ‘passing out matches.’ She
had not expected there to be so many stops in between, and she realized she hadn't given Ben any
sort of time frame. She was trying to reach him, taking the time in hyperspace to meditate, but so far
she had not been able to manage more than fifteen minutes before something - or more likely
someone - disturbed her.

She had finally resorted to climbing down into the gun turret, because there was no possible
reason anyone could have for coming down there and she'd assumed nobody would look for her
there either.

“What I understand is these stupid furry birds are nesting in the insulation and the engine
coolant is icing over,” he glared down at the little porg resting quietly in her lap.

Rey quite liked the little creatures, and this little one with its mostly black coat and slightly
crossed eyes had taken a shine to her soon after they left Crait. Its gentle companionship was
soothing, and feeling the warmth of its life force helped her concentrate. Now, it seemed to sense her
irritation and growled up at Finn as he leaned into the small space. She stroked its back to calm it.

“Can you just give me fifteen minutes? Please?”

They both cried out as the Millennium Falcon's engines stuttered, shaking the entire ship and
throwing the porg from Rey's lap. Chewie yowled from the cockpit that they were in danger of
dropping out of hyperspace and Rose shouted something unintelligible in response. Rey sighed and
unfolded from the seat, reaching for the steps.

“I guess that's a no.”

Finn scrambled out of the way as she emerged into the main deck, casting a sweeping gaze over
the various hatches and components. She spied a repair kit sitting out on a table near the med bay,
and Rose’s legs from the knee down poking out of a wide hole in the wall. She quickly knelt beside
her friend, trying to peer around Rose’s body to see what damage they were dealing with.
“Rose?”

She touched the mechanic’s knee gently. A hand reached out, waving around blindly, nearly knocking Finn in the face.

“I need insulation! Whatever you can find, pillows, blankets, bandages, clothes. We could stuff Chewie in here.”

Rey grabbed some blankets from the storage container nearby, while Finn scrambled wildly around the med bay, opening drawers and scattering their contents across the floor. Rey jumped to her feet, swiftly shoving the blankets into Rose’s hand, and rushed over to stop him just as Finn emptied the last drawer, spilling a pile of dusty, warped books along with Luke’s broken lightsaber onto the deck. He looked up at Rey, surprise and concern clear in his expressive eyes.

“Rey. Is that… What are these things?”

He jumped out of the way as she hastily snatched up the sacred Jedi texts, carefully closing them and smoothing the covers before gently storing them in a different cabinet.

“Nothing, nothing, just don't touch them!”

She had no idea how to explain the existence of the books to anyone - she was glad she had them, now, but she still felt a little guilty about acquiring them. Not that anyone could read them or make sense of them if they could. She had been waiting for the right time to try, but everything had been so busy, and without Leia, there was so much to do…

Finn was staring at her when she turned around, a package of bacta patches in one hand and a porg in the other.

“Nothing? Rey, those books are not nothing. Are they yours? Where did you get them?”

She shook her head, feeling herself growing emotional, and bent to collect the halves of the lightsaber. Finn dropped the porg and grabbed her shoulder.

“Rey!”

“I took them from Luke!” She snapped finally. “He said the Jedi had to end. He wouldn't help me. I found them in a library, on the island, and I just…."

She made a helpless gesture, still holding the broken pieces in her hands. Finn’s eyes shifted to something behind her, and she cursed inwardly. In all the chaos, she hadn't noticed Poe coming up from the cockpit. She thrust the broken saber in the cabinet with the books and slammed it closed. Then she took a deep, calming breath, and turned to face her friends.

“We can talk later. Rose needs insulation.” She yanked the package of medical supplies out of Finn’s hand. “Bacta patches? Really?”

“Yeah, let's save the medical supplies until we're really desperate,” Poe interjected.

Finn rolled his eyes as Rey continued to gather up whatever bits of fabric and insulating supplies she could find. He looked from her to Poe, bewildered, as the pilot began passing the materials he’d brought to Rey.

“One fire at a time, buddy,” the Resistance leader warned. “We've got to get this ship warmed up before we drop out of hyperspace in uncharted territory.”
The former scavenger knelt by Rose as the other woman dragged herself out of the ship’s internals. They hurriedly discussed options, Rey gathering some tools and tape from the strewn contents of the repair kit before climbing in to take Rose’s place.

She faintly heard Finn and Poe arguing, but chose to let it go and accomplish the more important task at hand, before her friends confronted her for thievery. Even with her slightly slimmer frame and athletic limbs, Rey could only barely reach the freezing coolant lines, the icy breath of empty space breathing down her neck and arm painfully where they brushed against the cold metal hull. Luckily, she had a longer reach than the extent of her arms, though it was difficult to concentrate on the Force when half of her body was in danger of frostbite.

She closed her eyes, focusing on her breath, and managed to float everything into place, but applying the thermal tape with the Force proved to be a more intricate task than she was currently capable of. Despite the cold, beads of sweat broke out over her whole body with the exertion, but she eventually managed to get the makeshift insulation stable, though the tape was wound in haphazard loops.

She dragged herself out and realized she was shivering, the ice cold of space and the heavy exertion taking its toll on her body. She heard Rose hiss in concern, rushing over to help her up.

“Rey, your arm!” Rose squealed, taking her hand and holding it out for examination.

Sudden, severe pain wracked her, and she wobbled a little. Rose was quick to steady her, gently guiding Rey to the bed in the med bay. Finn and Poe were staring wide-eyed at her arm. Well, Poe was. Finn took one look and immediately turned away, his face gray.

Confused, and somewhat disoriented, Rey looked down as Rose gently unwound her arm wraps. From her elbow down, red angry patches and pinpricks of black covered her skin. Her wrist and hand, where she had been reaching out to direct the Force, were the most blackened, with her pinky finger completely bright red. She looked up into the concerned faces of her friends, frowning in confusion. Poe immediately took charge, a small kindness Rey was suddenly grateful for, as the pain in her arm was making her feel faint and …

She felt a sudden familiar urge and looked around wildly, grabbing the first container she could find and proceeding to empty the contents of her stomach. She realized too late it was an old Rebel Alliance flight helmet.

“Good thing we saved those bacta pads,” Why did Poe sound so far away?

She flinched as someone held her arm out, just the simple movement was agonizing. Someone took the… flight helmet? …. out of her free hand and she opened her eyes to see Rose sitting next to her, her warm hand firmly wrapped around Rey’s good hand.

Poe’s face appeared over hers briefly and she heard him bark orders, but it sounded like background noise.

“She's going into shock, keep her awake.”

Rose shook her vigorously until her eyes opened again. Why was it so hard to keep her eyes open? The mechanic favored her with one of her gentle smiles.

“There. Stay with us, Rey, you idiot.”

“This is going to sting,” Poe warned.
She turned towards the sound of his voice, suddenly realizing he was talking to her. He was holding her injured arm out straight, preparing to bandage it. *Stars, how did I not feel that?*

Rose shook her hand gently and she tore her eyes away from her ghastly injury.

“Hey. HEY.” Rose slapped her cheek, not hard, but it grounded her somewhat. “Look at me, Rey. Talk to me. Why did you stay in there so long?”

“I don’t… I didn’t feel it.”

Why didn’t she feel it? Was it because she was focusing so hard on her Force abilities? She gasped as something wet and cold was applied to her arm, and her eyelids fluttered. Slowly, the pain began to ebb and she felt herself breathing more easily. She had been close to hyperventilating.

She opened her eyes again, this time seeing Rose clearly. A soft, comforting rumble reached her ears, and she realized it was the ship’s engines running smoothly again. Somehow the sound had faded against the background throb of pain. She forced herself to sit upright, realizing she had been leaning against the wall and Rose’s shoulder.

“I was … using the Force … to put the insulation in. I think I went into a sort of trance.”

She looked around at the worried faces of her friends, then carefully examined her bandaged arm.

“How's it feel?” Poe asked.

She twisted her wrist experimentally.

“Sore, but I can manage.”

He nodded in satisfaction.

“It's a good thing someone here knows basic first aid,” Rose quipped. “You can come back in, Finn, all the gory bits are covered up.”

The ex-trooper climbed up from the cockpit, followed by a warbled inquiry from Chewie.

“It's alright!” Rey tried to make her voice strong and steady. “I'll be fine.”

Finn’s eyes were angry and worried as he glanced over Poe’s expert bandaging. He sat across from Rey, his face serious. They were all looking at her with varying amounts of concern and apprehension. She looked all three of her friends in the eye, starting with Finn and ending with Poe.

“I’ve had worse injuries. There’s no need to look so scared.” She tried to reassure them, but they didn’t seem to want to believe her. “I fixed the insulation problem, at least.”

Poe and Finn shared a glance over her head. She wanted to know what they were thinking, why everyone was so worried about some mild frostbite, but she was so tired. She felt her eyes starting to close again. Rose noticed first and hopped down off the bed, helping Rey get situated as comfortably as possible.

Finn took off his jacket and folded it up for her to use as a pillow, and her little cross-eyed porg came to snuggle in by her side.

“Let her rest,” she heard Poe tell the others.
She heard them speaking in soft whispers across the deck, but she was too exhausted to try and parse words. Instead she scrunched Finn’s jacket up under her head and quickly fell asleep.

She felt him before she saw him. They were in some dark place, a cave of some kind, with glowing blue-ish rock formations poking out of the ground and ceiling. He must have felt her, too, because he turned from the rock he was studying, revealing the outline of his black clothing against the blue glow. He stayed still as she moved towards him, and she noticed his hand hovering over the saber clipped to his belt.

“Ben?”

Her voice echoed strangely through the chamber and it occurred to her that it must be much larger than it seemed. He held out his gloved hand and she took it, letting him pull her up beside him. He slipped his hand around her waist protectively and she rolled her eyes.

“I can defend myself, remember?”

“Not here,” he murmured softly. “There’s someone here… a Jedi, or a Sith. I can feel them.”

She reached out to him mentally, and he caught her probe, gently guiding her to the vivid presence until she, too, felt it. It was unlike anything she had sensed before. Ben’s aura was dark red, flickering like a candle flame and bright in the center. Her friends all appeared in shades of blue and green, the natural energy of living things as the Force flowed through them.

This energy was definitely a living being, she could see white light pulsing with life, but it was pure and colorless, a bright neutral glow. She had to admit it was strange, but it didn't feel hostile.

“I don't think it's-” she was cut off as Kylo Ren ignited his lightsaber and thrust her behind him.

There was someone moving towards them, cloaked and hooded and using a walking staff of gnarled white wood. She peered around Ren’s body, trying to make out a face beneath the cloak, but all she could see was the hood, held up by twin triangular peaks at the top of the head. Ears perhaps? Or just a headdress, it was hard to tell underneath the thick fabric.

The stranger laughed, and Rey was surprised to hear a feminine voice. She sounded elderly, but the tone of her voice was strong.

“Will you fight me, Ben Solo?”

There was the distinctive sound of a lightsaber igniting, one right after the other, and the cloaked woman held a pair of glowing silver-white sabers, the blades crossed in front of her.

Kylo Ren began swinging his saber in his hand, easing into a battle stance. The old woman circled around him, flipping one of her sabers into a reverse grip, but she remained defensive.

Rey grabbed his arm.

“Wait.” She whispered.

She turned and addressed the woman.

“Who are you?”
“A leftover Jedi?” Ren sneered.

Rey stepped back. He was truly Kylo Ren now, and she didn't trust him to pay any heed to her words. He was focused on the battle, having already determined this woman to be an enemy.

“I will destroy you, just like all the others.”

“I am no Jedi. And you will not destroy me. She won't allow it.”

“No one tells me what I'm allowed to do!” He snarled, lunging at her.

For a few seconds, the world seemed to move in slow motion for Rey. She saw Ren begin to move, and her body reacted instinctively.

She reached out with the Force and leapt ahead to cut him off, and her hand summoned one of the silver-white sabers. She had not been certain the stranger would allow it, but she had to try and she did not have time to consider alternatives.

Rey knew his fighting style, knew exactly how to catch his blade at the base to avoid the crossguard. She didn't know why, but she felt strongly that attacking the old woman was wrong and dangerous, and she knew only she had the ability to halt his wrathful onslaught before it started.

She had just enough time to slide between them, successfully catching Ren’s red saber with the borrowed white one. He jumped back with a grunt of surprise. For some reason, their display made the old woman clap in delight.

“Well, you two are fun! Unfortunately, this is only a dream, but I can't wait to finish it up in person.”

Rey felt the lightsaber wriggling in her grasp, and she let go of it, turning to address its bizarre owner, but the cloaked woman was gone in a flourish of white light, the sound of her lightsabers powering down echoing through the cave.

Not just gone from the the immediate vicinity, but gone from the entire dream-world. *It's not enough to be tortured by Ben through the Force, now there's this in my dreams.*

She heard Kylo Ren’s lightsaber switch off. Before she could turn, he had grasped her from behind in one swift movement, his arm wrapped around her waist while his gloved hand came up to tilt her face up towards him.

It was the first time he had handled her so roughly, and she knew in that moment she faced Kylo Ren, dark enforcer and Supreme Leader. Ben Solo was buried deep behind a mask of rage and ferocity.

She could not help the way her body leaned into him, even though her muscles tensed and her jaw tightened.

“If you ever try that again, I will-”

“You'll what? Go on be specific. I’m not afraid.”

Her eyes held his, daring him to answer. It was a dangerous taunt, she knew, but a part of her welcomed the danger. His arm tightened around her waist, his hand grasping her throat roughly, nearly choking her, and a part of her wanted it to go on, to see what else he might do when provoked.
She reached a hand up, tangling her fingers in his hair, her eyes never leaving his. His kiss was fierce and wild, instead of yielding to each other, they fought for dominance as he forced his tongue into her mouth. The hand around her waist roamed upwards, pushing aside her vest and claiming her breast, his gloved thumb bruising her sensitive flesh.

She moaned against his mouth, arching her back, and he pushed her face into his shoulder, trailing rough, inexperienced kisses and sharp bites down her neck. Rey's heart pounded and her flesh burned everywhere their bodies touched. She was afraid to open her mind to him like this, but when she felt him push, she gave in with only mild resistance.

Images flashed through her mind, harsh, wild fantasies that frightened and excited her, the sudden intense flood of his emotions nearly overwhelming any sense of caution she might have had. She struggled against his probe, trying to hide her reaction, but she knew he had sensed it as his teeth grazed her earlobe and he breathed hotly in her ear.

“It's too late now. I know you want this.”

She whimpered softly, closing her eyes as he roughly spun her around to face him.

“Stop closing your eyes!”

She felt his hands leave her for a moment, and her eyes flew open at the sudden loss of his touch. He was taking off his gloves, she realized, and she watched him with open desire, unconsciously biting her lower lip in anticipation. He wasted no time tossing them to the floor and taking her hands in his, his body crushing her against the uneven rock wall.

He held her wrists above her head with one strong hand, the other squeezing and kneading her breasts through the fabric of her clothing. His hand roamed inexpertly, finally sliding down inside her tunic to cup her bare flesh. His breath burned against her neck as he dragged his mouth down slowly … too slowly.

She writhed a little, trying to direct him, her fingernails digging into his hand as she attempted to free herself. He stopped and looked up at her, his lips forming that arrogant smirk she loved to hate. She glared at him, her eyes wide.

“I'm watching. Are you going to continue?”

Oh, this taunting him was glorious! She'd never expected to be able to get under his skin in this way. He growled and grasped her right breast, firmly taking her hard nipple into his mouth. Good gods, his mouth was hot, it almost felt like the whole side of her body was on fire, and when he pressed into her mind to see …

Oh! Oh, yes. It had never occurred to her that the Force bond could be used like this, that he could simply enter her mind and read what she wanted, feel what she felt … It was clearly surprising to him too, he seemed momentarily stunned and she could sense him reveling in it, caught up in his own imagination.

She felt an opening and took it, breaking her hands free to bury them in his hair, her fingers pressed against the back of his head, holding him there while he sucked and traced her round, tight flesh with his tongue. She felt his teeth graze her, reminding her that he could easily become dangerous.

His hands closed on her shoulders and he roughly dragged his strong fingers down her arms. She yelped at a sudden, severe pain in her left arm, jerking it inward across her body, away from
He stepped back immediately, his eyes searing her with anger and need, but fading as they dropped to where she cradled her bandaged left arm. His face cleared slowly from lustful to worried.

“Why didn't you tell me you were injured?”

With a surprisingly gentle touch after their rough foreplay, he took her hand and pulled her arm out to examine it.

“I forgot. I had to replace some insulation the porgs chewed through and I couldn't reach with my hand so I had to do it with my mind and… I don't know, I guess I just got in this kind of … trance.”

He looked up, letting go of her hand and frowning down at her. She always forgot how tall he was, she felt like a child being scolded.

“You were in a Force trance. You shouldn't be doing it without training.”

“Well, it's not as if I've had a lot of opportunities!”

She scowled, rubbing her elbow above the bandaging. He glared at her arm as if he could will it to heal with the power of his possessive angst.

“If you had stayed with me-”

“Stop. Just stop it. That was never an option and you know it!”

She was beginning to feel some angst herself, although it might have simply been the frustration of having her stupid injury interrupt them.

“You still need a teacher,” he insisted stubbornly.

Rey shrugged.

“I've done alright!”

“You fell into a trance unintentionally and injured yourself! Rey, you don't know anything!”

She shook her head, angry, frustrated, stubbornly refusing to admit to fault, because then what? Should she just… not use her powers, scour the galaxy until she found a teacher?

He moved in and cupped his hand under her chin, forcing her to meet his eyes. It was too difficult to hide things from him, and she didn't feel like it anyway. Her friends needed strong, dependable, resourceful Rey. Ben Solo needed something else entirely.

She let him draw her into an embrace, soaking up whatever comfort he could give her.

“We'll be there in three days, if we can get the ship repaired quickly.”

Ben rested his chin on the top of her head, inhaling deeply.

“I'll make arrangements,” he confirmed.

She nodded, and gradually slipped into deeper dreams as the warmth of his strong embrace soothed her. She dreamed of white lightsabers with violet edges, and of the island on Ahch-To,
where she climbed to the top to find the cloaked woman and her white staff instead of Luke.
Cloud City Has Tacky Tile

Chapter Summary

Kylo Ren’s family history comes back to bite Phasma’s rear. Hutts hold long grudges.

For some reason, Rey does not like Cloud City. Maybe she had a vision or something? Obligatory desert girl doesn't understand baths, because that seems to be a requirement of fluffy fanfics.

“You don’t just stroll into Mos Eisley and start asking questions,” the Twi’lek seated at the bar next to Phasma seemed amused, but not openly hostile.

Very few people on a planet like Tatooine had the energy for open hostilities. The woman made a gesture to the Bothan behind the bar.

“Hey. Sheera. Give the offworlder a drink. Put it on my tab.”

“I thank you, but I prefer to pay for my own expenses.”

She desperately wished for the comfort of her armor and the voice-modulating helmet, although she would have been sweltering in this heat. She was sweltering already under her cloak and mask, so she wasn't sure there would be much difference.

The bartender turned and set a sweating glass of blue liquid in front of her. She raised it to her face and sniffed experimentally. It was pretty much exactly what she had expected, which meant it probably wasn't poisoned. She would have been suspicious of anything in this rathole cantina that smelled or tasted good. The Twi’lek sipped a similar drink, watching Phasma pull a metal coin from the inner pocket of her cloak. The bartender took it without comment, though he offered her no change.

“Interesting. You don’t see chromium much around here.”

This chatty woman was starting to irritate her, but at least she was talking. She had spent the last two days unsuccessfully trying to get an audience with someone willing to loan out money. So far, she had been ignored. Not thrown out, not attacked, not robbed, just… ignored. So, despite her misgivings, she decided she would have to force herself to interact with the other woman.

“Got lucky on a salvage job,” she explained.

“Hmmm. That is a lucky salvage. Are you native to Naboo?”

The woman’s red eyes poured over Phasma’s clothes, and she realized it was probably difficult to discern her race beneath the voluminous robes.

“Not originally, but I keep my apartments there.”

She waited, watching the other patrons of the busy cantina. Out of the corner of her visor’s
view, she saw a human child slip out the back door. She supposed he could be a barback out running errands, but she'd have to wait to be sure. No one else seemed to be paying their conversation any mind, a practiced disinterest that was apparently ingrained in the culture here.

“I've never met anyone from Naboo. I hear it's truly beautiful. A whole core made of ocean caves, so one could swim from one side to the other by diving down far enough.”

“I wouldn't know,” Phasma replied, truthfully. “I can't swim.”

“I see.” The woman considered her carefully. “What would bring you from Naboo to a hellhole planet like Tatooine?”

“Business.”

She gingerly sipped the blue crap in front of her through her metal straw. It tasted as awful as it smelled, but she managed to swallow without gagging. The liquid was surprisingly cool given the ambient temperature.

“Any specific kind of business? I could probably point you in the right direction.”

Phasma lifted her visor to view the Twi’lek with her single blue eye. She was not surprised by the woman’s lack of response to the sight of her twisted visage.

“My employers are in need of funds. I’ve been assigned to explore options.”

“I see.”

The Twi’lek finished her beverage of choice and stood up.

“Well, I have some of my own business to attend, but I will pass the word along. You shouldn't have to wait too long, I can't imagine those with the funds would pass up the opportunity to loan money to the First Order. Take my advice, don't accept the first offer.”

She gave Phasma a knowing wink and strolled off, disappearing through the door flap into the brilliant sun. The officer sighed and turned around, finding the bartender refilling her drink. Well, at least her coin seemed to be good here. Hopefully it wouldn't run out before she secured a contract.

As it happened, the invitation came the next morning, slipped under her door by an unseen messenger. She assumed it was probably a trap, but Phasma was a warrior before she became a Stormtrooper. She assumed everything was a trap. She wore her chromium boots and arm guards under her robes, carried a knife in her boot and strapped a second, smaller blaster to her thigh in addition to the one on her belt. She left slightly later than she should have, hoping to instill a small reminder to these backwater criminals that the First Order was better than their petty social niceties. It was just after noon when she reached the palatial structure at the southern end of town. Supposedly it was a land barge, but she had not seen it move an inch since she arrived in Mos Eisley.

The assassin droids guarding the door were expecting her, letting her in without comment after she announced herself. Once inside, she was met by a scantily-clothed Twi’lek with a blaster prominently displayed on her hip. Phasma knew Tatooine and the Hutts in particular had a long history of slavery, but as they wound through the labyrinthine depths of the rusty old barge, she saw
no one with the outward appearance of a forced laborer. They passed a sort of exchange, where various denizens of Tatooine traded scraps and devices for things like medical supplies and farming tools. Water seemed to be the favored currency, and the large purification chamber they passed was heavily guarded by droids and a young, dark-furred Wookie who seemed polite enough to the customers lined up behind the sturdy vault.

Finally, they reached a throne room, where a smallish blue Hutt lounged on a dias, attended by a black chrome protocol droid and a large human wearing a leather loincloth, gauntlets, and very little else. Phasma's lip curled in disgust. He reminded her of some of the clan overlords on Parnassos.

“Welcome, Captain Phasma.”

So they did know who she was. So much for stealth. She was surprised to hear the young Hutt speaking Galactic Basic.

“Brago has heard rumors the First Order is seeking coin.”

“You have heard correctly, sir.”

How old was this creature? Not very, judging by its small size and relatively mild ego. She wondered how much power it really wielded.

“My apologies, Captain,” the protocol droid interjected. “You must address His Eminence, Brago Desilijic Tiure, as ‘Your Eminence’ or ‘Lord Brago.’”

Phasma rolled her eyes (actually just her one eye). She threw back the hood of her cloak and pulled the visor up. It was useful for gathering information, or for providing peripheral vision when fighting, but she found she preferred to look people in the eye during important conversations. She bowed as much as her injury would allow.

“I apologize, Your Eminence. Your information is correct. Supreme Leader Kylo Ren requires funding, quickly. I have come to bargain for a loan.”

Brago chuckled, his disgusting slimy rolls rippling. A giant, mucousy tongue emerged from his mouth and moistened his nonexistent lips.

“Hmm. The son of that double-crossing thief Han Solo and the murderess Leia Organa comes to the Hutts for a loan. Aha. Aha.”

Phasma did her best to suppress the frustration and panic that filled her mind. She had forgotten about the origins of Ben Solo. Brago the Hutt gestured to the Twi’lek who had escorted Phasma in.

“Please make arrangements for our guest to stay while we discuss the terms of this bargain.”

As she hurried out of the room, the Hutt snapped his tiny fingers, and a catering droid rolled up from the dark recesses of the throne room.

“Would you like a chair, Captain? You appear to be recently injured.”

Phasma was taken aback by the Hutt’s hospitality. She had half expected those ‘arrangements’ to include a prison cell.

“Your Eminence is generous. I thank you.”
The half-naked man brought out a folding chair of wood and leather and set it beside her, offering her a pillow for comfort. Perhaps he was not so disgusting after all.

“Now,” said the Hutt after he was assured of her comfort. “What is the First Order prepared to offer as collateral?”

Rey was not prepared to dislike Cloud City. The pictures she had seen of Bespin’s multi-hued clouds had seemed so beautiful and exotic. But as soon as they landed the Falcon on the floating skyport, she had felt a growing sense of unease that seemed to originate with the unnatural orange and pink glow of the clouds. She had rarely even seen clouds float across Jakku’s bright blue sky, and even the thunderstorms on Ahch-To came with the scent of fresh air and saltwater.

Bespin’s atmosphere was stifling, the only breeze a faint whisper of hot air that reeked of industrial fumes. She had wanted to stay on the ship and help Chewie make repairs, but was surprised to hear the Wookie intended to head inside with them, insisting Rose was fully capable of taking care of his precious starship alone. The young woman was clearly floored when he announced this, her cheeks flushing red as the Wookie patted her gently on the head. Earning Chewie’s trust so quickly, especially regarding the maintenance of the Falcon, was a feat in itself, and Rey was glad to see that Rose understood the honor bestowed on her. Of course, Finn had insisted on staying as well, ‘just in case,’ though Chewie reassured him Cloud City was perfectly safe and Poe quipped that Rose had held her own against Stormtroopers before.

That left just Rey and Poe to accompany Chewie on whatever mission they were there to carry out, and both insisted it was important for “the new Jedi” to be seen participating in the Rebel’s cause. She couldn’t bring herself to tell them the truth, that she was no Jedi and had no intentions of becoming one, so she reluctantly agreed even though every second on the floating city made her more and more uncomfortable.

Just as she was standing on the ramp preparing to follow Chewie inside, she heard Rose whisper he name and turned, seeing her friend dart out to meet her.

“Wait! Rey! Can I ask you something?”

She grabbed Rey’s arm rather shyly, her cheeks flushed.

“Yes?”

Rey smiled as Rose leaned over to whisper in her ear.

“Did Pashi give you some of those… patches?”

Rey suppressed a laugh. She remembered quite clearly when the motherly Wookie pressed a bag of tiny medicinal patches into her hand, patting her shoulder and gesturing at Poe and Finn loading crates onto the ship. She had doubted she would need them anytime soon, but the Wookie insisted, lamenting about the hassles of her brood of sons and the loneliness of prolonged space travel. Rey had thought about what Obi-wan said, about Jedi being celibate, and pocketed the patches in a flare of defiance. The bag had been sitting in a forgotten compartment of her satchel since then.

“Do you need some more? I'm not -”
Rose’s eyes widened and she shook her head, stopping Rey from rummaging through her belongings.

“No, I just thought…” Her eyes flickered over Rey’s shoulder, where Poe was waiting for her at the entrance to the enclosed city. “I mean, you’re going to be alone with General Dameron all night…”

“And Chewie.”

Rey knew what she was implying, but chose to pretend otherwise. Jakku was not a kind place to grow up as a girl all alone, a fact she had become well aware of by the time she was ten. There had always been offers, she had even tried once to share quarters with someone she thought she could trust, but after that disaster… It was easier, especially as she grew older, to remain aloof and distant, living alone outside Niima and spending her days in the desert wreckage.

She hadn’t really given it much thought until her brief conversation with the ghost Jedi, and her… interactions… with Ben. But Poe Dameron? She rolled her eyes internally, smiling softly at Rose’s concerned expression and patting her friend’s hand.

“Don’t worry, neither one is really my type.”

“Oh. Really?” Rose blinked for moment. “Not at all? I mean, the General is pretty popular. Lots of women would be jealous.”

Rey shrugged. Truthfully, she hadn’t met Poe until after Ben and … That’s ridiculous. I’m ridiculous.

She said goodbye to Rose and headed into Cloud City, where Poe still waited just inside the door.

“Girl talk?” He asked as she walked past, coming up to stroll beside her.

BB-8 chirped inquisitively as well.

“Nothing important,” she insisted.

“Good. Finn and Rose getting along okay?”

“As far as I know.” Then in response to BB-8’s hopeful beep, “No.”

Poe laughed at the droid’s sad whistle as Rey stalked ahead.

“I dunno, buddy, but I wouldn’t ask again.”

After a small meeting where Chewie introduced Rey and Poe to someone named Lobot, who apparently did much of the administrating in Cloud City, they were shown to fine quarters to rest and prepare for dinner which the man quipped would definitely not involve Darth Vader. Chewie had howled with laughter, slapping the man on the back hard enough to make him stumble, while Poe and Rey shot each other puzzled glances.

Chewie insisted he would let their dinner host explain and they were forced to let it go until then. Now she sat in a richly upholstered room, desperately trying to convince a well-meaning protocol droid that she was perfectly happy wearing the clothes she had on. It was not going very
well, until her determined metallic torturer suggested she take a bath to calm her nerves. She chose to ignore that last bit, pouncing excitedly on the bit about bathing.

“You mean, in water? You have bathtubs here?”

She had always wondered what it would feel like to relax in a pool of warm, soapy water, knowing it was common on other worlds. On Kashyyyk there were showers, big, tall boxes where sun-warmed water could be poured through a spout full of tiny holes. She had been too intimidated to try them until late the night after Leia died, when she had laid awake crying silent tears.

Despite the terribly-timed Force vision, she had enjoyed the feeling of bathing with water and soap instead of the sand and steam of the desert tents. She remembered the feeling of the ocean on Ahch-To, surprisingly enjoyable once she figured out how to stop herself from suffocating and move through the water.

But the ocean water was freezing and left her clothes stiff with salt. Baths were supposed to be warm, soapy and clean. Her enthusiasm seemed to be answer enough for the droid, as it happily pushed open a panel in the wall, revealing the usual facilities, but also a massive mirror, almost as big as the wall she had seen her infinite reflection in, and a huge basin big enough to hold someone three times her size. Eyes wide, she crept over to it, watching the protocol droid turn knobs and toggle switches until a torrent of water came bursting from the spout.

“There are a variety of soaps and shampoos here,” it directed her to a panel with a lot of tiny buttons with labels of substances she’d never heard of and several small dispensing taps. It opened a nearby closet door. “And robes and towels are here.”

She tried not to look as frightened and baffled as she was, looking over the soap panel and nodding. Then the droid nearly burst a fuse when she took off her boots and tried to enter the bath. Apparently, one was supposed to bathe completely in the nude. Rey thought about it, watching the lovely hot water pour out and tendrils of steam begin to cloud the mirror.

She couldn't help feeling a little stupid, and it made her tense. Of course one was meant to get naked! But, she found herself hesitant to do so. Still, it would be a terrible waste of water to refuse now.

“Perhaps you would prefer to undress in private?” The droid gently suggested.

It hadn't even occurred to her the silly thing would stay and watch her bathe! Eventually, she slipped behind a sort of paper wall and swapped her clothes for one of the fluffy white bathrobes. When she came out, the droid proceeded to turn off the water, and then departed, finally leaving her in blessed silence.

She was sitting on the edge of the basin wrapped in the robe, trying to figure out the soap dispenser, when she felt the familiar fading of her surroundings and the quiet rush of the Force. Abruptly, she remembered her dream from the previous night and felt a flush come over her face, refusing to turn around even though she sensed him behind her.

She could feel him moving closer, but she still gasped when his hand came down on her shoulder.

“What are you doing in Cloud City?”

She looked up at him, suddenly feeling shockingly vulnerable with only the flimsy robe covering her. He regarded her calmly, though she could feel his pulse beating rapidly in his wrist.
“Trying to take a bath.” She gestured helplessly at the unfamiliar knobs and buttons. “How do you know where I am?”

His expression turned unreadable.

“Calrissian is an old friend of my… of Han Solo’s. I recognize that horrible tile.”

“Oh.”

She supposed it wouldn't matter much for him to know where she was. She had a feeling he wouldn't send his dogs when their arranged meeting was so close. Still, it would be beyond foolish to trust him completely.

“It's just a short stop. We have to get the ship repaired.”

“Of course you do. That piece of garbage is always one jump away from falling apart.”

He brushed her hair aside to caress the side of her neck with the back of his hand. Rey wondered if he had already had his gloves off, or if he had removed them as soon as he felt the Force connection. She closed her eyes and leaned into his touch, her breath catching as he eased his hand down underneath the stiff fabric. She grabbed his wrist before it could wander any further.

“What do you think you're doing?”

She looked up, meeting his eyes, his wrist still clutched firmly in her hand. His eyes met hers and he smirked.

“Following up on last night.”

She had told herself it was just a dream, but she should have known better. Her face flushed and she let go of him. He sank his long fingers into her hair and firmly pulled her head back, holding her still while he bent to kiss her. It began as a reminder of their rough passion in the dream, but as she yielded to him, her mouth opening beneath his soft lips, it transformed into something else. His grasp on her hair loosened and his kiss became gentler, tender affection replacing pure lust, but just as urgent and hungry.

Rey reached up to pull him down, needing him closer, and he knelt on the floor, letting her twine her arms around his neck. He sighed desperately against her mouth, letting his kisses travel down the edge of her jaw before burying his face in her neck. He wrapped her in his embrace, as he had done just before her dream trailed off, his strong arms engulfing her smaller body.

“Ben,” she whispered the name almost reverently, incapable of pretending she didn't yearn for his touch.

She breathed in his scent, cold pine trees mixed with the hot metallic tang of his lightsaber, and briefly tightened her arms before reluctantly releasing him. He sat back and regarded her with a warmth in his eyes she would never have imagined possible.

“I’m sorry, but I really wish this were a better time. I’ve got to figure out how to get soap out of this thing, and then I have a droid to terrorize.”

He laughed - he actually laughed! - and looked past her at the frustratingly complicated dispenser.

“You have to pick a scent,” he explained.
When she regarded him with a puzzled expression, he reached over her and carefully made some selections. She watched him, surprised to find he was able to interact with her surroundings.

“What kind of soap do you usually use?”

Rey just stared at him with her eyebrows raised, waiting for him to realize how unfathomable that question was to her. His eyes flickered from the machine to her and back, and then he cursed. Now it was her turn to smirk.

“Not much in the way of soap on Jakku. Washing with water would be a waste anyway.”

“I'm almost afraid to ask…” He frowned at her.

“Steam tents,” she explained. “You splash a little water on hot rocks and then you scrape the dirt off with a handful of sand.”

His expression was skeptical. She shrugged.

“Don't look at me like that. It's not that bad.”

He shook his head, turning away to activate the machine.

“Put your hand under here.”

He took her hand in his and held her open palm cupped inside of his under the dispenser spout, then activated it. A pool of pastel purple liquid filled her hand. Transfixed, she brought it to her face and inhaled.

“It smells like something I want to eat!”

She looked at him, unable to hide her simple wonder at the existence of scented liquid soap, and caught what might have been a genuine smile. She let her hand fall into the bathtub, watching the soap spread around and turn the water a faint shade of lavender.

“Is it really safe to… I mean, you're supposed to put your whole body in there?”

“I assure you, it's safe. Most people enjoy it.”

“Now if only I can convince that stupid droid to give me something decent to wear. I'm sure it distracted me with a bath so it could sneak off with my clothes.”

She sighed, trailing her hand in the warm soapy water.

“It's just doing its job.”

Rey glared.

“I have never worn a dress in my life, and I don't intend to now. How are you even supposed to walk in those things?”

His lips twitched in what might have been amusement.

“A place like Cloud City ought to have some old Jedi robes around somewhere, if you ask nicely.”

She couldn't tell if he was laughing with her, or laughing at her, and it made her cross.
“I'm not a Jedi.”

“Aren't you?”

He was looking at her very intensely, and she looked away to hide the unexpected blush that came to her cheeks. No, because I have no intention of being celibate. Among other things. But she wasn't going to tell him that.

“Luke said the Jedi had to end. And as you pointed out, I don't have any training.”

She could feel her eyes growing moist for some reason, and she wanted desperately to be alone.

“I didn't mean to insult you,” he murmured gently.

He held her left hand, carefully drawing out her bandaged arm.

“You should keep this out of the water. It needs time to heal.”

“I'm not stupid!” She snapped.

She was fighting to rein in her emotions, and he seemed to understand. He stood up from the side of the tub, and she felt him fading away. He squeezed her hand one last time, and she returned the gesture firmly. She wasn't angry with him, any more than she usually was, this thing between them was just so profoundly complicated, especially added to everything else. If she didn't get a few minutes to herself, she was going to lose her mind.

Once he was gone, she slipped out of the robe and sank into the tub. It was just as lovely as she imagined, and she stayed soaking up to her neck until the protocol droid came back to check on her. She was grateful for Ben's suggestion about Jedi robes. The droid’s reaction to her changed abruptly when she asked, switching from gently condescending to respectfully polite, and she thought they were both relieved to have the issue resolved. It even left her alone to change and put her hair up in blessed silence.

The Jedi clothing was simple to put on and easy to move in, not unlike her scavenger garb, and it fit surprisingly well. She hesitated before leaving the room, feeling a surge of panic at the idea of leaving her staff behind. She had a blaster Chewie had given her tucked into her belt, but she could not shake the feeling of uneasiness in her chest.

Eventually she resigned herself to leaving it up against the wall just inside the door. Her room wasn't far from the entryway into the spacious dining room she had been directed to, if anything happened, she just had to hope she could improvise long enough to come back for it.
No Rey, You're Not a Monster

Chapter Summary

Rey gets a little out of sorts. Or maybe she has been for a while. The Force is terrifying. You can kill people with your mind...

... Kylo Ren would really like to kill someone with his mind right now, but unfortunately the consequences would be a pain in the ass.

Chapter Notes

Note: If your party is making secret plans, it's probably not a great idea to exclude the person with unpredictable magic powers. Just, you know... general advice.

Rey's discomfort in Cloud City is based on the Force vision from TFA and the lingering effects of what happened to Luke. It has nothing to do with her background, the place just has bad vibes.

Dinner was so lovely, she almost forgot about her impending sense of dread. It was easy to see how Lando Calrissian and Han Solo had been such close friends, despite the multiple times they had apparently double-crossed each other. The grizzled, dark-skinned Baron Administrator had an easy charm, and she thoroughly enjoyed his stories about his smuggling career and fighting with the Rebel Alliance during the end of the Galactic Civil war.

When Poe remembered to ask about Darth Vader, Lando looked for permission from Chewie before continuing.

“That was a bad business,” he admitted.

Despite the somber tone, the story he told was fascinating, and even Poe leaned forward, eager to hear all the details.

“Darth Vader was here?”

Poe looked around as if the dead Sith might rise up out of the floor at any moment.

“Yes. I invited him, much to my regret.”

He and Chewie exchanged a mournful look, before the Baron finished his wine and rose from the table.

“Speaking of the Empire, Chewie and I have some business to attend to. I trust you kids can show yourselves around? Nightfall on Bespin is an interesting sight, and there are plenty of viewports in this part of the city.”

So that was how she ended up standing at a window, watching the clouds fade from orange to
dark red and then purple, smiling in spite of herself at Poe Dameron’s witty commentary on Calrissian’s stories.

“You know he used to own the Millenium Falcon when it was new?”

“No,” she admitted, her curiosity piqued.

She turned to look at him, feeling traces of her previous discomfort surfacing again at the sight of the clouds.

“Han got it off him in a bet,” he explained.

“Did Han lose?” She quipped.

Poe laughed and BB-8 whistled animatedly. When he bent down to whisper to the droid, she looked away, fiddling with the wide sleeve of her robe, but she distinctly heard him say something about privacy.

The little droid rolled some distance away, and Rey chewed worriedly at the inside of her lip, trying think of how she could let Poe down gently, without hurting his feelings. At first he didn't say anything, looking out the viewport at brilliantly lavender clouds. Then they both spoke at once.

“Rey, I'm going to have to ask you-”

“Listen, I don't mean to hurt your feelings, but-”

They looked at each other in shock, laughing loudly enough to receive dirty looks from tourists trying to enjoy the view.

“So it's like that, is it?” He said finally.

“No, I don't mean it to be insulting, you're a good friend and I know you're good-looking, but…” She floundered, but then she remembered something and seized on the excuse. “Jedi are… they're not supposed to…”

“Rey, I don't mean to be insulting either, but I'm not interested in you.”

She looked up quickly, surprised at how hurtful those words were. Then he continued.

“Can you keep a secret?” She nodded, her eyes wide. “I’m… not interested in women. Any women.”

“Oh!”

She was ashamed at how relieved she felt, when Poe was confessing something he clearly considered a deep secret. He searched her face worriedly, until she surprised him with smile and a quick hug.

“Don't worry, you can trust me.”

“Thank you.”

She watched BB-8 roll back over to them, and Poe grinned down at his loyal droid.

“It's okay, buddy, we're good.”
The droid whistled happily at Rey, then rattled off something about plans being ready to Poe.

“What plans?” She asked, eyes moving from BB-8 to Poe and back. When neither answered, she put her hands on her hips crossly. “Well, if you're not going include me, I'm going to bed. My arm is sore and I'm tired.”

“Probably for the best, you need rest to heal,” Poe agreed. “And don't worry, we're not doing anything sneaky, it's just best for you to not know. You'll understand, Rey, I promise, but you've got to trust me on this.”

“It's alright, I do.” She looked down at the little astromech droid beeping an inquiry. “No, I'm fine, really.”

She half expected to dream of Ben again, but she didn't. She slept soundly and dreamlessly until the early morning, when blaster fire and the blaring of alarms jerked her awake. She was out of bed, staff in hand and out the door before her mind really came fully alert, and it took her a moment to register the bizarre scene that flew by her.

First, some greenish-yellow being with black eyes and a lot of tentacles came pounding down the hall, holding something clutched tightly to its chest. It was immediately followed by Finn, clad only in his undershorts, bellowing in rage and quickly closing the gap between them. Down the hall, Rose stood barefoot and cursing, holding a smoking blaster and trying to catch her breath.

“GET BACK HERE, YOU RATHTAR-FACED PIECE OF GARBAGE, YOU'RE GONNA PAY FOR WHAT YOU STOLE!!!!!!!”

The thief was fast, but Finn’s training as a Stormtrooper had its advantages, and he was gaining distance quickly. Further down the hall, doors were opening, and Rey made a split-second decision to run after Finn before the corridor became crowded with confused tourists. She wasn't as fast, but this was a walled and domed city, the thief was bound to come against a dead end eventually.

Fortunately, Finn's shouting guided her onward through the murky predawn, until she rounded a corner and had a clear view of Finn and his quarry caught at an intersection of hallways. Instinct took over and she raised her hand, halting the thief with the Force as Kylo Ren had done to her in the forest of Takodana. He froze in his tracks, just as Finn barreled into him, knocking the datapad he had stolen out of his hands to clatter on the laminate flooring.

Several people had come out of their rooms to stare and complain about the loud alarms and flashing lights, while the Cloud City security forces arrived to try and take charge. Finn held the man securely on the ground with his knee, keeping his hands pinned behind his back while the police placed binders on his wrists.

Rey had lowered her hand as soon as soon as Finn caught him, but she knew people had seen it, there were whispers and the crowd parted on its own as she rushed through. She had seen the datapad go flying and her gaze swept across the intersecting hallways, but she didn't see it. She closed her eyes and concentrated, skimming gently through the minds of the people gathered - there!

She opened her eyes, looking directly at a winged creature across the way. He looked elderly, his vibrating wings struggling to keep him hovering just above the floor, but as soon as he felt her attention land on him he dropped his feeble facade and flew up over the crowd. She raced after him, sensing Finn just behind her.

“He had an accomplice?”
“Looks like it,” she panted. “You do realize you're in your underwear?”

Finn looked down at himself and cursed, but continued on.

“That thieving piece of garbage snuck onto the Falcon. He hit Rose in the head.”

She nodded, trying to save her breath, but her eyes narrowed. He hit Rose?! Now she was angry. She wished she had grabbed her blaster instead of her staff. Finn sped ahead of her, almost catching up to the fluttering bandit, but all the running seemed to be finally catching up to him.

The creature made the mistake of ducking down a dead end, bobbing up to the ceiling as Rey and Finn cornered it. She held out her hand, focusing on calming her mind.

“You will drop the datapad.”

He laughed. “Ah, the Jedi. Your mind tricks won't work, little girl.”

“We have you cornered.” Finn yelled.

Rey spun her staff. If she couldn't force him to come peacefully, she'd bash him in the head like his friend had done to Rose.

“Do you now? Perhaps.”

He glanced to his side, and Rey realized too late the tiny ventilation window high up on the wall was open. She reached out again with the Force, but she was too slow. In the second it took her to realize what was happening, he tossed the datapad into the shaft. Fueled by her anger, she held out her hand.

The creature grabbed its throat, coughing. Dimly, she heard Finn say her name, but she ignored him. These bastards had hurt her friend and stolen secret information that could hurt the entire Resistance, right when they were at their most vulnerable. And somehow he had not only resisted her mind probe, he had mocked her!

She advanced slowly as her enemy sank to the ground, wings spasming wildly as he clutched at his throat.

“Funny, this trick seems to be working.”

“No! REY. Stop.” She froze.

Was that...?

“Let him go, Rey.”

She felt the sudden hush of a Force vision, and for a moment she could see his eyes clearly, open and honest, pleading with her as if she were about to break him all over again. She felt the thief’s life force fading, and suddenly it dawned on her that she was the cause.

She had reached out with the Force in anger, and she had almost killed with it.

Her victim fell to the ground in a slump and the security forces rushed in to bind his wrists and wings. Slowly, she turned, taking the nearest hallway. Before she realized it, she was running, running away, blindly, in whatever direction she felt might get her outside. She spied a hangar doorway and dashed through, her vision blurred by tears.
She crashed into something big and tall and furry. Massive, hairy arms grabbed onto her, holding her still as she dropped her staff and sobbed.

“...I would have killed him, Chewie,” she whispered, burying her face in the Wookie’s fur. She was shaken and horrified. “Just like that. I can kill people with my mind.”

Chewie just held her, making soothing sounds and gently stroking her head like she were a small child. In his eyes, she probably was a child. She wanted so desperately to confide in someone, but she couldn't tell him everything, so she gathered herself together.

She heard Poe calling her name, and Chewbacca yelling in response. Soon Chewie was gently holding her at arms’ length, looking down with his warm brown eyes.

“You wouldn't have killed anyone.” She looked down and he put his paw under her chin, making her meet his eyes. “Using the Force in anger is dangerous, yes. But you stopped yourself. Now you know better.”

“Everyone saw. They'll think I'm...” the word surfaced in her mind and her voice grew hoarse. “I'm a monster.”

“No one thinks you're a monster,” Chewie insisted. “Okay?”

She nodded uncertainly, turning as Poe came into the hangar and Rose emerged from inside the Falcon. They both glanced at Rey and Chewie gestured for everyone to get back on the ship.

“Where's Finn?” She asked as soon as Poe was close enough.

“Getting dressed and talking to Lando. Hopefully in that order,” he chuckled.

“Did they take the bait?” Rose asked.

Poe glanced over at Rey, who looked back and forth between her friends.

“Did they what?”

“Yeah,” Poe answered, grinning at Rose. “Beautiful plan, by the way.”

“You didn't warn Rey?” Rose’s eyes narrowed. "Poe, that was the one thing I asked you to do!"

“Warn me of what? Is this what you meant last night? That it would be better if I didn't know ahead of time?”

“They took the datapad and fled,” Finn announced, coming up the ramp.

“Everything worked out.”

“EVERYTHING WORKED OUT!??!”

Rey stalked to the aft hold and paced, shivering and shaking and unable to hold still. She wanted to break something. To start mindlessly hurling their supplies with the Force. To slap Finn, and strangle Poe.

The Falcon wasn't big enough, she needed space. But if everyone was on the ship, it meant they intended to leave soon. She stopped walking.
**Just... Breathe...**

Somewhere in the core of her body, there was a stable, serene orb of light. Bright, colorless, warm and white. It was where she went when she was lonely and scared, all those nights on Jakku when she couldn't sleep. When she hadn't eaten in days, and struggled to drag back a single, precious piece of scrap. When she was in the interrogation chair on Starkiller and fought back against Kylo Ren, then influenced the guard to free her.

She didn't know when it started, probably sometime after her parents’ abandonment, but it felt like something that had always been there. She had never questioned it. Now she understood. Every living thing had a core of energy just like it. The pure, animating power of the Force. Not dark, but not light either.

**Balance.**

Behind her, she sensed someone lingering in the doorway, concerned, but uncertain. She turned.

“Are you okay?”

It was impossible to stay angry under Rose Tico’s kind, worried gaze. Rey smiled.

“I will be. Are we going?”

“Yeah. Chewie's waiting for you up front. He won't let Poe co-pilot. I think he's mad about something.”

“Of course he is.”

“I'm sorry Poe didn't include you in our plans. If it makes you feel any better, I could always zap him a few times.” She patted the multi-tool on her belt. Rey took a deep breath, then met her friend's eyes.

“I don't like being left out,” she confided.

It was the best explanation she could come up with for the way she was acting. She knew they were concerned by her uncharacteristic behavior, and she didn't want her friends to be frightened of her. Rose nodded, then wrapped Rey in a semi-awkward hug.

“I get it. I really do. My sister and I were orphans too.”

Rey returned her hug, greatly touched by the warmth and understanding in Rose’s voice.

“I won't let it happen again,” the mechanic promised, and Rey knew she meant it.

Even if she couldn't explain everything exactly, she was thankful to Rose and Chewie for sensing her need and trying to comfort her.

“Thank you.”

Kylo Ren had never been so restless in his entire life. It was pure torture to make small talk...
with the ambassador, but they were alone on the floating platform and the woman did not seem to be able to tolerate more than a second of silence. She rambled on about buildings, statues, gardens … all kinds of stupid things he had no interest in.

Mandalore seemed to have more sculptures and monuments dedicated to war heroes than the rest of the galaxy combined. How anyone kept track of who killed whom, when and for what petty reason was beyond him. Finally, the transport stopped outside a tall, grey tower with somber blue-flamed torches accenting its corners. It didn't look all that fancy from the outside, but he had learned a long time ago that the truly elite preferred simple, well-crafted designs over the flamboyant “luxury” tourist traps.

He was reminded of the state of the First Order’s funding and felt a mild surge of guilt.

“My apologies, Ambassador…”

He searched for a name to go with the sharp-faced, red-haired woman standing beside him. Amela? Andela?

“Please, call me Adea,” she insisted, laying her bejeweled hand over his arm.

He stared down at it like he was observing some venomous, disgusting thing and unsure how to dislodge it. Belatedly, he realized the woman was waiting for him to respond, fluttering fake eyelashes over her amber eyes. He’d never seen a woman wearing so much makeup this closely, and he found it slightly off-putting. His mother wore the barest necessary, in natural tones, and the female officers of the First Order kept theirs to a respectable minimum as well.

He had seen holos, of course, but… Between Luke's training and his service to Snoke, he’d had precious little time to even think of women, or interact on anything other than a polite, professional basis.

Until very recently, of course. Rey wasn't the sort to wear it, obviously, and she definitely had no need of it. He looked at Ambassador Adea, with her blue and gold painted eyes and pearlescent white lipstick, and thought she was quite possibly the ugliest woman he had ever seen. He shook her hand off of his arm like he was shaking off a pesky insect.

“I take it this is the hotel?”

He purposely avoided eye contact by surveying the entryway. He had requested a low-level room with a porch or balcony, and he noted several conveniently close to the nearby park. This was a carefully-planned city, inside a massive, climate-controlled dome, with parks diligently cultivated to make up for the lack of living things on the planet's destroyed surface.

His thoughts turned to Rey again, and he found himself curious to know what she thought of Mandalore’s sculpted beauty.

“Yes, Supreme Leader. If you will follow me, I will show you the suite and make sure everything is to your liking.”

“That's really not necessary.”

He wanted rid of this woman as soon as possible, so he could rest and figure out what exactly he was going to do when his… When Rey found him. He had brought all the components he could get his hands on in such a short amount of time, but he had not had the chance to examine them at his leisure. He had a few design ideas in his head, but he was not exactly an expert when it came to lightsaber construction.
He stepped off the platform, and realized the woman was still following him. He opened his mouth to order her to leave, when she put her hands around his upper arm, stunning him into silence.

“I took the liberty of securing the room key earlier, checking in to a place like this can be a hassle, and there are always so many civic authorities and celebrity-chasers around. General Hux’s orders said you wished your visit to remain unofficial, so I assumed you would want privacy…”

Mutely, still trying to comprehend her baffling mixture of vapidness and fearless arrogance, he let the ambassador guide him past the main entrance to a little white gravel path leading around the side of the hotel next to the park. She led them to a discreet side door, which opened with a proximity card she pulled from her pocket. He expected her to hand it over, but the infuriating harpy trotted inside, leaving him to hold the door for her.

He took a deep, steadying breath. Rey. He was doing this for Rey. It would not be helpful for her cause, or the dwindling assets of the First Order, to murder a defenseless diplomat in broad daylight.

He followed her in and into a blessedly fast elevator that stopped on the third floor. She prattled on the entire time, and he mostly ignored her, scanning her thoughts briefly to assure she had nothing important to say. He let her lead him down the hall to the last room, then snatched the keycard from her grasp as soon as the door was unlocked, but again she seemed determined to insert herself even when he thought he was making it perfectly clear he wanted to be alone.

She walked through the suite of rooms, checking the temperature control, opening the sliding door onto the balcony, browsing the catering menu… He yanked the little datapad out of her hand and tossed it on the nearby table.

“Thank you, Ambassador Adea, that will be all.”

Why was she looking at him like that? Why wasn't she gone?

“You're… certain you don't require anything… else?” She walked towards him in a very… peculiar way… “I assume General Hux told you about the lovely times we've had together when he was here.”

Oh. He understood suddenly, and had to fight to keep his stomach from rebelling at the mental image of Hux being… involved… with this disgusting harpy.

“I have no interest in any of that, I assure you. I have everything I require.”

She looked disappointed, and for a second he thought she might try to touch him again or something, but apparently she did have some self-preservation instincts. He closed his eyes and tried to recall every exquisite detail of Rey's face, the way her dark eyes flashed, the wisps of hair that framed her face, her fine features shimmering with exertion…

“Wait.” He held up his hand, stopping the woman just as she grabbed for the door handle. “There is one thing you can help me with.”

He strode forward, holding his hand over her wide, frightened face. It only took a few moments. He tried to be as gentle as possible, rifling through her memories. His lip curled in disgust. Hux visited here far, far too often. Most of her memories of sexual acts contained the expected things that didn't seem very pleasant for the woman involved, and another person might have felt sorry for her, but he didn't particularly care. There were a few memories that he found very… instructive.

When he was done, he released her, intending to order her back to the embassy, but he had an
idea. Carefully, he spread his fingers and focused on the specific instructions he wanted her to follow.

“**You will return to the embassy, and inform General Hux that you personally ensured my visit was pleasurable. You will tell him our interaction was...especially satisfying. Now, you will leave this room and not come back.**”

He waited as she repeated his instructions in monotone, her eyes faintly glazed, then turned around and exited. He immediately locked the door from the inside, just in case, then sat down at the small desk, a slight smirk playing at the corners of his mouth.

He laid out the lightsaber components, but found it difficult to concentrate, his earlier restless feeling resurfacing now that he had rid himself of the horrible ambassador. He kept seeing images of Rey, of her sharp eyes and battle-flushed cheeks, the soft moans she made when he kissed and touched her, the way she bit her bottom lip, her eyes roving over his body…

He wondered what she would look like if he did some of those things he had discovered from reading the woman's memories. Would she let him? He knew when their minds had met in her dream, she had been just as excited as he was by the images of his fantasies. He had spent the last few days thinking about what would have happened if she hadn't been injured. The idea made him feel overheated, his palms sweating into his gloves, not to mention the most easily distracted part of his anatomy, which stubbornly refused to let him focus.

He looked around the room, trying to ground himself. This was so incredibly… ridiculous. He was the Supreme Leader. He’d had almost two decades' worth of training, in Jedi and Sith techniques. And even if she had been interested, it was a dream. She had rebuffed him gently in their most recent Force bond. He had no reason to expect she would want anything from him other than the previous agreement about help with lightsaber construction.

But he was going to try. He realized he had already decided that. He would help her build a lightsaber, because that was their agreement, but he would not ignore the opportunities meeting in person presented. Rey had said they would be there in three days, that meant sometime tomorrow. If he could not get his mind and body under control, it was going to be a very long night.

And then he felt... something wrong. Very wrong. He had jumped to his feet, without realizing it.

“No! REY. Stop.”
Chapter Summary

The Resistance gets to Mandalore, and Rey has to make some decisions. Hopefully they're the right ones. Sabine Wren doesn't have time for anyone's crap. Rey is tired of cryptic advice from old people.

Chapter Notes

I'm taking great liberties with Sabine here. I've only seen the equivalent of one and a half seasons of Rebels, and I have no idea what she'd be up to 30ish years later. Mandalore's neutrality is based on the struggles of the Clone Wars era Satine Kryze.

I just needed a neutral planet and some interesting characters, and Mandalore had a lot of story opportunities.

The quietly mesmerizing task of piloting had soothed Rey’s nerves immensely. She was still angry at Finn and Poe, even though she understood their logic from a purely tactical perspective. She had lived her whole life alone, now, having finally found a place among people she cared about, who cared for her in return, she felt a clear sense of purpose. Being used as a prop without her knowledge, while everyone else had all the details, made her feel used and resentful.

But how could she justify her feelings of resentment, when she herself was hiding perhaps the most dangerous secret of all? She had wanted desperately to confide in Rose after the other woman had so warmly comforted her, but she had no idea how to explain everything. And even if Rose remained on her side, she knew Poe and Finn wouldn't listen to reason. They would assume she was compromised, that Kylo Ren had taken over her mind, that she was falling to the dark side.

There was simply no way to achieve a favorable outcome by confiding in her friends. But she could not in good conscience continue to travel with the leaders of the Resistance and be included in their sensitive intelligence operations when her mental link to Kylo Ren kept getting stronger.

After spending the flight to Mandalore mulling it over, she had come to the conclusion that there was only one real choice. Poe had said they must all serve the Resistance to the best of their abilities. Her abilities would only get better with training, and there was only one Force user left to learn from.

She had seen the way General Hux interacted with Kylo Ren. The First Order was clearly facing a divide in leadership, a weakness that could be exploited with cleverness and patience. The Resistance could go on passing out matches without her. She was going to become a match.

Rey made sure she was the last to leave the Falcon when they landed, walking slowly through the ship with her hand trailing along the walls. This place had become her home for the last couple of months. She refused to allow herself to be morbid. She would see the Millennium Falcon again. She would see her friends again. But she was afraid of the thing that had awoken inside her.
The thing that nearly killed someone. Would have if... If he hadn’t stopped her. But he had. Ben had seen her about to step into the dark side... And he stopped her. Rey’s mind was made up. She could not continue to put her friends and their cause at risk. As soon as the memorial service was over, she would go back to Ben. To Kylo Ren. She did not relish the idea, it granted him far too much power and authority, and she knew he would make her pay for refusing him the first time. But she knew, now, that he cared enough to not try and sway her down his path, even if he was still arrogant and aggressive.

She was not a sheltered Core-dweller. She had survived on her own on Jakku for most of her life. Eventually, he would get over himself, and maybe it wouldn’t be so bad. She held her more... distracting... thoughts in check. She told herself if it happened, she would deal with it then. If. She did not examine the small part of her that warmed up and brightened at the notion, and she forced the dream cave into the back of her mind and locked it down tightly.

Rey collected the broken lightsaber and carefully tucked the sacred Jedi texts into her satchel. She kissed her little black porg goodbye, and gathered her staff. Her friends were waiting, along with a contingent of armored guards and a violet-haired woman in brilliantly-customized armor, who appeared quite athletic despite her age. Rose was shaking her hand and babbling, her face flush with anxiety. The woman was inspecting the hidden insignia on the young woman's ring, but she looked up sharply as Rey joined them.

“Ah, the famous Rey, of Jakku.” She held out her hand and Rey shook it firmly, feeling the other woman’s strong grasp. “So, tell me, are you ready to cross blades with me?”

“Whoa, whoa. Can we get through the memorial service first?”

Poe interrupted, saving Rey from having to make up and answer.

“I guess you're Sabine, then?” She addressed the woman.

“I am. But forgive me, General Dameron is right. Please come inside, all of you. There's been a… complication we need to address.”

“What ‘complication’?” Finn demanded.

The ruler of Mandalore looked around, then pitched her voice somewhat softer.

“It seems the Supreme Leader has chosen to pay us a visit.”

Poe and Finn reacted precisely as Rey had feared. She was quite grateful that Chewie and Sabine’s guards intervened before they killed each other, but she did not miss the Mandalorian woman’s quick glance in her direction. It was such a sudden development, dropped so casually, she had not been able to still the briefest moment of heat flooding her cheeks. And she was absolutely certain Sabine Wren had seen it.

Rey had no idea what to do. She was not naturally duplicitous, but given her friends’ reactions and Wren’s subtle scrutiny, her options were limited. Stay and face what she knew would be a losing battle, or leave now and make a clean break? If she ran, she would lose the opportunity to explain herself, and even if they didn’t believe it, she felt she at least owed them that much. She had planned to leave a note, as cowardly as it was, so maybe it was better this way. She twisted the blue-stoned ring on her finger, and stepped forward, addressing Sabine.

“Did he bring any other forces? Ground troops or star fighters or anything like that?”

The older woman turned to her guard captain, who shook his head.
“Just his personal shuttle. Mandalore has remained neutral since we threw off the shackles of the Empire. No starfighters or unauthorized military forces are permitted past the planetary blockade,” Sabine explained.

Rey nodded. She realized Finn and Poe were staring at them in confusion. She took a deep breath.

“Did it occur to you that maybe he just wants to say goodbye to his mother?”

Oh, the glaring was even worse than she expected. And the yelling. Even Chewie yelled at her. And she did not like the speculative look from Sabine, either.

Poe, always quick on the uptake, seemed to have sensed the subtle undercurrent of mistrust, and his expression turned uncomfortably dark when he looked at Rey. She bowed her head in defeat.

“I… I’ll just… take a walk,” she murmured, looking around for somewhere to wait while the Resistance leaders discussed the details of Leia’s memorial service without their potential… traitor.

“Rey, wait,” she heard Finn start to come after her.

Kind, loyal Finn, unwilling to believe that his first real friend was an enemy sympathizer. She stopped, facing away so he couldn’t see the tears forming.

“I don’t understand. You saw him kill his own father! The man is evil. I know your parents abandoned you, but… Kylo Ren abandoned his parents.”


“Rey…”

“How do you know that?” Poe demanded coolly.

“Luke told me. That’s why he fled and went into hiding. He knew what he’d done and couldn’t face it.”

“Look, I don’t care what happened to turn him to the dark side,” Finn snapped heatedly. “He’s evil now. He killed his father in cold blood. You saw it. Then he almost killed me. He doesn’t have any room in his heart for anything but murder and rage.”

Rey turned around slowly. She hadn’t wanted to do this now. If they could have just let it be… He came alone, with no troops and no firepower. He had kept his end of the bargain.

“He saved my life. On the Supremacy, Snoke wanted him to kill me and he… He killed Snoke.” Might as well tell them the whole truth. "We're linked through the Force. He... we've talked a few times. I know what it sounds like, but he is the way he is for a lot of reasons. He's not just evil!”

Rose had come up to touch Finn’s arm. Rey expected her eyes to be cold and angry like the others, but they were surprisingly warm.

“You told him to come here,” she intuited.

Rey’s eyes closed, loosening fresh tears to drop down her face. Rose nodded to herself. She looked up into Finn’s clouded expression and whispered something. Finn’s shoulders dropped. He
shook his head at Rey, confused, unhappy, but no longer angry.

“You’re insane. No one could love that monster.” He stared at Rey with wide eyes. “Please tell me that’s not true. You don’t love Kylo Ren.”

Rey froze. She was not prepared for this at all. What had Rose said to give Finn that idea? Was she in love with him? She took too long to answer, giving herself away without even speaking.

Finn and Poe were looking at her with dawning horror. Her fists clenched. Sabine Wren turned her sharp gaze on her and nodded in approval.

“Now that’s courage,” she announced to her guards in a blaise tone.

“That’s not a great idea,” she added, as Poe reached for his blaster. She and her guards had already drawn theirs. “This is a neutral planet, remember? As far as I’m aware, Rey hasn’t violated any of our laws. Sorry, General. I’m going to have to ask you to put away your weapon or I will have it confiscated.”

He looked from Rey to the Mandalorians and back, then slowly let go and held his hands up. His eyes glittered murderously.

“Fine. Run back to your true master. Seems like I was right to keep our plans hidden.”

He stalked away in the direction of the city, without sparing a look back. BB-8 hesitated, giving Rey a sad warbling whistle before rolling after him. Rey felt as if the ground were crumbling from beneath her feet. How? How had this Mandalorian woman put together the pieces and drawn the correct conclusion within less than five minutes of meeting her?

To her surprise, Rose rushed over and wrapped her arms around her.

“Please keep yourself safe,” she whispered into Rey’s shoulder.

“I’m trying to keep us all safe,” she sighed.

“I know.” Rose took her hand. She slipped off the metal ring with the concealed rebel insignia she wore and put it in Rey’s hand with a soft laugh. “I keep giving these away, maybe Sabine can help me make more.”

Rey examined it carefully, then hugged her again.

“What did you say to Finn?” She whispered.

“We won’t win by fighting those we hate. We’ll win by saving those we love. It’s something I said to him on Crait.”

"After you nearly killed yourself saving him?"

"Yeah, love makes you do crazy things, I guess."

She squeezed Rey’s hand around the ring, meeting her eyes with tears of her own. Rey looked down at the hand wrapped around hers, and slid Leia’s ring from her finger. With a determined stare, she put it in Rose’s.

“Don’t give it away.”

“I can’t keep this, Rey…”
Rey leaned in quickly, before she could protest more.

“Give it back to me when we see each other again, then. He can't keep me forever.”

Her eyes suddenly filled with concern and sorrow, Rose hugged her tightly, shaking her head.

“You don't belong to him. He can't just… Oh, Rey!” She sniffled and Rey slowly pulled back from the other woman’s embrace, brushing away tears of her own. “What if I never see you again?”

“You will. I know we will.”

Finn had cautiously taken a few steps closer, but remained guarded, slipping his arm around Rose as she went to stand beside him.

“You’re insane.” Rey sniffed and laughed softly. “You said that already.”

“I feel like it needs repeating.” There was a trace of a smile in his eyes when he met hers. “I remember the last time we had this conversation, you were begging me to stay.”

“I can’t stay, Finn. I’m sorry. I know Poe’s angry, but he’s right. I was going to leave anyway. I can’t explain it, but… this… connection with him. With Kylo Ren. He's in my dreams now. For some reason, the Force is drawing us together and I… I can’t put you at risk anymore.” Finn tried to protest, but she just shook her head sadly. “He can see where I am. What's around me. It’s too dangerous.”

“That doesn't mean you have to offer yourself up like a sacrifice.”

He looked disgusted, and she couldn't blame him. Sighing, Rey shook her head.

“I… I'm not. It's not… like that. It goes both ways.”

“Right, okay. I'll file that under things I don’t want to know.”

Finally out of things to say, he hugged her tightly. Rose squeezed her hand, and Chewie came over to hug her too. He had nothing judgmental to say, only warning her to be careful.

“**Kylo Ren isn't the only danger in the First Order.**”

“I know. Please believe me. It's not a spur of the moment decision.”

The Wookie warbled in sympathy. Taking a deep breath, Rey turned away from her friends and addressed Sabine.

“Where is he?”

To her surprise, the Mandalorian leader walked most of the way with her. Rey was annoyed. She was nervous and hurt and angry and she really wanted to take her time walking to try and gather herself. She felt like pieces of her were floating in the vacuum of space, each one slipping further away as she reached for it. Surprisingly, Sabine let her walk in silence for a long while, only speaking to give directions. Occasionally she would point out some small landmark or park.

She did not want to like this woman. She had forced a confrontation when Rey was completely unprepared. She had been planning to slip away in the night, after the memorial, leaving a simple note, not confront everyone all at once and have them think she was a traitor. Poe’s
response still stung, although she understood. She was glad she’d had the chance to hug Finn and Chewie though. And exchange rings with Rose. She twisted the thick metal ring on her finger thoughtfully.

“Come into this park.”

The older woman directed suddenly, gesturing to a small forested space hidden between two tall gray buildings. There was a statue in the middle of a delicate-featured woman with proud eyes, wearing an elaborate headdress. Sabine sat down on one of the benches and Rey sat next to her. She looked to see if the statue had some kind of sign, but it was in a language she couldn’t read.

There was something very sad and regal about the woman, and Rey had the strangest feeling of guilt looking at her.

“Who was she?”

“A past ruler, who fought peacefully for decades to maintain our freedom during the Clone Wars.” She glanced at Rey out of the corner of her eye. “They say she had a very famous Jedi as her lover.”

“Jedi are celibate,” Rey replied almost automatically.

“If you say so,” the woman said with a shrug. “Anyway, she died in his arms. One of his enemies, a Sith, targeted her because of their affection.”

Rey turned from studying the statue to the current Mandalorian ruler.

“Is there something you want to say to me?”

Sabine shrugged.

“Kylo Ren has a lot of enemies.”

“I see.”

She did see. She had just come to that conclusion as they were walking. She tried to gather her courage, but the idea of going back to the First Order with him was… No. No, I am not doing that. There must be other options.

“I was going to leave tomorrow, you know. After the ceremony.”

“Hmm. Do you think he will be there? At his mother’s memorial?”

Suddenly, Rey understood.

“You don’t care if Kylo Ren is there. You don’t want me to be there.”

“Does he care about you?”

Rey thought about it for a while. Please… Rey… She could still see the pleading in his eyes as he held his hand out to her.

“He came. Alone.”

Sabine nodded, rising to her feet.
“It’s the building next door. Third floor at the end of the hall. There’s a balcony.” She nodded respectfully to Rey. “May the Force be with you.”

Rey stayed sitting on the park bench, watching the sunset.

“I know you’re there.”

She had felt the ghostly presence just before Sabine left. The blue-outlined form of Ben Kenobi emerged soundlessly from behind the trees. He stood looking at the statue silently for a long time.

“Ah, Satine.”

“She died in your arms?” Rey guessed, her voice soft. “Not very creative with names on Mandalore, are they?”

A quick smile crossed his face, but his eyes remained sad.

“My greatest love and my greatest regret.” He sat down next to her.

“The books say Jedi should refrain from attachment,” she glanced up at the statue again. “She was beautiful.”

“Oh yes. And proud, and stubborn and…” He turned to the living woman sitting next to him with a sparkle of amusement in his eyes. “A bit like you, actually.”

She regarded him quietly, tired of all these old people offering advice in the most cryptic manner possible. But her dark eyes were thoughtful.

“You know,” he said eventually, “love is powerful by itself. I’m not sure what the galaxy will do with two powerful Force users in love. Maybe that elusive concept of Balance will reveal itself after all these years.”

“I didn’t say I was in love with him,” she insisted sharply.

He tilted his head, looking up at the statue.

“I never said it, either. I certainly wish I had.”

Rey stood suddenly, her mind made up. Alright, fine. The least I can do is not repeat the mistakes of others. Until now, she had been keeping her mind on lockdown, but she could feel him losing his patience, his searing anticipation, the terrifying need that threatened to overwhelm her. She had shut off her own emotions as much as possible, uncertain what she wanted from him, afraid to lose control. She could not sit still any longer.

“Ask Sabine Wren about Agent Fulcrum,” Kenobi called as she turned to go. “There are other paths than the Sith and the Jedi.”
Finally Alone ...

Chapter Summary

A-n-n-n-n-n-n-n-n-n now, the main attraction. Lots of it. Smut all the way down... For a few chapters, at least. It's long, but I didn't want to break it up any further. Chapters from here on out are probably going to be longer, so... You're welcome.

Chapter Notes

FYI, I give lots of warnings. I'd rather error on the side of too much than not enough. It may ruin the suspense, and I apologize in advance if that happens, but I try to keep it vague.
With that said -

WARNING: EXPLICIT CONTENT AHEAD. TRIGGERS: ORAL, ROUGH SEX, SOME MINOR BLEEDING. DON'T YELL AT ME, I MARKED THIS SERIES EXPLICIT FOR A REASON.

As soon as he felt her presence on the planet, he had fallen out of his mediation. Nothing he did would help him focus. He could sense her so very nearby, and it took every ounce of self-control he had not to go and find her. There was something darkening her usually bright energy, some kind of profound sadness. He could tell when she was crying. His fists clenched. If those criminals had hurt her... No. He couldn't fight her battles, and he was sure she would not let him.

She was coming to him, he could sense the same uneasy excitement that had been torturing him tightly held in check by the thinnest thread of willpower. The solid strength of her mind never ceased to amaze him. He knew she could sense him, too, but somehow she was holding herself back.

He very nearly broke something when she stopped so very close, in the little park just outside his balcony. If it had been broad daylight, he might have been able to see her, but the park was already draped in the shadow of the nearby buildings under the setting sun. Still, he went out onto the little balcony and waited.

Finally, finally, he sensed her... He tried to keep his excitement from flowing through their link, but he had been poorly taught to handle his emotions. He watched her scale a tree in the park, then swing up to the third story terrace, admiring how easily her lithe form moved even in the dark.

He thought he would have to hold himself back. That she would be frightened by the ferocity of his desire. She didn’t even speak. She tossed her staff and her satchel to the ground, and shrugged out of her cloak. There was, perhaps, a single second where his eyes roamed over her body, before she shoved him against the wall. One hand grasped his hair, the other twined around his neck, her lovely soft lips covering every area of his skin she could get to before she fiercely claimed his mouth.
He reached out to her mind and she simply let go, and he could feel… *everything*. Her desire, her need, her pleasure at being with him finally, in person where they could do whatever they wanted without worrying about being dragged apart… *Wait, whatever they wanted?*

*YES.*

He had to practically pry her off of him, holding her firmly away where he could see her eyes. Her pupils were dilated, her face already flushed. They both struggled to catch their breath. He caressed the side of her head gently, his gloved fingers gliding over the top of her ear. She closed her eyes and leaned into his caress like some kind of feline creature.

“Rey. Rey, look at me.”

She did. He held her eyes until he felt the intense emotion cool to a simmer. She blinked slowly and smiled at him, her sharp features open and warm.

“I’m looking.” There was so much in her eyes, even beyond desire and hunger, there was a deep, solid feeling of… *love? She loved him?*

“Yes,” she whispered.

He would have accused her of lying, but it was impossible to lie when her mind was so open. There was something about it, some kind of reverence that followed her feeling of love. Her searched her mind, gently, only where she would let him, and he read her entire day’s worth of pain. The shock and betrayal in the eyes of her friends. The girl with the kind eyes exchanging rings with her. The long walk with the Mandalorian ruler, and her suggestion that Kylo Ren had enemies nearby who would be happy to hurt her if they could get to him. That somehow, someone was aware of their link.

Her guilt at putting her friends - the only family she’d ever known - in danger. And the sharp ache when she thought she might never see any of them again. The appearance of his ghostly namesake, and her conviction to learn from the mistakes of the past. And beyond all of that…

“How now you want to join me? After your so-called friends turned their backs on you?”

It was pointlessly cruel, but he didn’t really know how to be kind. If she wanted training, he would teach her, but she had to understand, he would not be a gentle master. He held her face in his hands and opened his mind so she could see the kind of training Snoke put him through. Hours and hours of excruciating pain, to increase his tolerance to physical wounds. Sleep deprivation to hone his mental tolerance. The constant degradation and humiliations.

He felt her body shaking and he realized she was crying. Ren hesitated. How someone could be as strong of spirit and cry so much was a mystery to him. Feelings didn’t seem to be a distraction for Rey. She simply embraced them and let them pass over her, like swimming under a waterfall or into an ocean wave.

“Shhh,” He pulled her into an embrace and pressed his lips against the top of her head. "I'm not going to do that, I just wanted you to see."

Her hair still smelled faintly of the lavender shampoo from Cloud City, and he breathed it in with his eyes closed. She was still sobbing, and he leaned back so he could see her face again.

“All that pain…” she whispered.

She was looking at him with such open horror, he didn’t even realize she was crying for him.
He had shown her the most terrifyingly cruel training he could imagine, and she had gone right past fear for herself into genuine sympathy for him. He could see it in her wet, golden-brown eyes, blinking at him as she tried to hold back tears.

“It doesn’t matter. It's over now.”

He brushed her tears away with his thumbs and pressed his lips to hers. There was plenty of time to talk later. All he wanted now was to touch her, to feel her sweet, soft mouth open for him, her hands clutching his hair, her moans as he dragged his lips over her neck. He pushed her hair aside to taste her neck and shoulder, and she shivered slightly, making a displeased hum.

He stopped, and suddenly she grabbed one of his hands, holding his wrist while she used her teeth to rip off his glove. Her dark eyes held his the entire time, and she angrily tossed it off the balcony edge without looking. Stunned and enthralled, he let her do the same with the other. It was quite possibly the most erotic thing he’d ever seen in his life. He stood still as her wild eyes held him.

“I don’t ever want to see those things again.”

He just nodded in response. He felt a like a child given a gift just a bit too advanced. He had seen plenty of holos, and he had gathered some inspiration from the mind of the ambassador, but actually having Rey do things to him - even ripping his gloves away - was something he wasn’t entirely prepared for. She pushed him through the door, shutting it firmly behind them with a quick movement of the Force.

Inside, she was momentarily distracted by the fine trappings of the elite hotel. The balcony opened off of a small room with a fireplace, a couch and a few small chairs. Behind was the bedroom, which Rey found quickly enough after exclaiming over the fireplace. He watched her move through the bedroom to the door on the side, waiting.

“There's a bathtub in here! And this mirror is huge, how…”

She came back to find him leaning against the doorway to the bedroom, looking at her with a dark, predatory gleam. She started to speak, but was cut off as he raised his hand, finally catching her off guard and paralyzing her, as he had the very first time he encountered her. It was more difficult this time, she fought against him, her eyes rolling wildly as her chest heaved with the effort to push against him.

“Don't struggle,” he said softly, walking in a lazy circle around her.

He had a brief thought that it might be more fun if she did struggle, but he wanted it to be gentle, at least the first time. Her eyes followed him until he stopped directly behind her, where she couldn't see him, and gathered her dark hair in his hand. He kissed the back of her neck, his free hand resting lightly on her shoulder.

“I won't hurt you. I just need you to hold still.”

He let go of her hair and continued kissing and nibbling the side of her neck, gently and slowly. He wanted to take his time, to taste her body everywhere, but everything she did to him was so intense. She was still frightened, he could feel it, but he continued, determined to prove his intentions.

He nibbled her earlobe and kissed all the way down her arm, unraveling the scrap of fabric wrapped around it to nip at her wrist, and she slowly stopped fighting. He knew she would, it would be impossible for even a trained Force adept to focus with the intense sensations he could feel
coming from her, and her heart was pounding. He moved in front of her again and looked into her frightened but excited eyes.

“I've never done this before,” he admitted. “You move too fast.”

Understanding dawned on her face, and he let her go. Really, it was too difficult for him to focus either, but he didn't tell her that. It was a minor victory, but he wanted it. Now he opened his mind again, letting her feel what she did to him. Her eyes roamed over him, as she carefully tested her released muscles.

“Am I allowed to touch you at all?” She breathed.

With their minds open, he could see what she wanted. He shook his head, and her eyes flashed with annoyance, but he could still feel some… excitement. He thought of the cave, focusing on the moment when he had shared his thoughts and she had responded so favorably, despite her attempts to hide it. He could see the same response now.

He caressed the side of her neck, halfway encircling it with his thumb, and applied the slightest pressure. She gasped, her eyes closing for a brief moment. Her hands twitched and he could feel her trying to control her breath, squeezing her hands into fists and opening them slowly.

He smiled slightly.

“Is that too difficult for you?”

“It might be.” She stared at him defiantly.

Gods, he might come undone from the heat in her eyes alone. He brushed her hair from her cheek and settled both hands lightly on her shoulders, his thumbs almost, but not quite around her neck. Her eyes never left his, and he could feel her pulse pounding beneath his hands. He had to break away from her searing gaze, so he kissed her again. He had not intended it to be so forceful, but he felt her surge of pleasure as their lips touched, and he forced his tongue into her mouth even though she more than willingly opened for him.

It was almost impossible to separate her emotions from his anymore, and he didn't see any reason to keep trying. Roughly, because he knew it would arouse her, he slid his hands under the wide shoulder straps of her simple clothes and pulled them down, exposing more skin that he had to taste. He pressed hurried, hungry kisses everywhere he could reach, his lips gently brushing over each and every tiny scar, as she practically purred, her shoulders writhing beneath him.

He pushed her tunic down as far as he could, but it wasn't enough, he needed more of her, and impatiently he pulled at the fabric until it tore.

“Ben!”

Irritation flared briefly in her mind and he growled in response, his hands roughly exploring her body. He felt it melt away when he took her bare nipples into his mouth one at a time, and he stripped away the remaining bits of her clothing, leaving her upper body gloriously bare.

He pulled away just to look at her. The pale skin of her breasts and lower body contrasted against her tanned arms and the dark waves of hair falling down her back. The small scars over her shoulders were interspersed with a dusting of the same light freckles she had on her cheeks. Her face was flushed and her eyes wide, exactly as she looked in the midst of battle. She was absolutely exquisite, and she wanted him.
Her eyes caught his, and he felt her impatient, consuming need. To kiss and caress as he had done, to see and feel his bare skin against hers. As quickly as possible, he shed his own clothing, stripping to the waist as she watched, her bottom lip caught between her teeth. He pulled her against him, her bare breasts pressed against his skin, and he felt her arms come around him. She had broken his rules, and there would be consequences, but he desperately needed to kiss her again, to press his face into her neck and run his hands over the bare skin of her back. He felt her fingers winding in his hair tightly as she loved to do, and it was nearly overwhelming.

“Rey,” he warned.

Her hands froze and she disengaged reluctantly.

“Sorry. I’ll try again.”

She stayed still, only moving at his direction, while he continued to undress her completely. But her eyes grew wide as he knelt on the floor in front of her. Their minds were still open, and she could see clearly what he intended to do. She closed her eyes and whispered his name again.

“Please. Please let me touch you,” she begged.

He considered it, as he gently prodded her legs apart. He lifted her right leg and pulled it over his shoulder, forcing her to balance against him. It took her some effort without touching him, but she managed to adjust herself correctly. He breathed in her scent as she shifted her weight, closing his eyes. He wanted to see the reaction on her face, in her fierce eyes. He wanted her to tangle her strong fingers in his hair, but he was enjoying this game.

He trailed kisses down her thigh, enjoying her soft, frustrated moans. He felt her digging her nails into her palms. Finally, something shifted in her mind, and the muscles in her leg tightened over him, pulling him closer to her body. She buried her hands in his hair and roughly drew his face to her sex. When he reached out, intending to hold her motionless again, he was met with solid resistance.

“No, I’m done with that game.”

He looked up and met her stubborn gaze. And held her eyes while he gently slipped a finger between her legs, exploring her body carefully. She trembled slightly, but kept her gaze on him. He did it again, gently pulling his fingers through her wet, slick folds, stopping when he felt her hold on his hair tighten. He locked his arm around her hip, keeping her balanced while he spread her apart with his free hand, brushing his tongue lightly against that sensitive spot. Her whole body twitched, and he reached into her mind to see…

Yes. There. Please.

Oh, this was going to be easy. He held his touch on her mind as he teased her with soft flicks of his tongue, feeling the fire build inside her. She moaned beautifully, her voice ragged and desperate. She said his name over and over again as he lengthened his strokes, her body convulsing, and he didn't mind that she called him Ben. Their minds were so linked now, he could feel her coming close to the edge, panting and moaning, her strong fingers clutching his hair hard enough to hurt.

He pushed her apart as far as he could, to put his whole mouth over her swollen little nub. He hadn't expected to enjoy this so much, but sensing the release building inside of her, the golden glow of her pleasure filling his mind… her taste, her smell, knowing he could draw this moaning, sobbing abandon out of the fearless, independent scavenger girl… it was a new kind of power, and it thrilled him.
He felt her freeze suddenly, her sex throbbing. He pressed his tongue against her eagerly, caressing with quick, strong strokes. A rush of intense, searing joy flooded through his mind in waves, and an excess of fluid reached his tongue. Her balance faltered, and he steadied her with both arms, slowly swiping his tongue over her a few more times, until the aftershocks faded, savoring her taste.

He wrapped his arms around her waist and pressed his head against her flat stomach while she stroked and smoothed his hair. He realized she was shaking with the effort of staying on her feet, and he quickly gathered her up and brought her to his bed. She looked up at him, her dark eyes full of wonder and affection, caressing his cheek as he lay down facing her.

“I don't know what to say,” she murmured, finding his hand and threading her fingers through his.

“I love you. Rey.”

He kept his eyes on hers, though as soon as he said it, he wanted to look away, afraid to face her response. She smiled in that easy way that made her eyes bright.

“It's ridiculous and insane, isn't it? But I'm not afraid.”

He dragged her into his arms and kissed her. He thought, belatedly, that she might be hesitant after what he'd just done, but it didn't seem to bother her. She looked down at their joined hands, at the ring on her first finger, and sighed.

“What are we going to do now?”

“Now?”

He raised his eyebrows, and she rolled her eyes.

“No, not right now. I mean, I am not going to be a part of the First Order. I can't go back to the Resistance, but I will always be on their side.”

Oh, she was infuriating. He rolled onto his back and closed his eyes. What was it going to take to get this woman to be by his side? And he had to have her now, she came back and he wasn't letting her go again. The Resistance “leader” turned his back on her, considered her a traitor, but she still supported them? What about joining him?

“I can see your thoughts, you know,” she admonished quietly.

He turned to look at her, his eyes wide and angry. She sighed.

“Ben.”

“That's not my name!”

“Really? Whose head was between my legs then? Because I think I said it a lot!”

Swiftly, he rolled on top of her, grabbing her hands and holding them down with his fingers laced through hers. He leaned over to breathe into her ear.

“You will learn my name.” he hissed. “By the time the night is over, you are going to be screaming it so loudly, it will be as if Ben Solo never existed.”

“Are we back to this now? Well, you're certainly welcome to try.”
Those eyes. He wasn’t accustomed to having people talk back to him. Her stalwart refusal to be intimidated by him was maddening. He hesitated, his eyes roving up and down her naked body while she watched him impassively, waiting.

With a growl, he used his knee to force her legs apart, but she just sighed with pleasure and made room for him, shifting her hips to press against him. He knew she could feel his hardness through his pants, and her dark eyes glittered as she settled her naked body around him.

“Are you ever going to take those off? I’ve already seen this part, remember?”

Despite him pinning her hands down, she managed to lean up far enough press kisses against his neck and chest, and his muscles clenched as he felt himself straining against the fabric of his clothing. He didn't want to give in to her, didn't want her to know just how badly he wanted this, but he could tell by the way she gazed at him that he had already lost this battle.

He cursed and got up to finish undressing, sitting on the edge of the bed to unlace his boots. He sensed her tense up suddenly and start to move.

“Wait. I left my things outside.”

“So?”

“I have… patches. You know, to prevent-”

Oh, that. He stood up.

“I'll get them.” He glared as she began to protest. “No, no, you are not leaving this bed.”

Rey pulled her knees up to her chest, feeling a little exposed on the strange bed. She wasn’t overly modest, she hadn’t had the luxury of privacy for most of her life, but while she had thought about what might happen when she and Ben… Kylo Ren… were alone together, she had not exactly pictured a room like this. Even Cloud City was not this fine, and until now it was the finest bed she’d ever slept in.

The sheets were made of some impossibly soft fabric she thought might be silk, although she couldn't imagine how much an entire sheet made of silk would cost. Especially one the size of this bed. It was a solid, dark wood frame, probably weighed as much as a starfighter, and the bedroom could easily have fit two of them. Instead there was a matching desk, full of a lot of communication devices, some even she barely recognized, a wide display monitor, and a carefully-organized selection of light weapon components. So he does plan to help me.

She wondered if there was even a point, now. She suspected Sabine Wren would still be willing to grant her a boon if she battled the Mandalorian and won, but what would she ask for? Poe made it pretty clear he didn't want her help anyway. She felt a sudden, fresh batch of tears rising, and tried to suppress them before -

“Rey?”

He tossed her staff and cloak over the chair beside his desk and came to sit on the edge of the bed, holding out her satchel. She took it, rummaging for Pashi's parting gift, trying to compose herself without meeting his eyes. He caught her hands as she inspected the small square, suddenly
wishing she had actually let Rose explain.

“It goes on your hip,” he said, sensing her confusion. “My mother used them. Here, let me.”

She sat back and watched as he pressed and held the little square against her bare skin.

“They gave us shots, on Jakku. It was a quarter ration every month.”

His eyes narrowed.

“You had to pay for birth control with your food? Starve, or have a kid so you can both starve? That's particularly cruel.”

“You didn't have to keep it. Some people sold their kids. You know. For drinking money.”

She didn't mean to sound so pathetic, and she wondered why she'd even brought it up. What did she expect him to do? Comfort her?

“Why do you want to hold onto things that hurt you? You're not a Sith, there's no power in it for you.”

He looked over at her, his eyes angry. She shrugged.

“I don't know.” She took a deep breath and tried to find her center, the white light that burned away her emotions. He was like a feral animal. Say or do the wrong thing and he wouldn't hesitate to bite. “Will you help me... let go?”

He stared at her, his eyes roaming over her body with a fierce possessiveness that should have frightened her, but she remained still, calm. She knew what he was. She had chosen to come back to him anyway. She watched him finish undressing, and felt her whole body burn as he laid down beside her.

Desire, she could let herself feel that. And with him so close, it was easy to let it drown out anything else. He laid his hand against her cheek, his dark, expressive eyes uncertain, but she could feel his need through their link. He was just waiting to make sure he had her full attention. His mind brushed hers and she let him in, knowing he would be able to read everything - the sadness she sought to bury, her cold assessment of him and her acceptance of it - and her desperate need to lose herself, to drown her pain in desire and pleasure, and love.

“Yes,” he answered finally, moving on top of her.

He bent to kiss her, beginning with soft, slow kisses, but building rapidly to a heated exchange of tongues and sharp bites. He touched her thigh and she opened her legs, reaching down to wrap her warm hand around his hardness and guide him. She watched his eyes grow wide as soon as he felt her hand surround him, and she tentatively reached out, wanting to know...

His mind was nearly on fire. She gasped as he let her in, and she closed her eyes unintentionally, just trying to breathe under the searing rush of pleasure. She hardly knew what she was doing as she fit him against her opening, caught up entirely by how intensely he felt.

He had said he loved her, and she knew he wasn't lying, but she was shocked at the strength of it, at his perfect, pure clarity, and how he had spent almost the entire day thinking about her, imagining - hoping - that she would let him touch her. And now they were about to join together, it was almost painful.
No, that really did hurt. Why did - She opened her eyes at the same time he did, and her free hand clenched tightly on his hip.

“Don't you dare!”

“Rey-”

“It's supposed to, you idiot.”

She shifted slightly, trying to find a better angle, easing her body around him. He gasped and his hips moved, but he stopped himself. She reached up and tightened her fingers in his hair.

“You are Kylo Ren. You have killed in cold blood, hurt, tortured and destroyed. Kylo Ren takes what he wants, and he doesn't care if he has to hurt someone to do it. Do you hear me?”

He looked down into her dark, steeled gaze and she watched as he processed her words. His eyes hardened, and when he moved again, it was not gentle. He ignored her when she hissed in pain, driving into her deeper, forcing her body to accommodate his. But he left their minds joined, gifting her his pleasure and sharing her pain, an exquisite melody.

And she discovered there was something hypnotic in the pain, some part of her savored it, a test of her endurance. When he finally buried his full length within her, he allowed her a mere moment to catch her breath, to brace herself. She wrapped her arms around his neck and pulled him closer, sinking her teeth into the flesh of his shoulder, a wordless warning that she could be rough, too.

He growled her name, setting a fast, ruthless rhythm while she dug her teeth and fingernails into his pale skin until she tasted blood under her tongue. He let her feel what he felt, drawing her in, allowing her to see his thoughts about her. He knew the strength of her mind and will, and her impossible power in the Force, but he had not expected her to have this kind of physical endurance.

He was not just in love with her, he was in awe. He had thought his life was difficult. He thought he knew loneliness and pain and fear. Nothing, nothing about his existence even compared to what she had suffered, and the brightness of her soul never faltered. And now she was here, in his bed, willingly letting him hurt her body, because she wanted to be with him.

All of his thoughts of affection, combined with the physical sensation she could feel coursing through his body, filled her with warmth, shielding her until her body relaxed and his movement inside of her became more pleasant. She felt his pace quicken and she wrapped her legs around him, closing her eyes and holding onto him with all the strength she had left. She felt the sudden wave of pure bliss crash through him as he spent himself inside her, moaning her name and shuddering slowly to a halt.

He buried his face in her neck as she held him, stroking his hair and feeling his body tremble with faint, fleeting spasms as his pulse slowed and he caught his breath.

“Rey,” he dragged himself up to look her in the eye. “I'm...sorry.”

She sighed and rolled her eyes.

“No, you're not. You just want me to tell you it's okay.”

“Is it?”

He kept looking at her, his eyes begging for absolution. Gently, but determined, she disengaged herself, grimacing as their bodies slid apart. She climbed out from under his arm and sat on the edge
of the bed, against his protests.

“Did I do something to make you think it isn't?”

“No, but, I-

He suddenly uttered a string of very creative curses. Han Solo would have been proud, she thought. She had assumed she wouldn't bleed, given how athletic and grueling her lifestyle had always been, but they hadn't exactly been gentle.

“I'm not dying, I promise. Will you please just go and get me a towel?”

She reached down, feeling the fluid between her legs, and examined the scarlet hue on her fingers. *It's a shame about the sheets, though.* He looked at her with wide eyes and hurried away, moving around behind her, and she heard the brief sound of a water basin being filled.

He came around to her, offering a warm wet towel and another dry one, and she scrunched her face in disgust.

“Who uses white towels?”

“You're bleeding, does it really matter? Please let me see. Rey.”

She sighed again.

“I'm fine. It's supposed to bleed the first time. How old are you, anyway?”

He switched on a light on a nearby table, kneeling beside her and watching worriedly as she gently cleaned herself up. It was sore, but not terrible. She'd had worse injuries tripping over boulders in the desert.

“I was your first?”

She really wanted to slap the arrogant smile off his face. He shifted uncomfortably under her annoyed stare.

“I'm twenty-nine. Why?”

“You really should know these things at your age.”

She chose to ignore the age difference, she might have cared at one point, but it was a little too late now. She did the best she could with the towels, but she couldn't resist the excuse.

“Is it okay if I take a bath?”

“Yes, of course.”

He clearly meant to come in with her, but she made sure she was fast enough to shut and lock the door, leaning against it and closing her eyes.

“Rey! You know I can just cut through this door!”

“I'd advise against it. We've already ruined two towels and the sheets. Probably the bed too.”

She laughed quietly to herself as she calmly examined the water taps. This place wasn't as complicated as Cloud City, only the water was automated. There was plenty of soap to choose from,
but at least it was the traditional kind of soft waxy bar she was used to. She found a purple one that smelled similar to the liquid stuff he'd chosen for her, wondering if it was something he liked.

And then she relaxed and listened to Kylo Ren trying to cope with getting a servant to change the bed sheets, insisting that he hadn't been attacked, or attacked anyone himself, and talk them out of contacting the authorities, while she let the hot water soothe her aching body.

There was a lot of movement outside, and she might have been impressed at his ability to halt his rage and have things done without threatening anyone, but she was pretty sure he just used the Force to make them do what he wanted. And in between, he would not stop apologizing and begging her to let him in. Which she refused to do, mostly because she was comfortable and relaxed, but partly because his drama annoyed her.

*I'm sorry, too. I'm sorry I made you be cruel when you wanted to be gentle. And I'm sorry I'm going to do it again. Because the only way to bring back Ben Solo is to make you hate Kylo Ren so much, you kill him yourself.*
What's better than sex? Food and sex, obviously!

He won her over with the smell of food. It was a surprisingly clever ploy, apparently he knew
her better than she thought. Of course he does, he's been in my mind. A lot.

She tried to suppress an uncharacteristic giggle, wrapping herself in a bathrobe she fully
intended to steal when they left, and sneaking out the door. He was sitting on the floor with a plate
full of some kind of roasted meat sandwiches, weapon components spread out in front of him. It was
such a strange sight, she tried to be as silent as possible, observing him unnoticed. His head was bent
over a piece of metal in his lap, dark hair still a mess from her hands, a cup of some hot liquid
forgotten in his hand. In the cold glow of moonlight pouring through the high windows, his bare
upper body was like marble, the bruises and scratches from her teeth and nails a vivid purple against
his pale skin.

A surge of possessiveness filled her as she thought of the servants and staff wandering around
when he was dressed only in a thin pair of pants. Her eyes followed the long scar trailing down the
side of his face and neck, flowing out over his shoulder. There were fresh wounds she had inflicted
tonight above it, and her face flushed with the desire to kiss the places where she'd marked him.

He looked up then, sensing some spark of her emotion through their bond, and immediately
leapt to his feet, his worried eyes roving anxiously over her body until she caught his gaze and
smiled.

“I thought the food would lure you out.”

Oh, he was beautiful, and she loved him, but he was so arrogant! She laughed and picked up a
sandwich, claiming the desk chair since he was sitting on the floor. Despite his condescending tone,
she could see he was relieved to find she wasn't angry or upset. She let him have his bribe.

“Yes, how very clever of you.”

She realized she was starving, she couldn't remember the last time she ate. Probably some time
before they landed on this planet. She gestured to the lightsaber pieces.

“What are you doing?”

“Trying to design a weapon,” he murmured absently.

She had devoured two of the sandwiches and was sucking the juice from her fingers, eyeing a
third, when she felt his eyes on her. She realized he had been staring for a while, mesmerized by the
sight of her eating.

“What?”

“You're supposed to chew, not swallow it whole.”
Her eyes narrowed and she glowered at him while defiantly snatching another. And another, just to see his hilariously scandalized expression while she stuffed her face. She looked him directly in the eye while she licked her fingers.

“If you don't like the way I eat, don't watch.” Rey wondered if his eyes might fall out of his head. She couldn't help herself. She giggled. Oh, he was really annoyed now. He looked away, frowning down at his work.

“I made some sketches.” He handed her a leather notebook with a page marked by a piece of jagged black fabric, like he'd just torn a piece of his cloak off and used it as a bookmark. She made sure her hands were clean before taking it. She opened it, her eyes rapidly scanning the pages while she resisted the urge to flip through the rest of his private notes.

“Oh! Can you really make a staff like that?”

She glanced over at her faithful, battered weapon leaning against the desk.

“Theoretically, although the only references I could find pre-date the Empire. You need two crystals though.”

He waited as she carefully examined his diagrams. She chewed at her thumbnail thoughtfully, her mind conjuring up years of cobbled-together scrapwork and repaired power cells. She lifted a hand and summoned her satchel from across the room, her attention still on Ben’s notebook. She rummaged inside for the pieces of Luke’s lightsaber, and cursed when her hand slipped and the Jedi texts tumbled out.

Their eyes met as he instinctively reached out to catch the falling objects and realized what they were. He held one up to examine, his face dark with concentration. She froze, watching his lips move as he slowly deciphered the ancient writing that had so far eluded her. He looked back up at her, a strange gleam in his eyes.

“Where did you get these?”

“I stole them from Luke,” she admitted, knowing he wouldn't judge her for it. “He refused to teach me, and I didn't know what else to do.”


“Yes.”

They were silent a moment while he processed what she had done, and she waited to see how he would respond. He still had that strange gleam in his eyes, like he'd just uncovered something secret and exciting. He opened his mouth to speak, but was interrupted by the beeping of his comm unit on the desk. Rey picked it up and handed it to him, noticing his aggravated sigh. He held a finger against her lips and she nodded in understanding. She watched the tiny hologram of General Hux appear above it, and suddenly his face took on the cold mask of Kylo Ren.

“What do you want, Hux?” He snarled.

The officer stood with his hands clasped behind his back, his voice an arrogant drawl.

“My apologies if I've awoken you, Supreme Leader. I thought you'd like to know, our sources have finally acquired information about your mother's memorial service.”

Rey decided instantly that she hated this man. She had felt sorry for him before when Ren used
the Force on him, but now she almost wanted to do it herself.

“And?”

Ren’s voice was emotionless, though he must know the man was deliberately baiting him. He knew Kylo Ren had come here alone. *Arrogant prick.*

“Strangely enough it’s on Mandalore. I’ve already ordered the *Finalizer* to take up position.”

“No!” Rey could see the man jump at the force behind his leader’s voice. “Mandalore is a neutral planet. You’ll be giving them cause to join the rebels!”

“But, Supreme Leader, they have already proven they are worthless sympathizers! Besides, we have confirmed that General Dameron and the traitor FN-2187 are on the planet.”

He was practically spitting. Rey desperately tried to think of a way to warn her friends. She had chosen to come back to Kylo Ren, but that did not mean she was going to sit by and let this venomous peacock ruin Leia’s memorial and target people she cared about. She tried to catch Ren’s eyes, but he was purposely avoiding her wild gaze.

“Do you think I don’t know that? Why do you think I came here? This mission requires stealth, not orbital bombardment! Your… zeal is appreciated, but I will *not* authorize the use of military force on a neutral planet!”

General Hux smiled his disgusting, self-satisfied smile.

“I’m afraid I’ve already dispatched orders on your behalf. Of course, I can recall them, but -”

“Then do it!!!”

The comm unit rattled in his hand.

“Supreme Leader, surely you realize how this will look across the fleet,” the man said smoothly.

His eyes on Ren were beady with poorly-concealed hate.

“I DON’T CARE HOW IT LOOKS. YOU WILL DO AS I COMMAND! Recall the *Finalizer* now!”

Rey bit her tongue as the comm unit began to rattle and break apart.

“Of course, Supreme Leader.” Why was he smiling like that? “I assume you will let us know when you have dispatched the rebels.”

*Oh. Oh, oh, oh.* She didn’t think about it before she did it. He had already stressed the internal mechanisms to boiling. All she had to do was add the barest touch of Force, her fingers subtly curling around the leather notebook in her hand. It burst into pieces, sending bits of plastic shrapnel flying as Ben jerked himself away and she ducked behind the back of the desk chair.

Slowly, she peeked around the edge, expecting him to be furious. He was just staring at her in that piercing, liquid way that made him seem vulnerable despite everything she knew he was.

“I’m sorry-” she began. He reached out his hand and spun the chair with the Force so she was facing him. Then he shoved lightsaber parts out of the way haphazardly as he crawled across the floor, laying his head against her knee. She reached out instinctively to stroke his head, smoothing the chaos of his hair. He kissed her knee, slowly moving his kisses as far up her inner thigh as he
“What are you doing?”

He pressed his face against her leg and slid his hand upwards, under her bathrobe, gently caressing the top of her thigh. She felt her breath catch and unintentionally she shifted forward, letting his seeking fingers brush against the clean, wet curls between her legs.

“Ben,” she murmured insistently.

His thumb ghosted over the center of her pleasure and she gasped, her hands grasping the arms of the chair. She pressed on determinedly.

“Kylo. We need to talk.”

“I'm not going to hurt your friends.”

He looked up at her, his eyes honest and warm. He reached in and put his hands around her waist, pulling her closer so she could feel his warm breath over her sex. She closed her eyes, feeling the rush of heat flowing through her body and moistening between her legs. Her body still felt exhausted, but she couldn't pretend she didn't want him to go on. He pressed his thumb into her folds, drawing her wetness forward so his touch was slick against her. She fought desperately to maintain her line of thought.

“Wh-why wouldn't you? That vile snake is playing you. He's just waiting for you to make -” she moaned softly and leaned her head back as his tongue replaced his caressing fingers “-a mistake.”

She knew he liked to know she was watching, so she opened her eyes and looked down, the sight of his dark hair between her legs bringing another searing flush of warmth. He stopped and looked up at her suddenly, a smile playing over his face when he saw that she was indeed watching. She tangled her fingers in his hair and let the edge of her thumbnail scrape lightly over the top of his ear. He leaned his head into her touch.

“I know. Snoke gave him far too much authority. I did not make that mistake.” His eyes closed briefly as he took a deep breath. When he opened them, they were dark and sly. “He can't order an attack or ground assault without additional authorization from myself or Phasma. She's on her own mission right now, so that leaves Hux alone.”

“Does he know that?”

His smirk alone was enough to spread heat through her body. She had always found him unusually alluring. He wasn't traditionally attractive like Finn or Poe Dameron, but there was something about his dark, clever eyes that drew her in and brought heat to her cheeks and carnal images to her mind.

“No,” he murmured.

She caught another glimpse of that smirk as she pulled him in, and he eagerly pressed his tongue to her again. She moaned his name softly, one hand still in his hair, the other clinging to the arm of the chair as if her life depended on it. He stopped, and she whined unhappily.

“Say my name,” he ordered.

Both his hands gripped her waist tightly, fighting to hold her still as she writhed with need. She
met his gaze, defiant, but agonized. Good gods, she wanted his mouth back, her whole body ached with hunger, but she refused to give in so easily.

“Ben,” she said firmly.

He shook his head.

“No. Rey. You know who I am. Remember? Say it.”

Oh, she had really painted herself into a corner there, hadn't she? What had he said? That she would be screaming it by the end of the night?

She glanced at the window. The moon had set, but there was still darkness left. She felt his thumb rolling gently over her, agonizingly soft and too slow. She looked down into his eyes. She could feel his amusement, his quiet patience. She had given him his release, now that his needs weren't so urgent, he was happy to toy with her. Hmmm…

She thought about what she wanted to do before, when he paralyzed her. An idea formed, and she had to act before he sensed it.

She gathered her energy and used the Force to shove him roughly onto his back. Before he could respond, she was on top of him, and she quickly discarded the robe so he would have to see all of her. She straddled his hips, holding him down with her wet heat settled perfectly against his length, separated only by the thin fabric of his pants.

She leaned down and caught his lips with hers, plying his mouth with her tongue. He didn't struggle at all, she could tell by the surprise she felt that he hadn't even considered she might take control like this. She dragged her mouth down the center of his chest, slowly working her way down.

“Rey. Stop.”

His voice was hoarse. She met his intense gaze with a sly smile of her own. He firmly wrapped his arms around her and flipped them over with some slight help from his Force power. He caressed her face, his eyes once again warm and loving.

“Rey. You gave me something very precious tonight. I didn't know… Let me make it up to you. Please.”

“You gave me yours, too,” she hadn't been sure, at first, but she knew now.

“It's not the same. I hurt you.”

She raised her hand and traced the scar across his shoulder.

“I marked you. Permanently.” He shivered as her fingers danced over his skin. “Does it hurt?”

“Not really.” He caught her hand as she lowered it and kissed her wrist and palm. “I want to taste you again. I want you to moan and cry and when you cry out my name, I want you to know it's the only name you will ever cry like that.”

His eyes burned with a possessiveness that should have frightened her, but she knew her own mind, and she knew she would happily slaughter anyone who touched him. She shuddered under that gaze, and she could only nod her assent, swallowing some intense, tearful emotion she had no name for. When his mind pressed insistently against hers, she let him in, let him see…
Yes. You belong to me. I belong to you.

He moved over her, kneading her breasts, taking her nipples into his mouth one after the other, licking and sucking and grazing his teeth over them, tasting the bare skin of her stomach, her hips, her thighs.

“Yes,” she whined, instinctively rolling her hips against him as he finally brought his hot mouth back where she really wanted it. “Good gods, please!”

“Say it.”

“Ben. Kylo,” she was losing this battle. "Please."

He spread her apart and pressed his mouth against her, his tongue working in fast, hard strokes. She held onto his hair tightly, her eyes closed, her mind and body overwhelmed.

She growled at him when he paused, knowing what he wanted, desperate to make him go on. She opened her eyes, checking the light in the window. The faintest trace of dawn touched the sky. He slipped two fingers inside her, his touch gentle, aware of her soreness. He moved them slowly, smiling at her whimpered pleas, his eyes steady on hers.

Just this once. He had to win sometimes.

She gave him what he wanted, loudly, panting the two syllables over and over until they gave way to wordless keening. Her thighs clenched against him so he couldn't pull back as she crested, intense, exquisite waves rolling over her. She knew he could feel it too, that he was there in her mind, enthralled by the wild, overwhelming flood he had caused.

Ben! Her mind whispered, even as she sobbed and moaned out loud the name he wanted. You will always be Ben Solo to me.

Afterwards he laid with his head over her stomach, his arm wrapped snugly around her waist. She felt like they had battled in the forest again, exhausted physically and emotionally, only this time there was no sadness or foreboding sense of darkness. Just them, together, finally. Still at an impasse, but she thought she would win. She always seemed to, eventually.
And the Award for The Worst Person in the Galaxy Goes to....

Chapter Summary

Hux. It always goes to Hux.

Finn has a bad day. Kylo Ren also has a bad day. Somehow no one important gets injured.

Sabine has no time for these stupid kids.

Finn was having a bad day, and it wasn't even an hour past sunrise. BB-8 had hacked the door and snuck itself into the room he was sharing with Rose in the predawn morning, babbling about Poe and other things Finn didn't understand. He had to wait for Rose to wake up, and Rose Tico did not spring awake at the slightest sound like a trained Stormtrooper. She could scramble for cover, or grab a blaster, but those were instinctive responses. Getting an intelligent, competent Rose before sunrise was like asking the planet to rotate faster. It just wasn't going to happen, no matter how gently you prodded, or how much caffeinated beverage you offered.

So when he finally got her cognizant, and the little orange and white droid spilled its guts with a series of whistles and unhappy beeps, Finn was already in stress mode. Of course, of course, Poe hadn't come back to his room last night. Or anytime this morning.

“Easy, slow down,” Rose tried to comfort the excitable droid, stifling a yawn. “When, exactly did you see him last?”

The droid let out a long, sad whistle. Finn waited for Rose to interpret, quietly missing Rey, but knowing how it would sound if he said it.

“He came by before dinner,” Rose tried to comfort the excitable droid, stifling a yawn. “When, exactly did you see him last?”

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He didn't need Rose to interpret the sad whistle.

“*What* secret mission?”

“We’re not need-to-know. Poe is taking this really hard,” Rose observed quietly. “Do you think they… had something going on?”

“If they did, it was completely one-sided. That woman knows what she wants.”

There was a moment's pause where they looked at each other, shared sadness and worry passing between them.

“Do you think she’ll be okay?”

“Yeah…” he thought for a minute. “You know, I think we all owe Rey just a little more credit.”
BB-8 bleeped in agreement.

“We have to find Poe,” Rose said eventually.

“We have to find Poe.” He agreed.

So here he was, ambling around the government district they were staying in, checking bars and shops and questioning people on the street. In actual truth, this was not something Finn had ever had to, and he was running out of ideas. Nothing was open yet, it was too early in the day, and a single human with no real outstanding features could easily pass through the streets unnoticed.

His comm blinked and he switched it on.

“Any luck?” Rose's voice was worried.

“No. You?”

“I've checked every ship in three hangars. You don't think he'd steal a military fighter, do you?”

Finn wasn't sure he thought that at all.

“Let's hope not.”

He turned the astromech droid trailing along after him faithfully.

“BB-8, check the military hangar.”

The droid gave a worried whistle.

“Yeah, me too. The ceremony starts at noon. He has to be there.”

But the day went on, and eventually Finn, Rose and Chewie had gathered in the Mandalorian leader’s office, uncomfortably explaining that with fifteen minutes to go, the leader of the Resistance was about to miss the ceremony to honor their fallen heroes and the Princess who had given her life fighting for them.

Sabine seemed unconcerned.

“I have a feeling he'll be there,” she reassured them, placing a comforting hand on Rose’s shoulder as she walked to the door. “Let's go and see.”

It was a small ceremony. A large pyre had been built in the shape of the Rebel phoenix inside a walled courtyard on Sabine’s personal estate. They could not use government facilities or resources, to protect Mandalore’s neutrality, but the Wrens’ family estate was large enough to accommodate the bonfire and the fifty or so people who had come to say goodbye.

All around the massive pile of wood, people had placed mementos of the dead, to be cremated in place of destroyed or unrecovered physical bodies. Finn felt like he should put something on it, but he had very few possessions and the person he was closest to was still alive. He watched as Chewie draped a pair of golden dice on a chain over a piece of wood and stood back, his head bowed. He glanced over as Rose let go of his hand to touch the Haysian amulet around her neck.

“Do you really want to do that? It's the only thing you have.”
She sniffled, her almond-shaped eyes moist.

“It’s time to say goodbye to the past, and look toward the future.”

It was a line from the speech Poe was supposed to read, but he knew Rose and Sabine had written most of it. Finn watched her press her lips to the amulet one last time before leaving it behind. She came to stand beside him again, holding out the hand that bore Leia’s blue stone ring.

“This is our future. Trust. Love. Compassion. Not war and hate.”

“She would have agreed, although she was pretty adept at war and hate.”

Finn would have recognized that voice anywhere, even without the voice-modulating helmet. He spun around with lightning reflexes, jerking Rose behind him and grabbing his blaster.

“Please put away your weapon,” Sabine said calmly from beside him.

She had turned too, and her saber was in her hand, but inactive.

Kylo Ren met Finn's furious gaze with an icy glare, but his lightsaber rested untouched on his belt. He had a strange look, like something about him was drastically changed, but aside from his lacking helmet, Finn couldn't place it.

“Where's Rey?” He demanded, easing his blaster slowly back into its holster.

Ren smirked lazily, crossing his arms, his eyes smug.

“In my bed. Sleeping.” Before Finn could register that, the man looked him directly in the eye and clarified his meaning. “We had a long night.”

Sabine's guards grabbed Finn, but they weren't quick enough to catch Rose before she stalked forward and slapped the man across the face.

“You disgusting snake! How dare you! That’s my friend!”

Kylo Ren was rubbing his cheek with a look of profound surprise, not unlike the way Finn was staring at Rose. The assembled crowd murmured uneasily. Finn could hear some of them whispering very unpleasant things about Rey. The guards started to approach Rose, but Sabine held up her hand, waiting.

“I assure you, I didn't force her,” he said calmly.

He made no move after his weapon, despite Rose’s obvious rage.

“I know that. I know she loves you, for some dumb reason I will never understand, but whatever you do alone is private. You don't go boasting about it in public! In front of people!”

His arrogant gaze took in Rose, Finn and Sabine Wren. A warbling sound from the side made his eyes widen slightly in what might have been fear. Chewie pushed his way through the crowd, growling and gesturing wildly.

“Fine. I just came to pay my respects.”

He stalked across to the wood pile, withdrawing a square of white silk and carefully tying it onto an unused branch. Every eye in the room was on him, but they watched silently.
“What is that?” Rose asked suddenly.

Horrified by her daring, she covered her mouth with both hands, but Kylo Ren just shrugged.

“Silk. From my mother's dress.” He turned to walk out. “She was my mother. And for whatever it's worth, I had nothing to do with the Starkiller project.”

“Please be good to Rey,” Rose whispered in the following silence.

Chewie added something in Shyriiwook, and Ren paused.

“Of course I will. I'm not Han Solo.”

He walked back through the courtyard gate, and the guards let Finn go. Sabine instructed one to follow him and make sure he was off of her property. Finn adjusted his jacket and rolled his shoulders, shaking out the feeling of being detained for barely a moment, before Rose rushed over to bury her face in his shoulder, sobbing.

And, of course, Poe Dameron entered just in time, followed closely by a hulking gray-furred alien, whom Sabine addressed as Zeb.

“General Dameron, nice of you to join us.”

“Sorry I'm late guys. Turns out stealing from a Mandalorian vault’s not as easy as it sounds.”

He gave Finn a conspiratorial wink that the ex-trooper did not return. BB-8 rolled over, whistling and chirping madly. Poe's face darkened.

“Kylo Ren what?”

“Yeah, he was here for like a second,” Finn explained. Poe opened his mouth, his eyes angry, but Finn did not want to hear it. “Stop. Wait, stop. You tried to break in somewhere?”

“Weapons storage. The Resistance needs supplies, and without our Jedi to fight for our cause, I had to think of something else.”

BB-8 whistled and chirped in a very unhappy manner. Poe held his hands up defensively.

“I knew you wouldn't, that's why I didn't tell you!”

He looked at his human companions, but Finn focused his eyes in another direction, while Rose shoved a datapad into Poe's hands, her face streaked with tears and anger.

“Just read this so we can finish what we came here to do.”

She wiped her eyes with her sleeve. As Poe took his place before the assembled crowd, it suddenly occurred to Finn what had been so strange about Ren’s appearance. He'd seen the man once or twice without his helmet, but never without his gloves or his ragged, voluminous black cloak. But he had come to his mother's funeral with neither, his face bare with nothing to hide behind.

It made him look younger, less intimidating, but somehow more… real. He spared a thought for Rey, wondering if she knew how much of a change she had affected in one, single night.

Then he remembered the smug way Ren had talked about her, and his fists clenched. Regardless of the change in the way he dressed himself, the man was still an insufferable prick.
When Poe finished his speech, Sabine’s guards passed out torches to select members of the crowd. Together, the Rebels stepped forward to light the pyre that would burn steadily for the rest of the day and throughout the night. Recording devices were set up everywhere, especially from above where the phoenix design would be most clear. The piles of wood and branches glittered with mementos of precious jewelry, pieces of weapons, military pins and buttons and hundreds of other small things that reflected the sunlight. The wind picked up as the flames took hold, setting bits of cloth and ribbon fluttering.

The podium was left open for anyone who wanted to call out the names of their dead, and Rose was the first, holding tightly to a handwritten list, her voice hoarse but steady.

“Paige Tico. Amalyn Holdo. Glial Ackbar. Nora Wexley. Tallie…” It took thirty minutes for her to make it through her own list, but they stayed as others came to add their own names. The fire was constructed to burn on through the night, and they needed the time. The lists were long.

Rey had been adamant. One of them must go. Sabine Wren considered her a liability, so it had to be him. The Mandalorians were vehemently protective of their neutrality. They would not allow a fight. He knew it wouldn't be so simple, but he couldn't find it in himself to refuse her. She had been correct, surprisingly enough, they had let him in without prejudice, and the retired Spectre had stopped FN - Finn - from pointing a blaster at him. He was almost disappointed, the Mandalorian Darksaber was legendary and he was curious to see it.

Then again, perhaps there was a way… What had Old Kenobi said to Rey? Ask about Agent Fulcrum? It was just a code word for Rebel spies, wasn't it? He turned to the guards at the gate as he was leaving.

“I have something important to ask your leader. She knows where to find me.”

The bodies inhabiting the traditional Mandalorian armor were impossible to read, but the helmets did not have voice-modulators. He could hear the surprise in the young woman's voice.

“Ahh… Yes. We'll tell her.” He had to make sure Sabine understood that it wasn't just the Supreme Leader asking.

“Tell her…”

How was he supposed to say it? Rey's friend had been very angry when he thought he was simply being direct. Rey had no titles, no last name… He could give her those, but… would she accept a title he gave her? He had given up his claim to his mother's inheritance, but everyone seemed to love Rey. If he married her, maybe... Somehow he doubted she would agree to that. Of course she would. No woman in the galaxy would want to be known as the wife of the murderous, terrifying, evil Kylo Ren. He made his choices a long time ago. There was no point in fantasizing about any kind of lasting happiness.

The guard coughed politely, and he realized he had been standing there lost in thought.

“Tell Sabine it's a personal request.”

“Yes, sir.”

His comm bleeped impatiently and he checked to see Hux’s code. Of course. Why would it be anyone else? He shouldn't have let Rey cobble together a new one, but she had clearly felt guilty for destroying his original so brashly. Despite how wildly erotic he found it to see her channel her
powers in a rage.

He briefly considered her vehement dislike of Hux and toyed with the idea of arranging a meeting as he looked around for some place to take the call in private. He found one of the little cultivated parks and ducked behind a tree.

“Yes?”

“It appears I owe you an apology, Supreme Leader. Believe me when I say my faith in you has been restored.” Ren glared at the comm. He did not like the general’s tone. It sounded suspiciously honest. “I assume you won't be returning to the fleet for some time, of course.”

As it happened, Hux was correct, but he wasn't sure how the little weasel had gotten that idea. He hadn't even discussed it with Rey yet.

“Why would you think that?”

“Well, I know I am not well-versed in your mystical… gifts… but I was under the impression that it takes some time to break in a new apprentice. Although,” he chuckled, “it sounds like this one is already… willing.”

He didn't realize what he'd done until he saw a piece of metal hit the ground at his feet. He opened his hand, and let the rest of the crushed commlink fall to the ground. Then he turned, and ran.

The recording, at the memorial service. Of course. Hux had found out about it last night. Which meant… it was being broadcast… now. He leapt onto a passing ground transport, dispatching the shipping droid piloting it with his lightsaber and jerking the control stick in the opposite direction, against the protests of a dozen other drivers. He ignored them, detaching the trailer and pushing the tiny engine to full-power. He could sense her through the bond when he reached out. He always knew when she was crying.
Chapter Summary

In a surprise twist, someone in Mandalorian armor shows up to save our heroes from bounty hunters.

Kylo is very... distracted... when Rey does things with the Force. Hopefully that excitement wears off, otherwise he's going to have some uncomfortable adventures.

Oh, yeah, Rey still has that light____ to make. Any guesses to the final product? Stay tuned!

Chapter Notes

The formatting on this chapter was giving me fits, even though I specifically copied and pasted WITHOUT formatting. So I apologize for all the weird spacing. I used to HTML when I was younger, but that was a long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away.....

Rey woke up at precisely noon, and immediately turned the holovid to a solid Rebel frequency while she reviewed Ben's notes about the lightstaff. She saw a bedraggled Poe reading a speech he clearly hadn't written, but even though the general was distracted, the words tore at her heart.

“Hope is never truly gone from our hearts. It cannot be killed, or silenced, or destroyed completely. As long as one person lives, the spark of hope is alive. Even in our darkest hour, there is always a part of us that yearns to be saved, prays to be rescued and redeemed. The tiniest match can start a fire…

“It is time for war and hate to end. We cannot fight violence with violence. Instead we must forge weapons of love and compassion. The galaxy will always have tyrants, and we must have heroes to defend us from them. But matching blood for blood is the way of the dark side. Instead, let us defend each other by preventing bloodshed altogether…

“Everyone has a choice to make. To do what you are told, knowing it's wrong, or to do what you believe is right and accept the consequences. If you wish to stand against tyranny, you must only choose what is right. Be the match, stand up for yourself, protect those you love and cherish them. It's time to say goodbye to the past, and look toward the future. We don't know what tomorrow might bring, but we know someday, eventually the light will return…”

She watched them light the pyre, and the holo switched to an aerial view, where the shape of it was clearly visible and all the thousands of memorial items glittered and waved in a myriad of colors. Then Rose took the podium, and Rey didn't realize she was crying until the tears dripped onto Ben's sketches. She cursed and jumped up, scrambling for a cloth to blot ineffectively at the spot.

She didn't hear him come in over the noise of the memorial, and nearly crashed into him as he came looking for her.

His eyes were wild and frightened, and he immediately gathered her into his arms, his face pressed into her hair as he murmured her name repeatedly. She tried, unsuccessfully, to disentangle herself.
“Please don't leave. I understand if you're angry. I didn't know what else to say. I'm sorry. Just…”

Finally, she got him to let go, although he was watching her like he expected her to bolt any minute. She frowned at him.

“What's wrong with you? What happened?”

He glanced at the screen of the holovid, where a senator from Hosnian Prime was reading a list of the planet's entire population on the day of its destruction. No wonder they'd planned for it to go on all night.

“Have you been watching this all day?”

“Yes. I woke up late, so I missed the very beginning, but…”

“So you didn't see it.”

He sat down in the chair she'd just vacated, running his hands through his hair.

“Rey. Rey. I…”

“What are you on about? Did you do something?”

Suddenly she was worried. But no, she could see everyone on the screen, even BB-8, perfectly unharmed. He would not look at her, she had to pull his hands away from his face, and the look he gave her was wounded.

Wordlessly, he picked up his datapad, typed a few things onto it, then handed it to her with a video queued up some First Order propaganda video. She saw him approach, and Finn reach for his blaster. Their short exchange. She could feel his eyes on her, his anxiety over the bond was making her stomach queasy. She laughed unexpectedly, her hand flying to her mouth, followed by a soft gasp.

“You had a piece of Leia’s dress?” She asked.

He looked away.

“I… I just found it in my notebook when I was doing the sketches. It's old, she gave it to me before she sent me away.”

“You did love her.”

Her eyes threatened to spill over and she handed the datapad back.

“Everyone loved her. That's what made her an effective leader.”

“But not a great mother.”

“She was always busy…” he looked at her with a puzzled expression. “Aren't you… upset with me?”

“What for?”

He leaned forward, searching her face, but whatever he was looking for, she had no idea. Finally, he leaned back.

“That video is everywhere. Hux commed me to… congratulate me.”

She laughed, and he nearly jumped.

“I can't imagine he's had much success with girls in his life. I'll bet he's murderously jealous. Oh, I like that mental image.” She laughed again. “Who's he got to be romantic with, anyway? Captain Phasma?”
She started to giggle, and he laughed too.
“That's... that's horrifying... No, don't ever bring that up again.”

He looked like he might be sick, and she couldn't help it.
“But, imagine... the helmet...” she couldn't finish, it was too hilarious.
“I'd really rather not.”
She shook her head, now laughing so hard she was gasping for breath. He watched with an expression of puzzlement that bordered on actual concern.
“Oh, Ben. I might've slapped you, but I think Rose got the point across. I don't know who they think they are, really. I've been stuck on the Falcon with them for three days. You can hear everything. I had to fight with Poe for the gun turret. And I really don't care what Hux thinks of me.” She paused. "That was a First Order station."

"Yes. Hux wanted the galaxy to know I've corrupted their precious Jedi, I'm sure."

"Hmmm. Corruption works both ways, you know." She patted his hand and he jerked away. Rey rolled her eyes. “Don't be dramatic.”
“Your have no idea how worried I was! I ran back here. I stole a vehicle. I thought you'd be angry!"

The poorly-contained rage in his voice evoked a sigh from her.
“Do you want me to be angry?"
“No. No! But you could at least have the decency to-”
“Decency? Is that really the word you want to use?”
He got up angrily, his eyes broadcasting the intent to be aggressive and his hand moving toward his belt. She summoned his lightsaber to her hand before he could draw it.

He stopped and stared, his eyes going from her to his weapon. Her voice was absolutely devoid of emotion, her eyes cold.
“You had better think very carefully about what you're doing, Kylo Ren.”
He watched her, his face a mask of rage and fear.
“You came to me,” he said slowly.
“Yes, I did. But I will defend myself if I have to. I am not an object for you to take out your anger on.”
She waited as the emotion slowly drained from his face. He sat back down and dropped his head into his hands. She waited another minute before grabbing her staff and cloak from beside the desk.

His head jerked up and she met his eyes with a hard stare.
“I'm going out, but I will be back. Don't come looking for me.”
She laid his lightsaber on the edge of the desk and backed out of the room.

From the roof of the hotel, she was close enough to sense him and feel his black mood fade to anxiety. She took the pieces of Luke's crystal from her pocket and inspected them carefully. In the afternoon sun, they just looked like clear pieces of quartz, but when she held them in her hand, one at a time, she could feel a kind of resonance.

Now, to see if they were the right color. The book had mentioned that it was sometimes possible to purify a bleeding kyber piece, but given no instruction on how to do. She had been going to bring it up when Ben got back, but he had to go and be an idiot. Really, it was a crude and childish thing to say, but she had a feeling he wasn't very good at social etiquette.

Combined with his intelligence and power, he could come across as arrogant even when he wasn't trying to be. He had a way of prodding at people, trying to antagonize anyone he thought he
could best, in a physical altercation or a verbal argument. She knew he hated it when she wouldn’t take the bait, and she thought she had probably made him feel a bit foolish when she wasn’t upset about the video at all.

But she would not tolerate him taking out his anger on her. She had seen drunken, violent fights between couples on Jakku enough times to know that there would be no winner. Maker only knew what kind of mess they would make quarreling like that.

She closed her eyes and focused on her breathing, reaching for that colorless ball of light in her core. When she was ready, she took the crystal from her left pocket and held it loosely in her hands, summoning just a tiny touch of Force energy through it - vivid, angry red flashed in her hands and she let go of the Force immediately, regretfully putting that piece back. Maybe Ben could find a use for it.

She yelped, and almost danced with joy when the second piece glowed blue. Quickly, she stored the crystals in the pockets of her cloak and hurried down from the roof, excited to tell Ben of her experiment. She sensed him through the bond, but it was faint, as if he were heavily focused on something else.

The flare of panic was so fleeting, she might have missed it, had she not been so close. And then there was silence.

*Ben? Ben?! Answer me! Kylo Ren!*

Nothing.

She would have known if he was dead, but he was definitely in danger.

She climbed onto their balcony from the tree in Satine Kryze’s park, carefully pressing herself against the concrete wall and peering through the window. There were a lot of people inside, and it took her a moment to take stock of it all. Two humans and a Trandoshan with blasters were being held off by Sabine Wren’s Darksaber, while Ben lay on the ground behind her. He didn’t look injured, Rey thought, probably just stunned. She could feel him trying to move.

She only had a limited time frame to act before they noticed her outside the window. Luckily, Rey had spent most of her life avoiding danger by thinking on her feet.

With one hand, she Force-pushed the door open, hard enough for it to slam against the wall, startling everyone and giving Sabine a chance to slice into the nearest human with her eerily glowing weapon, black as the void of space but somehow still casting light.

Rey had no time to admire it, as she was already summoning Ben’s saber to her hand. She activated it as it flew, slicing cleanly through the Trandoshan’s reptilian neck.

After seeing their comrade murdered and sporting nasty burn wounds themselves, the two humans shared a brief look.

“I only signed on for one Force user. All the credits in the galaxy aren’t enough for three of them.”

“Damn Lyra. I knew this job sounded too easy to be true. That’s the last time I take a job from the Hutts.”

They took off, backing out the door before pounding off down the carpeted hallway. Rey started to follow, knowing she could beat them to the ground level, but Sabine stopped her.

“They won’t get far, Zeb’s been tracking them all day.”

“Who are they?”

She knelt besides Ben looking for any wounds, but he wasn’t bleeding and his breathing was
steady, so she adjusted herself into a sitting position and dragged his head into her lap.

“So, it's true then. You really are brave. Or stupid, but you put the pieces together pretty quickly for an imbecile.”

“I think ‘crazy’ is the word you're looking for.” She gave the woman a rueful smile. “Trust me, I know what it looks like.”

“You think you can save him.”

“Maybe.”

She smoothed his hair out of his face. He looked so young this way, without his characteristic arrogant smirk and wild eyes.

“I think I need to be with him no matter what, really. I just don't want anyone to get hurt.”

His eyelids fluttered, then opened. He gazed at her with so much emotion in his brown eyes, she couldn't help but lean down and kiss him. He tried to hold her for more, but his strength wasn't entirely recovered.

“Sabine is still here,” she whispered.

His memory came back to him and he sat up quickly, reaching around for his lightsaber.

“Those bastards were here for you! They didn't even know who I was! I will eviscerate all of them slowly—”

His eyes reached the body of the dead Trandoshan and he turned to see Rey twirling his lightsaber hilt in her hand.

“Did you do that?”

She smiled and held out his weapon. He took it, looking at her with a certain glint in his eye she was beginning to recognize.

“Sabine is still here,” she repeated waringly as she helped him to his feet and his hands started roaming.

The Mandalorian chuckled.

“Oh, to be young and in love.” She pressed a button on her wrist comm. “Did you catch those bastards yet Zeb?”

“Bagged and tagged,” came the gruff reply.

“Good. Let's give them the traditional Mandalorian farewell. And get someone up here to clean up, there's a body in Kylo Ren's living room.”

She turned and nodded to Ben, her eyes taking in Rey as well.

“Whenever you're ready. I'll take on either one of you.”

Rey insisted on helping Ben to bed and overseeing Sabine’s ‘cleanup crew’ herself. There wasn't too much blood, fortunately lightsaber wounds cauterized instantly, and the guards were quick and polite. She checked to make sure both doors were locked, then came in to look him over. He appeared to be resting, but his eyes opened as soon as she came in the room, and she could see that glint there still as he watched her take off her cloak and lay the kyber crystals on the desk.

“One blue, one red,” she told him excitedly.

“Hmm.”
He reached for her, and she came to sit on the edge of the bed beside him. Immediately he was kissing her arm, starting at her wrist and moving slowly up to her neck, where he nibbled and tasted until she gave a small moan, her body filled with heat.

“You should be resting,” she admonished without real force. “I've been stunned before. It's nothing.”

He sat up and caught her earlobe in his teeth, gently dragging her down beside him with his arms wrapped around her. He kissed the nape of her neck, then pulled her back against him, sinking his fingers into the base of her hair buns. He was already hard, she could feel it against her back and she suddenly wanted to feel him inside her again with a primal intensity.

She turned over and pushed him to his back, her agile fingers unfastening his belt and surcoat. He was more than willing to help her, and she had him undressed quickly. He reached to tug at her clothes and she batted his hands away, remembering how he'd ripped away her tunic the night before.

“No. No! Let me. This is the only shirt I have now.”

Rey got herself undressed despite his attempts to help and persistent need to touch and kiss every inch of skin as it was revealed.

She pushed him to his back again, making it absolutely clear she was going to be in charge. At first she straddled his hips, fitting his hard member against her just so, while she plied him with kisses and dragged her mouth slowly down his body. She pressed her lips to the toned but pale skin of his abdomen and both sides of his hips, and then she firmly took hold of him and put her mouth over his gloriously hard cock.

He groaned like a feral beast, stroking her hair, panting her name as she took in as much of him as she could, working her lips up and down his length. She kept her hand around him the rest of the way as she experimented with her technique, trying to adjust how she moved by the sound of his noises. Small drops of fluid with a taste like salt water leaked out of him and she licked them up with her tongue, sucking at him to draw out more, until he grabbed her hair suddenly and pulled her up.

“Rey. I need to be inside you. Please.”

His eyes met hers as she let go of him, crawling back up his body. Gods, she was still sore, but she wanted him so badly and the desperate need in his eyes kindled more heat within her. She was already wet there, just the act of finally being able to taste him was arousing, but he moved his hand to find her most sensitive parts, his fingertips gently drawing out more of her fluid.

Carefully, she leaned forward and fit him against her entrance, watching his eyes as she slowly eased herself down. It was easier this way, she could control the pace and she made him wait, lowering herself and adjusting her body while he begged her take all of him, until finally she felt comfortable enough to move. There was a dull ache, but it was soon drowned out by the intense feeling of pleasure from somewhere deep inside.

She had not realized this could be so exquisitely blissful, and she felt a climax building in her as she rocked her hips in a slow, gentle rhythm. He was making all kinds of rough, desperate sounds, his hands on her waist holding her down while he thrust from underneath. She leaned back for better leverage, and closed her eyes, whimpering when she his felt thumb against her sensitive front.

“Say my name!” He demanded.

She opened her eyes and gave a coy smirk. “Ben.”

“No!”

She stilled herself and he groaned in frustration, trying to buck against her while her thighs tightened around him.

“You say my name,” she demanded.
Their eyes met. He threw his head back, his hands hard and bruising on her hips.
“Guck. Rey! Rey, please, I need you!”
“You need me? For what?”

She shifted, adjusting herself around him, and drew her hands and nails down his chest. His frustrated sounds and urgent movement beneath her filled her with a mischievous sense of power.
“Ride me,” he gasped, his hands rubbing her hips helplessly. “Fuck me! Please, Rey! Please don’t stop.”
“Of course not,” she caught his eyes with a tender smile. “Have some patience.”
She moved again, watching his face as she slowly built up speed, taking her time and letting warmth spread through her body, despite his groaning and begging her to move faster. She reached out with her mind, wanting him to know, to share as they had before, and he welcomed her.

Once he could feel her, he changed, using all of his training to try and hold himself back, waiting for her. He pressed his thumb into her, gently massaging her center, and she leaned back to give him better access, riding him harder as her pleasure fully ignited inside her.
The climax caught her by surprise, her body froze as the first shiver passed through her. She fell forward against his chest, his arms wrapped tight around her, holding her still as he kept thrusting, and it felt so lovely, wave after wave of golden pleasure passing through her while she moaned against his neck.
“Maker, Rey,” he groaned, and she felt his release fill her, a burst of shared fire in her mind.

She laid over him, panting, unwilling to move to break their joining. He smoothed her hair back where it had escaped around her face, and she gave soft hums of contentment. He tried to move like he wanted to get up and she clutched at his shoulders and tightened her muscles around him, not ready to let him go.
“No!”
“Rey. We have things to do. Your lightsaber, remember?”
“I don’t care,” she mumbled petulantly into his shoulder.

He sighed and pressed gentle kisses into her neck and ear.
“Do you want to take a bath?”

He laughed as she swiftly pushed herself up.
“Come with me this time?”

They spent another hour investigating the opportunities provided by the large tub, and slippery warm water over naked skin, but they did talk about her lightsaber. Eventually.
He thought about turning off the holovid after Rey began snoring softly, her body curled against him so that he was afraid to move and wake her, but something kept him from it. She had switched it on while he was catching up on the dozens of administrative tasks he'd let get away from him, and he’d just sighed and rolled his eyes. There were still names being read, the ceremony was planned to go on until morning, and he knew she would want to see the end.

He expected his mother's to be the last, the Rebels were always sentimental like that. He understood their grief about the strikes from Starkiller. It was an unnecessary and grisly spectacle, in his opinion. Destroying whole planets because their government chose the wrong allies would leave the galaxy a wasteland. But he was sure General Hux would watch every single living thing burn if he could rule over the ruins, and he had been… unwilling to speak his mind before Snoke. *Afraid, I was afraid of Snoke.*

He was so afraid of his old master, he had been convinced it was necessary to murder his own father. Yes, Han Solo was not the greatest father, so what? Was that a crime worth dying for? Luke had been right, damn him. Damn them all! They were supposed to be adults. They were supposed to help him!

His mother knew something was wrong, she sensed Snoke’s hand on him, so what had she done? Passed him on to her brother, an uncle he barely knew, who still struggled with his own darkness. And Han Solo…. Ren thought he was relieved to have Leia to himself again. Except it didn't really work even then, and when they fought the last time, he wasn't there to blame their dysfunctional relationship on.

He wished he'd had the chance to tell her how wrong he'd been. How miserable he was, all the horrific things Snoke had done, had made him do. He knew Ben Solo’s mind inside and out, manipulated him so completely that he had taken away every shred of agency while making it seem that Ben's decisions were his own. He had wanted to research his grandfather, and Snoke had
encouraged it, but twisted his interest subtly, so he studied the life of Darth Vader and not the Jedi who became him.

Now, with the solid warmth of the woman he loved sleeping snugly against him, he thought about his grandparents in an entirely different light. He knew Padmé Amidala had died in childbirth, but before then she had dared to love a Jedi, carried on a secret affair that destroyed them both. Luke had told him that Anakin Skywalker was destroyed by Darth Vader, and Snoke made it seem like just another of the Jedi’s lies, but he supposed in a sense it was true.

He wondered what would have happened if his grandmother hadn’t died. Would Darth Vader have existed at all? He looked down at Rey’s peaceful face, and imagined turning away from that kind of happiness to pursue the dark side. No. There was nothing in the galaxy he would trade her for. If only she had been there… before. When he was scared and lonely and just seeking someone to understand him, someplace where he was wanted and welcomed.

“I see you’re making better choices.”

He nearly jumped out of bed, reflexively summoning his lightsaber from the bedside table, but remembered himself just in time so that he only jerked slightly and didn’t ignite the blade. The apparition watched with astonished eyes as Rey murmured in her sleep and he gently resettled her against him, shifting the blanket to cover her naked shoulders. Only after he was certain she would continue resting comfortably did he fix hateful eyes on the faintly transparent form of his uncle standing in the doorway.

“Why are you here? Have you come to tell me I’m not good enough for her? Scold me for corrupting your precious hope?”

Luke shook his head.

“Has it occurred to you that corruption works both ways?” He walked to the desk, glancing over the numerous sketches and construction components. “A lightstaff? That’s ambitious.”

“She came to me. She’s mine now. I will be her master.”

“Are you sure of that? It seems like she’s mastered you pretty well.”

His uncle was right, of course, and it enraged him.

“It’s too late for me.”

Luke shook his head.

“It’s never too late.”

“My mother and father are dead. Nothing’s going to bring them back. I murdered my friends… You have no idea what I’ve done. I’m broken. I’ll never be able to go back to… what I was.” Why did his voice sound so hoarse? He glared at his uncle’s ghost, wishing he knew a way to dispel the apparition. “You’re the last person I want to see right now! Just get out!”

“We’re never the same person we were yesterday,” Luke’s voice was mild.

Ren wanted to be angry, but it was difficult to find the energy, and his hissed words were disturbing Rey. He was so tired of being consumed by rage and hatred. He stroked Rey’s hair and let his eyes drink in her sleep-smoothed features. When he turned back, Luke had disappeared, damn him. How dare he just show up, trade a few sarcastic comments, then disappear without taking
responsibility for anything? Old people and their cryptic messages.

He threw his unlit saber furiously at the desk where the ghost had been, then summoned it back and studied it, his eyes unfocused as searing memories relit with agonizing clarity in his mind.

He woke her when he saw Sabine coming to the podium. He had wondered who would read the final names, and he was surprised to see the Mandalorian leader. But, she was an old hero of the Rebel Alliance, a friend of his mother's and creator of the phoenix symbol. She had returned to her home after the Empire was defeated, and worked tirelessly to maintain its neutrality during the cold war after the First Order broke off from the New Republic.

He knew his mother maintained correspondence, she maintained every friendship she ever made, keeping a stockpile of goodwill like a squirrel, one more tool to be saved for the future. She knew the leadership structure and half the diplomats on every New Republic world and most of the Core Worlds, even those that had sided with the First Order. She memorized family lines, birthdays, children, holidays, who died for what, where and when. And they loved her for it.

He had told himself for years that it was all a front, a practiced facade hiding her cold, manipulative scheming. It was easy to do with Snoke reinforcing that cruel assessment. Now that she was gone, and he could see how she had affected all these people, how kind she was to Rey and how she had loved him still, after all these years… It was becoming very difficult.

“Have you been watching this all night?” Rey asked as she rubbed sleep from her eyes.

He had never imagined caring for someone like this. She was beautiful even in the morning. Pure, bright and so solid. He was astonished at how much she trusted him, after everything he'd done. And he trusted her. Completely. Impossibly.

“Are you going to stare all morning?”

“It's almost over.” He gesture to the screen. “I thought you'd want to see it.”

He turned the volume up slightly. She frowned for a moment, studying his face, then turned to the screen, where a steel-eyed Sabine was addressing the assembled crowd.

“This is an end for some stories, but a new beginning for others.” She cleared her throat. “Forgive me while I recognize some long-dead friends. Ezra Bridger. Kanan Jarrus. Hera Syndulla. Ahsoka Tano. And finally, our most beloved heroes: Luke Skywalker and General Leia Organa, our beloved Princess. Let the ashes of our grief give life to new heroes. And may the Force be with us all.”

They watched for a while, as the dying fire smoldered in the growing light of morning. Rey’s friends were still there. The ex-Storm Trooper sitting on the ground with his arms supporting the girl. General Poe Dameron watching the fire with brooding eyes, his droid at his feet like a loyal pet. Chewie standing alone, probably thinking about Han Solo.

Ren realized they didn't say his name. Of course they didn't. He was just a smuggler to them, who helped out briefly during the end of the war against the Empire. Princess Leia’s estranged husband. He had never had much to do with the Resistance. Han never invested too much of himself in anything. His wife, his friends, his own life. His child. The face of my son.

Why couldn't he have come sooner? When his son was still alive, miserable beyond imagining, tortured by that spark of hope that someone would come looking for him. He had been so
certain his mother wouldn't give up on him, no matter what he did, what rumors reached the
Resistance spies. Rey confirmed that she hadn't. But then, why didn't they at least try to save him?
He was barely eighteen. And for eleven years, they'd abandoned him to the cruelty of Snoke, to be
used and tortured at that horrible creature's whim.

It wasn't until that day, in the interrogation chamber on Starkiller, when he had taken his
helmet off because he wanted her to see his face, that he had felt alive again. It had taken him several
days to understand the feelings that flared when he thought of her. But once he did, his mind was set.
He had a purpose again. Something he wanted with all his being. When she came to him, the first
time, on Snoke's ship, he had been elated. He thought it was time, that his master would allow him
an apprentice of his own.

He should have known better. He couldn't believe he'd been so stupid. Snoke had
manipulated him perfectly, and he had put Rey in danger. But she had been right. For once the cruel
man had underestimated his targets. For eleven years, Snoke had controlled his action, predicted
every stray thought that crossed his mind. But Ren had learned. It had taken all his concentration to
do it, with her there, on her knees, looking at him still with that unflinching faith… He made the only
choice possible. To save someone he loved.

Leia had watched Alderaan blast to pieces with the family she loved on it and held her calm.
Luke Skywalker fled instead of face the calamity he had fueled and failed to prevent. But Han Solo
had gone from a selfish criminal to a courageous freedom fighter for the love of a single woman. Had
confronted his wayward son without pause or regard for his own safety.

He had been so proud of that mighty Skywalker bloodline, but it turned out to be Han Solo's
blood that saved him. All his life, he had heard them, behind closed doors, as if he couldn't hear
them, as if he couldn't read every single thought his mother had about him. We have to be careful...
He's too strong... There's too much darkness in him... Snoke of all people had seen the truth. You
have too much of your father's heart...

“You're crying,” Rey said softly. There was a reverence to her voice. He glanced down as she
lifted a hand and brushed her fingertips under his eye. He swallowed, trying to collect himself
enough to put his thoughts into words.

“They didn't say his name. Han Solo.”

She breathed deeply, rising up so she could look into his face clearly. There was still a
dampness in his eyes, a familiar, but old feeling. He couldn't remember the last time he had truly felt
anything besides rage and loneliness.

“I've done terrible things, Rey. I can't bring back Ben Solo. You don't even know who he
was.”

She held his eyes, her hand finding his beneath the bed coverings.

He gripped it with bruising strength.

“Tell me.”

He couldn't look at her. Instead he focused on the embers of the fire still broadcast over the
Rebel channel.
“After Luke attacked me, I went to my friend Kellan… He came from Dathomir. Luke never liked him. The Zabrak have a long tradition of dark Force users. He knew too much. I told him I knew somewhere we could go to learn about the darker powers that Luke had forbidden us.

Jacen Syndulla was with us at first, but he left before we were done talking. He didn't go to Luke, he didn't warn anyone, he just stole a shuttle and left. I never saw him again. He didn't join the Resistance either, he just walked away from it all, like Luke. He was the oldest student, he could have done something.

Kellan had a girlfriend. We weren't supposed to, but… They were the kind of kids who broke rules just to… break them.”

He took a deep breath. She didn't say anything, but when he looked back at her, her eyes were warm. He closed his eyes. Her compassion was almost too much to bear.

“We gathered some other students after Jacen left us. A friend of Kellan’s. A Twi’lek I knew from Chandrila. Rasha. His mother was a senator.”

He could still hear Snoke’s voice.

*Kill anyone who refuses.*

“I tried to get them all, but… They were stubborn. Luke's teachings about light and dark were absolute. So we had to kill them.”

“Why couldn't you just leave without them?”

He could hear tears in her voice now. But she still held his hand. He met her eyes, trying not to look away. He needed to see her face. She was all she had to hold onto.

“Snoke’s orders. He said it was so they couldn't come after us later. I… it made sense at the time. We were too young. I thought…” His voice caught. She squeezed his hand. “I thought I could trust him. He said he… had a vision. For the galaxy. And he needed my help.”

“He was playing you.”

“Yes. But I didn't know! When we got to his ship… He told us to kill Kellan’s girlfriend. I don't… I don't even remember her name.”

He couldn't breathe. It was so clear in his memory. Why didn't he remember her name, after everything they'd been through? She was human, but pale. White hair, with beads braided into it. White skin. Brilliant purple eyes.

“She was so fast. She attacked while everyone hesitated. There were eight of us who came. She killed two, before Rasha disarmed her. Then it was just five of us. Kellan tried to convince me… He was the only thing close to a friend I'd ever had. He warned me it was a trap. Snoke wanted us to kill each other until there was only one left. The Nightsisters on Dathomir used the same trick.”

“I think Snoke was intrigued. He planned on only one of us surviving initially, but Kellan interested him. Or maybe he just wanted to break me slowly. The Knights of Ren were an ancient title from some culture with strong Force mythology.

Before the Sith, or the Jedi. The earliest Force users did not divide themselves along the lines of dark and light. So for a few years, that's how we lived. Snoke brought a few more people in, but I was never close to anyone. My training was separate. The Knights of Ren trained together, but
Snoke singled me out. They hated me for it.”

“That was probably why he did it.” Her expression was dark. “He only needed one of you, and you were the most powerful.”

“Yes. If only they knew what my training was like. Every day, he found reason to punish me. At night, I dreamed about my mother. I was miserable, Rey. There's an estate on Naboo that belonged to my grandmother.

It's where Leia escaped when she was tired of being Leia. When the galaxy found out about her real father. It's green and there are lakes everywhere. You would like it. I escaped there in my dreams, until Snoke found them.”

“He invaded your dreams?”

Her expression was hard to read. But when he reached through their bond, he was met with brilliant warmth. She moved back, laying her head against his chest, her fingers threaded tightly through his.

“No. Only you seem able to do that.”

He stroked his free hand across her loose hair.

“But he saw the dreams in my memory, and he wouldn't let me sleep for more than a few hours at a time after that. He made sure my days were exhausting. I fought everyone, one at a time, every day until I could defeat them all easily, even Kellan. Then I fought them in pairs. There were no practice blades. Every injury that was not life-threatening, we had to endure. They were not allowed to speak my given name.”

Memories flooded back to him. He knew she could see some of it now, it was hard to keep his thoughts from flowing over when she was close like this. The sound of Rasha’s deafening scream when Ren’s blade sliced off one of his head tails. The Twi'lek never had quite the same strength afterward, it threw off his balance, making him even easier to defeat.

Kellan’s purple-eyed girlfriend, gasping, struggling to fight on with blood pouring down from her severed ear. Lightsaber wounds were easier to bear, but he had summoned her knife after she disarmed him. She was the best fighter of them all, even after her injury. But weak-minded, unfortunately. He gathered himself, and continued.

“He manipulated them against each other. There was another girl who became… a point of contention. I don't know the truth, but two of the Knights fought over her. Snoke forced the winner to fight her. She killed him. Eventually it was just her and Kellan. I have no recollection of what happened to the first girl. Or Rasha. We all had masks, and I never took mine off. It was easier. But Snoke always knew what I was thinking.”

“He sent Kellan and me alone on an assignment. Kellan confronted me. He thought I had been sleeping with the girl or something. I wasn't, I don't even remember if I ever saw her face. We were all so broken by then... I think he thought she was his girlfriend from before. He blamed me for everything, and he was right.” His eyes felt watery again.

*Please just kill me, Solo. I'd rather it was you.*

“ You killed him.”

“Yes.” He remembered the Zabrak’s bloodshot yellow eyes. *Thank you.*
“You said he knew Snoke was manipulating you from the beginning. He knew what the end would be like. Snoke only ever wanted you.” Her voice was hard, but when she pressed her face against his chest, he could feel tears. “He used the Knights of Ren to break you.”

“I know.”

“But he didn't. He didn't break you.” She sat up again to look at him. Her hand let go of his, and she held his face in her hands. “Let me see.”

He did. He closed his eyes and opened his mind.

Rey was in hell. It was like watching a recording, except she was watching from the inside, as Ben Solo’s sanity crumbled. Tears poured down her face. He was the same age as she was now, but he seemed so much younger. Naive and terrified. She wanted so badly to take him into her arms and make it go away. But it was just a memory, and so she simply watched and listened, silently bearing witness to the years of chaos and agony that created Kylo Ren.

She felt his desperation, his regret, his final determination to let himself die and become the monster his master wanted. Snoke had raised him like a hunting beast, trained to chase and attack on command, and lick the fingers of his owner for scraps. She felt an illness in her heart that she was not sure would ever leave her. And she began to wonder at the people who were supposed to protect him, his parents, his family. He was a child who made a mistake, and they turned their hearts against him with finality. Or so it seemed.

She wondered if there were any records… Had Leia just given up the moment her son ran away? She already knew what Luke Skywalker had done. He ran away himself. No wonder Leia seemed to have aged so much in the years since Ben's last memory. She lost her brother and her son in one day, and her husband right after. But even if Luke had been too traumatized by his own guilt to look for his nephew and his students, surely Leia would have tried. How would he even have known, if Snoke chose not to tell him?

Snoke. She was glad he was dead, but a part of her wanted to revive him and tear him apart slowly. And then do it again. She wanted to learn the technique with the lightning and use it on him until he was a pile of smoldering dust.

Mostly, she just wanted to take the desperate, broken Ben Solo into her arms and tell him not to give up. But she could not change the past, he was who he was now. And she loved him anyway. Not just for the light she knew was still in him, but all of the dark parts too. He had to know that. She had suffered her own hell, different, but just as desperate and seemingly hopeless. They were both broken and remade. She wished she could make him understand that, and believe it.

It occurred to her that there was something she could give him. Something he could relate to, and something he could use. She opened her eyes to find him watching her face. His eyes gave him away. He might have learned to put up a mask for Snoke, but it took all of his concentration to do it. He had never quite managed it with her. She remembered the way he looked at her in the elevator when she had moved closer to whisper to him. She would have kicked any man on Jakku who looked at her like that.

She kissed him first, because she wanted him to know she wasn't going anywhere. Then she carefully took his hands and held them to her temples.

“It's all going to be okay. I'm here for you.”
your hell a million times more if you asked me to.” She curled her fingers around his hands. “Will you walk through my memories?”

He nodded. She let go and breathed in. She had done her best to forget these things. But sometimes at night she still had the nightmares.

She started with the first thing she could remember. Her first night on Jakku. She had not been prepared for how cold it was in the desert. The sheer contrast between day and night had been sudden and terrifying. She was in a little lean-to in Niima Outpost with a couple of older boys. There were very few children there. The big, ugly creature she found out later was Plutt had brought her here and left her without explaining anything. One of the boys offered to let her share his blanket, but only if he could touch her…

She felt Kylo Ren's rage and took a deep breath.

There was so much more. She starved and nearly froze to death in the first week, before she finally gave in. It wasn't that bad. He didn't hurt her. But she could never shake the oily feeling of his hands on her. It felt so awful, she had gone out at dawn and begged for work, approaching any adult who had rations. No one had any work, but one woman had shown her how to make a shiv from rusted scrap.

She had waited until the end of the day, when the boys came back with their rations. They weren't expecting it. She hurt one pretty bad, without meaning to. The one who let her share his blanket. She stole everything he had while the other watched.

Then she searched the wreckage around Niima for someplace she could squeeze into that anyone bigger couldn't get to. A tiny nest on a rotted pile of tires. Open to the sky, but deep enough to hide from the wind, and well-insulated.

She found out later the boy she cut bled to death in the night. She hadn't meant to kill him, and she cried all night, hidden in the pile of rubber. He was the first of many men she'd had to fight off over the years.

(Ben's possessive rage was almost sweet, in a way. Unexpectedly naive.)

The weirdest part was, no one cared. She expected to get in trouble, but if anything, people granted her a touch of respect. She lived in the tires for three years. She'd kept track of the days with her shiv on a piece of brick. In those three years, she was like a feral thing.

Stealing in the night, singling out whoever she thought wouldn't retaliate, making her own clothes from scraps of fabric. She didn't know how the steam tent worked, so she didn't bathe, and she had to steal water, so she ate the rations dry and uncooked. Sometimes if she was quick she could catch a small lizard or a rodent. She ate those uncooked too.

(She felt him cringe in disgust. Oh, that was only the beginning.)

Days on Jakku blended together. Hiding, stealing, fighting for her freedom against others who saw a girl child as an easy target. For all sorts of nasty things. She cried every night, praying to wake up and find it was only a terrible nightmare. Eventually, she realized she didn't fit very well in her nest anymore.

She watched the busiest scrappers, made note of when they came and went. Any injury meant days without food as you waited to heal enough to go out again. Or died. She watched a lot of people die. Mostly so she could steal whatever was left.
She set a trap for an older man with a battered speeder. A pile of rocks that fell into the small cave he lived out of. It did more damage than she expected, destroying the home. She waited to see what would happen, and when a friend decided to take him in, she offered him a month's worth of quarter rations for the battered vehicle.

Rey had seen in his eyes that he knew it was her, and he knew it would be the end of his life, but he gave it to her without malice. That was the worst part. The adults knew something it took her years to understand. That was just life on Jakku. She took him rations and water whenever she could, until he died of infection from his wounds.

With the speeder, she could search for a better place to live. The hulking skeleton of the Imperial AT was far enough from the outpost, but she had to clear out all the sand and spiders and lizards. It was a hard, grueling task and she had to sleep under the speeder during the daytime so she could work at night. Once she figured out how to build a fire, it got easier. She set traps, and ate cooked food again for the first time in years.

( Spiders?

The birds and lizards ate them. Food is food.

His revulsion was almost amusing.)

Rey lived like that until she was around sixteen. Nine years according to her markings.

She met Ria outside the ratty cantina. It was a bad idea to intervene, but some part of her had never given in completely to Jakku’s code of pure selfishness. She saw the other girl trying to fight off drunk scrappers alone with a staff made of a metal scrap and she stopped.

At first she was just intrigued by the other woman's skill with the weapon. But once she stopped, she couldn't make herself move on. She called out, and they escaped on the speeder. Rey didn't want to share her home. Ria insisted it would only be a few days. She had been thrown out by her husband, but she had family coming for her from offworld. They could take Rey too, if she wanted. She didn't, and she didn't believe the woman really had family, but she was so lonely.

The companionship was nice. Ria wasn't much help scrapping, but she talked. A lot. A few days turned into a week. When Rey gently brought it up, the older woman had the perfect response. She had never kissed anyone before. She had no idea how to respond. Vaguely, she had a sense that it was weird to kiss another woman, but she was lonely, and it felt nice.

(She could feel his jealousy and… curiosity?

Don't get excited, it didn't last long.)

She was not entirely stupid, she had never left Ria alone with her things. But she didn't want to be responsible for a sick person while she was trying to work. Something had made her come in early, and she returned to find the woman's husband there. They tried to force her out. It was too much space for one person. And Ria had smiled her coy smile and looked out from under her fine eyelashes and suggested they could… share.

She was furious, and hurt. She picked up the other woman's staff, and she forced them out of her home. It was a bitter fight. Ria was agile, but not as strong as Rey. Her husband was a scrawny alcoholic. But there were two of them, and she had never fought so desperately before. She knew if she lost they would take everything, her home, her vehicle, her stockpiles of food and supplies.
She didn't expect the staff to be so lethal. It was just one lucky swing at the back of the head, and the other woman had crumpled to the ground. Her worthless spouse took one look at her wide eyes and broken skull and ran for his life.

Rey buried the body herself. It took an entire day. She never saw the husband again, and until she rescued BB-8, she never tried to make friends again. She had forgotten the rules of survival on Jakku, and it nearly cost her everything. She still saw Ria’s wide, lifeless eyes sometimes in her dreams.

You did nothing wrong.

I know. She did know. She had come to terms with it.

Rey took another deep breath, and reached for the white light inside of her. Empty and colorless, but also warm and solid.

Do you see?

She sensed him there, and for a moment, her pulse raced. Fear and adrenaline filled her as she absorbed his understanding.

This is...

Yes. Life. She let a memory surface. The interrogation room on Starkiller, when he stood so close and for a second her body reacted and her pulse quickened with something besides fear.

Death. Ria’s empty eyes. Anger, sadness, loss.

Balance. She felt his mind like she had once before, in Snoke’s throne room, when they had fought as one person, in perfect awareness.

I see it. And instead of him being inside her mind, she felt... as if... she were in his mind. But... it was the same place. She could see his every thought. Feel his body as if it were her own.

How is this possible? He was in awe. You've done this... how long?

As long as I can remember.

How old are you?

I don't know. Eighteen?

Nineteen.

How do you know?

I know this feeling... I thought it was the call to the light... but it was... you.

Rey. This is our lifeforce.

I know.

Ours.

Yes.
As promised, some gratuitous smut to make up for the previous chapter of emotional abuse olympics.

She sensed him pull away, and the void was so sudden, she gasped. She opened her eyes just as he was. For a moment, they just stayed there, still, filled with an impossible sense of wonder.

Then his eyes dropped down to her lips and he reached out to hold her face in his hands. His touch burned, his mouth hot and insistent. She felt it too.

She pushed blankets and pillows aside wildly, climbing on top of him, drawing her mouth down to trace her tongue along his neck and shoulder. He groaned and shuddered, his hands painfully grasping her hair and firmly pulling her lips back to his. She met his demanding kisses with her own, catching his lip between her teeth before she pushed her tongue into his mouth.

Every touch was exquisitely intense, her body demanded everything, his mouth on her neck, her shoulders, her breasts. She moaned and writhed against him, craving more. She did not resist when he wrapped his arms around her and used his power to roll them over, but she cried out in surprise at the strange sensation of feeling the Force flow through her to him.

He looked down with a wildness in his eyes.

“You do it.”

“What?”

“Use the Force. I want to feel it.”

She closed her eyes, casting around for something. One hand slid from his back to rest flat against the bed. She wondered, with their strength together, could she... He yelped in shock.

She opened her eyes. She had only meant to lift up the bed. Not every piece of furniture in the room. In her surprise, she let go, and then covered her mouth, startled at the sound of things crashing to the floor. There were some noises... from outside the room.

“Was that...?”

“Probably.”

She started to move, to see what kind of disaster she had caused, but he grabbed her wrists in his hands and pinned her down. His mouth moved down her neck, feverishly urgent.

“We can work on that later.”

“I agree.” She panted.

She couldn't breathe. He kept her pinned down despite her persistent attempts to free herself,
shifting his grip into one hand so he could hold her breasts and taste the sensitive flesh of her nipples.

Her hips moved against him instinctively as she struggled to free her arms.


“No.”

She arched her back and moaned when his hand slid between her legs. He dragged two fingers through her slick body, and then forcefully shoved them into her mouth.

She looked up at him, trying to understand… Oh. She remembered suddenly, the way her pulse quickened when she was held at his mercy on Starkiller… the flush in her face when she was on her knees before him, waiting for him to act, knowing he would save her… the dream cave.

He forced her legs apart, and when she felt him reach out through her… she closed her eyes, and let him paralyze her. He took his hand off her wrists and caressed the side of her face.

“I know what's in your mind. Can we try it?”

Wordlessly, eyes locked on his, she nodded her consent.

Carefully, she tested her movements, and found she could still move her mouth. She bit down on his fingers. Hard. He yanked them away and put his hand around her throat.

She met his cold gaze, her eyes defiant, unfazed except for her panting breath.

“Beg me.”

“For what?”

She knew what. But he was right. She liked this game.

He leaned forward and whispered in her ear in his best Kylo Ren voice.

“Beg me to fuck you.”

She tried, in vain, to stifle the way she gasped, the way her body trembled. She waited for him to pull back and look into her eyes, meeting his gaze as defiantly as possible.

“No.”

“Yesss…”

His hand glided over her body, back to where her legs were spread open around him. He ran his hand lightly over her center, before drawing it down. She moaned when she felt his fingers slip inside her, fighting against his control.

Rey was well aware that she could break it if she really wanted to. He knew it too. They were playing this game together, and it was raw and hesitant in places, but she wanted it to go on.

She hadn't realized her eyes were closed until he slapped her cheek. It was laughably gentle. She waited until he did it a second time, harder.

“Look at me. Open your eyes and look at me.”
“Why do you need me to look at you all the time? Am I not loud enough for you?”

She could see it in his head, how he loved her voice, the unexpectedly crisp Coruscanti accent that whispered of her unknown origins.

“Not yet.”

He moved his hand, curling his fingers upwards, finding the place he could see in her mind. Suddenly she lost the ability to think, or speak, or do anything but exist in that exquisite feeling. He felt it, and he kept moving his fingers until she peaked, gasping as it washed over her, sobbing his name incoherently, completely unprepared for such an intense response.

"Happy now?"

She panted, trying to her best to put on a cool tone despite her ragged breathing. He smiled, leaning down to kiss her forehead.

"No."

She tried to keep her gaze on him as he experimented, learning her body with singular focus, following suggestions he found in her mind. She tried her best to keep her eyes on him as he drew another climax from her, so he could see the waves of pleasure pass over her, but her vision blurred. She was louder this time, and she added some colorful cursing for his enjoyment.

He watched with intense, excited eyes, his pupils dilated and his lips parted slightly.

"Better?"

"Yes. I could listen to that for hours."

His voice hinted that he might try to drag it out. She shivered.

"I'll lose my voice eventually."

"Maybe. Do you want me to stop? Let you go?"

She met the challenge in his eyes, offering a coy smile.

"Not yet."

He leaned down to kiss her thoroughly, before trailing kisses up to her ear.

"I like hearing you, Rey. But your eyes... Your eyes burn. You look so vulnerable."

He kissed her again, pressing his tongue deep into her mouth. She pressed against him, making him apply more force, until he pulled away and looked into her eyes again. His fingers moved inside her, slowly and she groaned.

"Ben," she breathed. Her voice was getting hoarse. "I don't know if I can... again..."

She could feel a sly smugness in his mind. Everything the day before had been intense, but this was indescribable. She felt like she was on fire, but she wanted more anyway.

“This is...” His eyes burned too. It was almost unbearable.

“I know.”
“Please.”

She pushed against his hold again. He was struggling to keep his focus, but she didn't want to break it. She wanted to make him give in. She wet her lips slightly with her tongue. She knew he wouldn't be able to resist, and he didn't.

He held her jaw tightly as he kissed her, and she opened her mouth willingly, yielding to him and drawing him in, groaning against his mouth when he added a third finger inside her. He thumbed her center and she couldn't stand it any longer.

She broke through his laughably feeble paralysis, bringing her arms down around his neck and pulling out of their kiss to breathe into his ear with her voice low and raw.

“Please, fuck me.”

His growl was agonized. He withdrew his hand and replaced it, firmly thrusting himself into her. They reached out at the same time, seeking and sharing sensations, each moving in response to the other. He knew what she needed, his fingers moving down to draw it out of her. She tried to muffle her cries in his shoulder, but he drew away, so she let herself be as loud as she could manage, moaning, *screaming* his name, both of his names, and every colorful curse she knew, drawn on by his absurd delight in it.

Her breath came back to her slowly, but she knew he wasn't finished and she suddenly wanted to feel him, and hear him. *Yes. Let everyone hear us. I don't care.* She wrapped her legs around him, pulling him into her with a strength that made him groan. She gripped his hair and his ear firmly, dragging him down to whisper with her wrecked voice.

“Say my name when you come. *Shout it.* I want everyone in this hotel to know that I'm fucking Kylo Ren.”

She was shocked at her daring. He was shocked, but it had the desired effect. For a moment his eyes flickered with that same heated look he had whenever she did something unexpected, or used the Force in a powerful display. Then he thrust into her wildly and his eyes fluttered closed as she felt his climax fill her mind, made stronger by the long delay. He was much louder than her.
Rey Has a Very Stressful Day

Chapter Summary

First, she had to face the hotel staff about damages. Then some ugly whore had the nerve to touch Ben in a completely inappropriate way.

And then he had to bring up the M word, so casually.

Fuck it, she needs to let off some steam, even if that means wielding Kylo’s stupid fiery death blade.

Sabine Wren is no pushover, even in her retirement.

Chapter Notes

I really just wanted a good fight scene. Coming up next: the Darksaber vs Kylo’s Fiery Deathblade. Honestly, who wouldn't want to see that?

“Ah, Captain. I hope you have good news.”

“Unfortunately, no.”

Phasma hated Armitage Hux even more than she had hated his father. It was like someone had taken Brendol Hux and put him through reconditioning one too many times. The base personality was the same, but Armitage had a few too many screws loose. She had been hoping for a change in leadership when she helped engineer his father's death, but it seemed Snoke preferred unstable underlings.

She had never really like the old monster, and she was glad he was dead, for the sake of the First Order if nothing else, but she wished Kylo Ren would come back from his little dalliance on Mandalore. Ren was unstable too, but unlike Hux, he had more than two brain cells to rub together and they were mostly on the same page about the future of the Order.

She remained impassive while the general snarled at her over the commlink. She was grateful it wasn't face-to-face so she wouldn't have to clean spit off her armor.

“I did increase the offer, but no one seems interested. Perhaps we could alter our arrangements with the Hutts.”

“Need I remind you that going there was your idea to begin with?”

“You gave me vague orders and expected me to manufacture a favorable outcome. Unfortunately, acquiring funds from out of thin air is somewhat more difficult than assassinating an elderly officer.”

Hux's face grew red.
“That has nothing to do with-”

“I had thought you more competent, General. Do you think Kylo Ren is an idiot?”

“Do you think you'll be rewarded for coming back empty-handed?”

His head moved closer to the recorder and she saw something familiar. Was he in the Supreme Leader's command center? Surely that was unauthorized.

“No. But do recall, this whole business with the bounty hunters was your suggestion. The girl fought off the entire guard and Ren. It's preposterous to think that a few bounty hunters could capture her.”

She knew it was a stupid plan, but Hux was possessed by jealousy and rage when it came to the subject. He was convinced Ren had planned the assassination to claim power and that he intended to take Snoke’s place and give the girl his previous position. While she agreed it was probably true, Phasma respected Kylo Ren's ambition. And if he wanted to install his slut as his enforcer, at least they knew she was an accomplished fighter.

Privately, Phasma was curious. She had never seen the woman, but if she had captured Kylo Ren's interest so thoroughly, there must be something truly special about her.

“The young Hutt was interested in trade -” she tried.

“No! I am ending your mission. Return to the Absolution at once.”

She sighed when he ended the connection. She hadn't wanted to do this. She had hoped they would take each other out. Now she had to choose a side. It wasn't a difficult choice, but she had to be careful about the execution. The Supreme Leader’s temper was infamous, and she did not want to bear the brunt of it in person, but she had been paging his comm all morning, since those idiot bounty hunters had reported their failure. Perhaps it was time to try a different approach.

Despite her earlier words, Rey felt a little odd leaving the hotel with Kylo Ren's arm around her waist. He insisted they needed somewhere private to work, where they wouldn't accidentally elevate every object on an entire floor and cause the building’s owner to politely but desperately ask when they were planning to leave.

She insisted on offering the man compensation, but then found herself completely baffled by the workings of credits and coin. Ben said he would take care of it, but she was stubborn. It was her clumsy, unfocused use of their Force link that caused it, and she did not like the idea of him paying her debts.

“You have no idea how much money you're talking about. Where would you even get those kinds of funds?”

He spoke mildly, but his assumption angered her, and she didn't like the way the manager ignored her and addressed only Ben.

“I have an account your mother made for me. When we brought BB-8 back, she split the reward money between me and Finn.”

“I am afraid we cannot take Republic credits,” the short, stubby creature apologized. “However, there are still some embassies who will exchange them, for the right person.”
She knew he was looking at Ben, waiting for a response. She sighed.

“Where?”

“I beg your pardon?”

“What embassy, where are they? No, don’t look at him, I’m the one asking!”

Rey scowled down at him. She was a second away from picking the man up and shaking him. With the Force or possibly her bare hands. She knew Ben was amused, she could feel his sadistic little smirk while he watched the man shift uncomfortably.

“The… the New Alderaanians will always accept credits, as per their policy, but I don’t know if they will cover this much.” He looked at Ben, beads of sweat breaking out over his pasty pink forehead. “Or you could try the Hutts, I suppose.”

“Thank you. I'll be back.”

She bowed as the man ambled away, turning to see Ben’s eyes sparkling above his arrogant smile. She rolled her eyes and disentangled herself from his arm.

“I am going to figure this out. Will you wait for me?”

“What? By yourself?”

“No. I’m going to call a friend. But I don’t think she likes you.”

“None of your friends like me.”

“Exactly.” She met his gaze defiantly. “Please just wait here. I know she can help me. I promise I won't take too long.”

“Alright, alright.”

He kissed her, for a second longer than she was comfortable with in public, but he let her leave. She watched him stride over to the little polished wood bar and noticed the man behind the counter hurry over to serve him, leaving the customer he was previously engaged with. It didn't matter that he wasn't wearing his mask anymore. They knew who he was.

Everyone, everywhere, knew who he was. It was something she would just have to get used to.

She drew up the hood of her cloak and walked down past the little park to a bank of public-use commlinks. It took her a few tries to figure it out but eventually she got to to a live assistance droid and convinced it to put her through.

“Hi Maz, sorry about the charges, I'll repay you as soon as—”

But the little old woman waved her hand dismissively.

“Don’t worry about it, child. How are you?” She adjusted some lenses on her face, peering through the grainy connection. “You look well. I take it he let you go?”

Rey paused. She had expected Maz Kanata to be up-to-date, but she was suddenly afraid the ancient woman would judge her.

“No, I just came to… He’s not… keeping me prisoner or anything.”
She looked at the comm and blinked back tears. Why was she crying?

Maz pulled her lenses back and gave Rey a sad smile.

“You don’t need to explain anything to me, child. Are you happy?”

“Yes.” She rubbed her eyes with the rough fabric of the cloak. “Oh, yes. At first I was so scared, but now I…”

“You really do love him?” Maz leaned forward and peered into her eyes without waiting for a response. “I can see it in your eyes. The ways of the Force are always a mystery, even to me. Now, what can I help you with? I assume you didn’t just call me for relationship advice.”

Ren nodded politely when the bartender brought his whiskey, then retreated to sit as far away from the rest of the patrons as possible. He did not like this, he hated people and public places and Rey’s vacancy made him feel as if he had left something valuable behind somewhere.

His subconscious urged him to look for her, even though he could sense her not too far away, and if he concentrated he could almost hear her thoughts. He didn’t want to pry, so he left her alone, quietly trying to mind his own business and wishing other people would mind theirs.

He jumped when he saw the First Order ambassador come into the hotel and speak to the concierge. He tried desperately to become part of the chair he was sitting in, but his arms and legs were far too large. He thought about looking for a back door out of the bar, but realized how ridiculous it would look for the Supreme Leader to sneak out of a hotel bar. So he leaned forward, one hand on his lightsaber, looking pointedly out the window. He jumped when she touched his shoulder, a sudden panic coming over him. What if Rey came back…

*Ben? Is everything alright?*

She must have felt his surge of emotion. It was too damned difficult to keep himself in check, after they had spent so much time with their minds and bodies entangled.

*It’s nothing really, just… Can you hurry, please?*

*I’m on my way.*

He glanced at the ambassador as she took a seat across from him. She was wearing a red leather thing that could generously be described as a dress, with weird red eye makeup to match. With her red-orange hair color, it looked horrifying. He imagined what his mother would have said. She had been talking and stopped, had she asked him something? He glanced over, skimming her thoughts.

“What about Phasma?”

“She asked me to get a message to you. Said it was of the ‘utmost importance.’ I tried to contact you, but your comm has been disconnected and the hotel staff refused to take a message.”

She leaned forward, purposely exposing an ample amount of cleavage.

“They said you had a guest, but I don’t see anyone.”

She reached out a bejeweled hand to touch his leg, somewhat higher up his thigh than was
appropriate in public. He saw movement out of the corner of his eye. Why was the barkeeper ducking? He felt her a split second later, shocked at the fiery ball of rage in her mind. The ambassador shrieked as Rey's staff came down on her wrist. It was a very light tap, he had felt it on his knee, but one would have thought her wrist was broken.

“I take it you can see me now?”

Oh, she was so cold when she was angry. Her voice was devoid of emotion, even Phasma wasn't that terrifying. He watched, transfixed, as Rey lifted the woman out of her seat by her hair. She was too angry to risk using her powers, he realized. She was still gunshy from the Toydarian in Cloud City.

But she didn't need them anyway, she had plenty of physical strength, which she used to drag the ambassador to the door and push her out.

“How dare you? I had a message for the Supreme Leader! From Captain Phasma of the First Order.”

Rey made a beckoning gesture with her hand, and the woman's commlink floated out of her pocket and into her hand. She held it out behind her, without looking, and he took it. He wished he had his mask, he was having trouble keeping a straight face while the other hotel patrons and the desk staff watched and whispered.

“Call Phasma,” she demanded.

“Now? Someone might overhear.”


She had let go of the woman's hair, but still held her staff out threateningly. Her eyes never strayed from her enemy. He found the right frequency and waited for it to connect. The woman's trademark helmet came into view before him almost immediately.

“Captain Phasma. I've been told you have an urgent message for me.”

“Yes, sir. I've been trying to reach you—”

“You sent Ambassador Adea to find me?”

“I take it she was successful?”

“Yes. I'll contact you when I have a more secure connection.”

“But, sir, there are bounty hunters—”

“I know.” He snapped the unit closed.

Ambassador Adea glared as Rey lowered her staff. Ren handed her communicator back and she took it, careful not to get too close to him under Rey's watchful stare. She smoothed her clothes and bowed her head.

“Thank you, Supreme Leader.” She cast an arrogant gaze at Rey as she turned to walk away. “Good luck, sweetheart.”

He waited until the woman was out of sight, before cautiously touching Rey's arm. She turned slowly, slinging her staff back over her shoulder.
“I’m sorry. I don’t know why I got so angry.”

He chuckled as she walked past him, letting him hold the door for her.

“I do.” She looked up at him, her eyes dark and brooding. He slipped his arm around her waist again and hugged her to him. “You don’t want to know what I would do to anyone who touched you.”

Rey didn't seem particularly relieved by that. She sighed and approached the desk clerk.

“Let's just go. Sabine is waiting.”

Somehow she had acquired enough coin to cover their charges. She didn't volunteer information, and he didn't ask. He knew she was stubborn and he didn't want to insult her pride. He wanted to tell her how impressed he was at her incredible resourcefulness, but he didn't know how to say it without sounding condescending, so he remained silent.

She was quiet while he summoned a transporter and instructed the droid to take them to Wren’s estate. He could feel her brooding over something, but she let him put his arm around her and hold her close during the ride.

After spending the last three days alone with her, Ren had come to understand that as comfortable as she was accepting her emotions when they came, sometimes she needed to process them afterwards. He knew she would talk when she was ready. When they reached their destination, she stopped him before getting out.

“You should fight her.”

“I thought you didn't trust me.”

“You have more training. I trust you more than I trust myself right now.”

Then he understood. The Force-link, losing her friends, all the loss of people when she had just started to open her heart. Him, and everything between them. It was too much. She was right.

He had trained for years to find his focus in the middle of the chaos of his emotions. He could take pain and loss and confusion and sharpen them into a weapon. But Rey's strength came from the opposite. From the balanced peace of their shared lifeforce. It was too difficult to keep herself there with everything weighing on her mind. She was used to silence and solitude.

He nodded.

“I will teach you how to focus.”

“I know, but, right now… I'm afraid of myself.”

He kissed the top of her head.

“I'm not.”

Sabine Wren received them with what could only be described as extreme excitement. Despite retiring years ago, it seemed the old Rebel was still an accomplished warrior, since leadership on the planet was passed down through the Darksaber. Not by hereditary lines, but by physical possession and the ability to maintain it, thus Sabine remained in top form with a daily practice schedule of at
least two hours. On top of that, she had all the political and administrative demands, and still found time to work on her true passion - the colorful paintings and murals that decorated her home.

Rey mostly listened as the Mandalorian Leader and the Supreme Leader conversed, not because she wasn't interested, but she had nothing to add, having no experience with... really anything they talked about. Instead, she watched Kylo Ren closely, seeing him interact for the first time with someone he considered neither friend nor foe. An equal, warrior, ruler and acquaintance of his mother's. If Sabine had been slightly younger, she might have felt threatened, but the Mandalorian was careful to include her, and occasionally Ren would edge up close and murmur some sarcastic commentary for her ears only.

It was an amazing building, Rey had never seen anything like it, and the idea of an ancestral estate, passed down through generations of people who each left their own distinct mark, was fascinating to her.

"Is that a Gungan sculpture?" Ren said suddenly, pointing to some awful sculpture of clay and gold trim. Sabine made a face.

"Oh, you're familiar with them aren't you?"

"My mother took me to Naboo a few times. To the lake country."

They were both using what Rey thought of as 'protocol voice', so carefully devoid of inflection it had a faint edge of disdain. She peered at the thing, trying to understand why anyone would craft something so ugly, or put it in their home for decoration.

"I'm sorry, what is a 'gungan'?" She did not expect to see Ren snort with laughter as Sabine hesitated to explain.

"They, ahh... they're a native water-dwelling race from Naboo."

"Oh." She looked from the statue, to her lover, snickering behind his fist, back to Sabine. "I suppose we'll see some if we go there."

"No, absolutely not-" Ren began, at the same time Sabine said "Oh, I hope not!"

"I feel like I missed something," she murmured. "Are they like... primitive or something?"

Kylo Ren gently steered her away as Sabine continued the tour that was supposed to take them to her practice ground in the back of the house. While he was close, she took the chance to whisper to him.

"Why would anyone think that thing is art? It's horrifying."

She looked up expecting him to correct or explain, but he just glanced down and gave her an approving smirk.

"Oh no, you're right. It's awful."

"I mean, it looks like Plutt wearing a gold chain. Why would you want that in your house?"

"Probably a diplomatic gift. One day I'll show you my mother's collection. If it's still... Well, wherever it is. She had some really bizarre wedding gifts."

He frowned thoughtfully as Sabine led them outside into the back half of the estate. Rey
recognized it from the holovid of the memorial service. So she was distracted when he continued speaking.

“When we get married we'll do it quietly. No guests, no gifts, just us and someone to officiate.”

She stopped. He kept on walking, following the Mandalorian across the covered courtyard onto the sun-drenched lawn. She stood in the shade, watching him examine the hilt of the Darksaber that Sabine held out for his inspection, and a dozen things clicked in her mind at once.

She set down her bag and her staff and her cloak, striding forward with a renewed sense of purpose. He turned, sensing her, but she didn't even really look at him, instead she just held out her hand before him.

“Give me your lightsaber.”

“You said you weren't.”

“I've changed my mind.” She still didn't look at him. She knew he would sense it over the bond, that she was angry about something, but he wouldn't cause a scene, not here. Hopefully he would wait until they left, or even until they got to off the planet, so she could have some time to think.

“Rey. Are you sure you want to do this?”

Their eyes met briefly as she picked up the hilt he offered.

“No, I don't want to. But I think… I have to.”
All about lightsabers. And darksabers. And lightstaves?

Chapter Summary

Yep, Darksaber vs. Kylo’s Fiery Deathblade, let's go!!

And Rey's lightweapon, finally!! Hope it was worth the build up!

What's that? Another wild Ahsoka?

Sabine was good. Better than Ben, even. Rey was afraid she was actually going to lose.

The sun was blazing overhead, sweat dripping into her eyes and plastering escaped strands of hair to her forehead. But she was accustomed to working in sweltering conditions, which was good, because her opponent wasn't holding back.

The only advantage Rey had was her Force powers, which should have been enough, but for an old woman, Sabine was fast. And she had clearly fought Force users before. No matter how much Rey tried to distract her, to give herself a single second to trip or shove with even the slightest touch of power, Sabine was ready. She leapt off the ground multiple times, using her jetpack to avoid falling, then gaining the advantage from above, forcing Rey to roll and dodge, always just barely parrying the darkly glowing blade.

She wished she'd taken the time to practice with Kylo Ren's lightsaber, as it still felt slightly heavy and awkward in her grip, and the crossguard made it dangerous to wield with her favored double-handed grip.

She thought of how he swung it around so effortlessly in one hand, and wondered how long it had taken him to get accustomed to it. He had modified his original blue saber after he joined Snoke, but the fiery red crystal was too strong for the base, thus the venting. Or so he claimed. Personally, she thought he just had a flare for the dramatic and had found a convenient excuse to make his lightsaber as intimidating as possible.

She yelped as she just barely ducked Sabine's advancing blade, wishing the Mandalorian’s armor wasn't so finely crafted as to make the vents useless. Another opponent would have suffered burns on their hands and arms at this point, but all she had managed to inflict were scorch marks, while she had resorted to focusing fully on defense.

She could feel Kylo Ren watching intently, sometimes from behind her own eyes, but she had no time to listen to any tips or instructions, and he was wise enough not to distract her.

Desperate to regain control of her side if the field, she stilled her mind, waiting for an opening - there! - to let go of her weapon and drop down, catching the hilt and rolling from under her opponent's blade. But she heard Ben shout, and felt something sear her palm.

She had caught the hilt too high up, and the venting had burned into her left palm. The same hand that was still healing from her recent frostbite wounds. She cursed and shifted to her right hand, but she knew she’d lost. She fought on valiantly, to the point of exhaustion, only once managing to Force-push Sabine into the ground, successfully killing her jetpack, but not actually causing more...
than a few bruises.

When the other woman powered down her blade, all Rey could do was drop to her knees, panting, absolutely drenched in sweat and covered with bruises. She was surprised to find that her scalded palm was the only saber wound on her.

Sabine took off her helmet, revealing a face just as wet and exhausted as Rey, and offered her a hand up. She immediately inspected Rey's palm.

“Since you did that to yourself, I think we'll call it a draw.”

“But you were winning!” Rey frowned at her, wondering if it were some kind of trick. But the other woman shook damp hair from her eyes and gave Rey a careful once over.

“If I were the same age and had mystical powers, maybe. But I haven't had a challenge like that in twenty years, and if I ever do again, it will end with the transfer of power to Mandalore’s new leader.”

She put an arm around Rey and guided her into the building. Rey looked around suddenly, not seeing Ben in the immediate vicinity and slightly uncomfortable alone in the monstrously huge house.

*I'm here.*

He sounded annoyed, but not with her. She looked around to see he had found a dark corner to lurk in while Sabine instructed a servant to show Rey where she could clean-up and get some rest. She started to follow, but when Ben got up with the clear intention of following, the servant stopped and looked back to her employer.

“It's alright, they come together.” Her eyes held Rey’s. “Although, if anything happens because the Supreme Leader is in my house, I am holding you accountable.”

Rey did not want to argue. She really didn't want to do anything but clean up and maybe take a nap or sit against the wall and meditate. She did not want to hear Kylo Ren’s scathing critique of her fighting, and the only reason she hadn't shouted at him was because she did not want to have a fight in a house where she was being treated as an honoured guest.

So she just kind of ignored him while she took off her clothes and brushed out her hair, although he followed her around the little suite of rooms until she turned on the water and drowned him out. She took her time bathing. The facilities didn't include a bath, but although the idea of soaking her aching muscles sounded wonderful, she was grateful the loud running water gave her an excuse to have a few minutes by herself.

She had been mentally preparing herself to talk to him when she got done, so she was surprised to find Ben gone when she walked into the bedroom. Sabine’s servant had left her some clean clothes to change into, thankfully, since she did not really want to put on dirty clothes after she had just showered, and she was happy to see simple garb of a tunic and leggings in a dark blue fabric. It was quite comfortable, though clearly well-made, and she wondered if they would let her take it with her when she left. Since someone had ruined her only change of clothes…

She felt a hint of a smile, remembering that first night. As infuriating and arrogant as he was, she would never regret her decision to go to him. She had thought she might at first, but when Maz
Kanata asked if she was happy, she had been surprised to realize she was.

She was also happy to have some downtime without him, however. She could still sense him somewhere nearby, so she wasn't too worried. The shower was refreshing enough that she didn't feel like sleeping, so she went into the little sitting room and sat down on the floor, slowly working through her tangled emotions, one by one, until she felt a little more centered.

Balance.

Now that she thought about Ben's casual comment on marriage when she wasn't feeling so pressured, it seemed more… acceptable. She didn't really see the need for it, but if he wanted to for some kind of diplomatic reasons, she could understand. She agreed with him about keeping it quiet though. She had no desire to wear some kind of expensive costume and participate in religious rituals that had no meaning to her, nor did she want any weird sculptures to put…

Where? Where are we going to live? She grimaced, remembering how he'd taken her stubborn refusal to be a part of the First Order. But he had wanted her to rule the galaxy at his side, and she had no desire to rule anything. She had hated the way some of the Resistance members seemed to think she was Leia's heir and looked to her for leadership.

Obviously Ben wanted it though, and it occurred to her that she'd never asked him why. Or even what his plans for the First Order were. He had said something about bringing justice and order to places like Jakku, which didn't sound bad, it was just the way they went about it was so heavy-handed and tyrannical…

She sensed him at the door, and opened her eyes when he came in. He sat down in a chair next to her, radiating all kinds of unhappiness.

“What's wrong? Are you still angry with me for losing?”

“What? You didn't lose, she agreed it was a draw.”

She was grateful for that, but that didn't explain why he looked and felt so upset. He sensed her worry and leaned forward, reaching out for her hand. She gave him her unbandaged right one and he held it gently in both of his, lifting it up to kiss her knuckles.

“I have to go back to the First Order.” He sighed.

She could tell he had more to say, so she stayed quiet, listening. She didn't want to go back to the First Order, but he was always easier to reach if she just gave him time to collect his thoughts.

“I know you don't want to. I won't force you. But Hux has done things that I cannot allow him to get away with. I'm sure this means nothing to you, but I need to be there.”

“Why? What did he do? You can tell me, it's not like I can just call up Poe and feed him information. He wouldn't listen if I tried.” She leaned forward to meet his troubled eyes. “I'll help you, in any way I can”

“Come with me. I promise, Rey, you can leave anytime you want. I'll give you a ship.”

She took a deep breath. She had wanted to understand his plans for the First Order. She rested her forehead against their joined hands, thinking. She had to have something from him first. It was fine to promise her a ship when they got there, but what if things didn't go as planned? What if Hux had organized a mutiny? She wouldn't put anything past that rabid little weasel. No. She wasn't going to let him walk into a trap alone.
“Help me build my weapon. Then we’ll go.”

She looked up to see surprise flooding his beautifully-expressive eyes. He pulled on her arm, dragging her up to kneel in front of him so he could wrap his arms around her tightly, pressing kisses into her neck.

“Thank you. Thank you.” He let go and frowned down at her. “I thought you said there was only one blue crystal?”

She shrugged.

“One blue, one red. Balance.”

His eyes searched her face.

“I’ve used your lightsaber twice. It doesn't feel any different.”

“Hmm. We'll see.”

Actually, it was a lot different, but it wasn’t a bad thing. Ben had explained the purpose of the Sith’s use of red, and she could feel it when she held the crystal in her palm, feeding it carefully, just enough so that it glowed a dull ember-red. If she listened, she could hear it call out to all the negative feelings inside her, memories of pain and suffering and death. But in her mind, those emotions weren’t inherently evil. They had their purpose.

The blue crystal was easier to hear, the gentler whispers of peace, warmth and living things. She held them both, the red in her left and the blue in her right, and reached for the balance within, the white light of her life force.

Their life force.

She could feel Ben watching, heard his soft intake of breath when she reached for their center. She was sitting on the floor, pieces of weapon components arranged before her as she tried to get the design just so. But something felt off, and she wasn’t sure what it was. For the tenth time, she set the crystals down and growled in frustration.

“I don’t know what it is. When I hold the red one in my left, it feels too strong. But if I put the blue there, it just feels… unbalanced.”

Ben looked over her shoulder from the chair where he was sitting behind her, frowning at her careful arrangement of metal and glass pieces.

“What if you move the stabilizer down and put the activation points closer to the center?”

He didn’t touch anything this time, thankfully he had learned after she slapped his hands the last five times. She shook her head, chewing idly on a thumbnail.

“But I need to be able to activate them separately. I don’t want to broadcast Sith red if I’m trying to negotiate with the Resistance, they’ll open fire immediately.”

“Your precious Resistance sounds so very peaceful.”

Rey rolled her eyes.

“What do you think Phasma would do if she saw a blue lightsaber blade coming out of the distance? Wait politely and offer me a cup of tea?”
“No, she’d open fire.” He sighed, his hands gently massaging away the tension building in her shoulders. “I don’t know what to tell you. Lightsabers are highly personal. No single one is the same, and everyone’s process is different.”

“I wonder if—”

She was interrupted by a polite tap on the door.

“Come in!”

The same kindly-eyed maid who had shown her to the room and laid out fresh clothes poked her head in. Her eyes roved curiously over the outspread components before she raised her eyes to address them. “I apologize for interrupting, but we’re about to serve dinner and Sabine thought you might be hungry? She also says she has some things to discuss with you, if you don’t mind joining her in her private quarters.”

Ben was already on his feet while Rey wrapped her project up in a battered piece of cloth, slipping the crystals in her pockets.

“Of course,” he agreed.

Rey scrambled to her feet.

“That sounds lovely, yes. Thank you.”

They followed the older woman down some stairs, past the horrible statue that Rey thought looked a bit like Unkar Plutt, onto a small open terrace with a cozy table where Sabine and her gray alien sidekick were already seated. Another door further down the terrace opened into a sitting room with comfortable, well-worn furniture, and a large crate of art supplies in one corner.

“Ah, I hope you’re not aching as much as I am, Rey.”

It truly appeared to be an informal dinner, Sabine seemed to prefer to keep things as simple as possible. Rey smiled as the older woman poured her a glass of the same steaming beverage she was drinking. There was a basket of bread on the table, with plates of cheese and fruit and some grilled meat speared on sticks.

“Please help yourselves, Zeb will eat it all if you’re not quick enough.”

Remembering the way Ben had stared at her eating habits, Rey did her best not to overfill her plate, but she was at a loss as for how the myriad of utensils were supposed to work. Knives and forks she understood, but why were there so many different sizes?

Ben seemed to sense her confusion, as she watched him break open a roll with his fingers and stuff some meat and cheese into it, then proceed to eat with his hands. She watched Zeb do the same before she did it herself, hoping she didn’t look as foolish as she felt.

Sabine didn’t seem to notice or care, and Rey slowly relaxed as she talked with her hulking gray friend about the bounty hunters they had captured the day before.

“What did you mean about a traditional Mandalorian farewell?”

She asked, feeling brave in such an intimate setting. Zeb laughed out loud and Sabine smiled.

“It means we stunned them, threw them onto their ship, and set the autopilot to a randomized
location. It’s actually a less extreme version of our traditions,” she explained.

“Traditionally, we would have just executed them,” Zeb put in. “Serves them right, it takes a special kind of idiot to try and collect a bounty here. Not to mention who they were after.”

“I apologize,” Ben said earnestly. “I should have paid more attention to Hux. I expected him to try something, but clearly I overestimated his intelligence.”

“Apology accepted,” Sabine said bluntly. “Now, I know we agreed it was a draw, but I am curious to find out who told you about my connection to Fulcrum? Surely you know it’s an old codename for Rebel intelligence agents.”

Rey looked at Ben before answering, but he simply shrugged, leaving her to decide how to explain that she was receiving visits from an old, dead Jedi.

“I had a vision,” she said, unable to think of a more delicate way of putting it. “It’s...hard to explain…”

Sabine waved her hand.

“Don’t worry, I know how Force visions go.” She shared a glance with her gray friend. “To answer your inquiry, there have been several agents to use that pseudonym, but I have a feeling what you want is the original.”

She paused to give Ben a hard stare.

“There was a Jedi apprenticed to Anakin Skywalker, before he turned.”

Ben coughed like he was about to choke, causing Rey to turn to him worriedly. He waved off her concern, swallowing hard and fixing Sabine with an intense stare. The Mandalorian and her friend exchanged another meaningful glance.

“She left the Order just before… Everything went downhill. No one really knew what happened to her, I think the Empire and Vader assumed she was killed by Inquisitors or clones, but those who knew her best knew she wouldn’t go down so easily. Her name was Ahsoka. She was the original Fulcrum, using her skills to spy on the Empire, destroying Inquisitors when she could and passing information to the Rebels. I’ve known her personally for a long time.”

“Ahsoka Tano was killed by Darth Vader years ago,” Ben argued. Sabine’s steel eyes flickered over him. “Is that what the Imperial record says?”

“There was a battle,” he paused, narrowing his eyes at her. “You said her name, at the memorial service.”

“You were watching, hmm? Well, I assure you, she’s not dead. Just extremely difficult to find. Although I’m not sure how many years she’s got left, assuming the Togruta have the same lifespan as humans. Anyway, you don’t find Ahsoka. She will find you.”

“I think she already has,” Rey said suddenly.

She remembered the old woman with the white lightsabers. *Horns, She thought. Togruta have horns, that’s what’s under the hood.*

Ben turned to her with an incredulous stare.
“I have no interest in talking to an old Jedi.”

“Yes, you made that quite clear. Maybe I want to talk to her, is that a crime?”

His eyes flashed with something… jealousy? … and she could feel his anger building through the bond. She got up from the table hurriedly, bowing to Sabine and Zeb.

“I’m really grateful for everything. It was an honor to fight you, your home really is lovely. But I think we should try and get some rest before we leave in the morning.”

She wrapped her hands around Ben’s arm, gently steering him away before he became even more sullen and angry. Sabine smiled and gave Rey a private wink.

“Of course, the honor was mine. Please feel free to rest as long as you like.”

“Thank you.”

She was barely able to get him back up the stairs to the room, shutting the door and standing against it as he stalked around, twirling the hilt of his lightsaber, but not actually igniting it. She sighed, trying to keep her breathing even.

“Ben. Don’t be like this.”

Eyes flashing with anger, he turned on her.

“I don’t care if she was Anakin’s apprentice. You’re my student. Mine.”

Rey did her best to keep her face calm and emotionless, breathing deeply to center herself. She had had a very trying day, emotionally and physically, and she did not have the energy to put up with one of his tantrums, but she also did not want to have a shouting match in Sabine Wren’s house.

“Of course I am.”

He stopped just inches from her face, his eyes roving over her body in a way that made her blood heat up and her flesh tingle. She met his eyes fiercely when they returned to her face.

“I don’t have time for that right now.”

He reached out and grasped her face, his thumb pressing into her jaw.

“Don’t pretend you’re not interested.”

“Gods, Ben! When am I ever not interested?” She closed her eyes to escape the heat in his angry stare. “I need to finish my lightsaber. You have responsibilities, remember? Responsibilities I promised to help you with. But I am not going back there without a weapon. Please, understand!”

He took his hand away and stalked into the bedroom.

“Fine. Work on your lightsaber alone. I’m going to bed.”

Breathe... You share a lifeforce with this man... You love him... Just breathe...

She gathered up her project supplies and her cloak.

“Good. I’m going outside for some peace and silence.”
She got a little lost in the corridors of the huge house, but once she found the hideous statue, she knew how to get to the training ground. There was plenty of open space on the grass under the stars, and Rey felt herself relaxing as she hadn’t in days.

This planet and its massive capitol were fascinating, but there so many buildings and bright lights and people, she felt suffocated. On Jakku, when the nights weren’t terribly cold, she could sometimes sit outside of her home and look up at the brilliant sky, wondering about her family…

What would she have done if she hadn’t rescued BB-8 and run into Finn? Would she still be on that rathole planet, waiting for someone to come back for her? How long would it have taken her to realize it was all a lie, that her parents were nobody and she was on her own to figure out the rest of her life?

She sat down on the soft grass and spread light weapon components out before her, feeling far more confident under the open sky than she had indoors. Beds were nice, and she was beginning to develop a special relationship with bathtubs - and hot running water - but a part of her would never feel comfortable behind so many walls, under several floors of rooms, cut off from the sound of the wind and the scent of the night sky.

Carefully, she arranged the pieces before her, worrying at her thumbnail as she looked them over.

What if… The red crystal was somewhat larger than the blue, but the blue had a deeper, stronger resonance. Maybe she was going about this the wrong way. She thought of the symbols in the little pool of water at the pinnacle cave on Ahch-To.

No light, without dark. No life without death…

Gently, she rearranged pieces until it felt… right.

She would never have tried this with Ben watching. He was constantly warning her that any careless mistake would cause the whole thing to explode in her face, and she had a feeling he would be dismissive of such an unorthodox design. But once it had come into her mind, she had to try it.

She closed her eyes, her hands and fingers moving slowly, but with firm, confident gestures. It took much longer than she expected, and by the time she was through, her forehead was beaded with sweat despite the cool evening air.

She opened her eyes and let the sleek, smooth piece of platinum fall into her hands. The hilt was slightly longer than Luke’s or Kylo’s, but slimmer and weighted to balance in the center, although she could activate either side independently. She switched the blue one on first, testing the heft and balance of it in her double-handed grip. It was still lighter than Kylo’s, even with the the larger base and dual crystals.

She switched it off and activated the red. The blade was slightly shorter than the blue, and she gripped it more like a short spear, effective, but inelegant.

She held her breath when she activated the center switch. The beams crossed inside, glowing through each other, producing a mostly white, colorless blade on each side. In the dark, the white had a clearly visible violet glow to the edges.

She tested it, spinning and thrusting in her regular training forms, a brilliant, bright smile across her face.

It was beautiful. Perfect.
And it was, most definitely, completely unique.

She strode back inside, elated. She had to show Ben, and she was afraid of what he might say, but she found she didn’t really need his approval. This weapon and she were one now, she could feel it on her belt as if it were an extra appendage, and she was deliriously proud of herself.

She paused on the steps going up to their shared room, seeing Sabine’s shadowed form down the hall. Suddenly the woman turned towards her, and she realized the Mandalorian was speaking with a guest she had not seen in the dark, a cloaked figure with a double-pointed hood and a gnarled white wooden staff. She hesitated. Clearly, she was not meant to be a part of this meeting, but she knew with a sudden clarity who the stranger was.

“Ahsoka?” She murmured softly.

The woman lowered her hood, displaying her striped blue horns and a wrinkled, weathered face with brilliantly blue eyes.

“Nice lightstaff,” she said, and winked.

Then she pulled her hood back up and walked down the hall, followed by Sabine.

Rey frowned, watching after them. Sabine had said Ahsoka would find them, and she was here now, but she didn’t seem to want to interact with Rey other than her mysterious wink.

Surely Sabine knew they were leaving in the morning? Should she go after them?

No, the Togruta had very clearly pulled up her hood and turned away. She frowned thoughtfully.

She was halfway up the stairs when she remembered her dream - Ben’s dream? - and Ahsoka’s white lightsabers. She had no idea what to think. Ben had never been very clear on the variety and meaning of lightsaber colors, but she had been led to believe white was a highly unusual color. The edges of violet even moreso.

She sat down on her side of the bed, the staff hilt in her hands. Ben was actually asleep, soring and sprawled over the bed, and she wanted so badly to wake him and show him what she had done, but he had been awake most of last night. Still, she didn’t feel much like sleeping at all.

She went to her bag and got the one Jedi tome she could puzzle out, the one that talked about the sacred concept of balance, and sat next to him on the bed, reading and waiting somewhat impatiently for him to wake up.

She wasn’t sure why, but Rey decided not to tell him about Ahsoka Tano’s strange visit. He had already been so upset at the idea of anyone else training her - He has to learn, I am not his property.

She thought of the atrocious woman with the red hair at the hotel, and her extreme overreaction.

But that was… She was touching him… Rey felt her cheeks flush. Okay, maybe we both need to learn some… boundaries.

She was still reading when he woke up, in the early hours of the morning. She had made it through a single chapter, but she felt like she’d only absorbed about half of it. She was sitting cross-legged next to him, propped up against the pillows with the book on her lap, the finished lightstaff just in front of her.
He rolled over and put his hand on her thigh, pressing his face into her hip where the slightest bit of skin showed through her clothes. She yelped when he nipped at her flesh, letting the book fall closed.

“Ben!”

She started to wiggle away and his arm slid up her thigh, his fingers purposely dancing over sensitive areas before wrapping around her waist and holding her still. She closed her eyes, briefly just enjoying the fact that his first thought on waking was of her. He reached for her hand, and his eyes fell on the shining hilt of her weapon.

He sat up quickly, picking it up and examining it carefully, his fingers caressing the smooth, slim surface.

“This is beautiful, Rey.”

“Thank you.”

He handed it back to her, almost reverently, like it was some sort of divine artifact. She supposed it was, actually. She couldn’t imagine the fortune something like this would cost on the market.

Ben was looking at her expectantly.

“Do I get to see it?”

“Oh! Of course!”

She had wondered why he didn’t turn it on, now she realized it would have been a small breach of etiquette when she hadn’t given him the explicit permission. She hopped down from the bed, looking around to check the surroundings.

“You’ll have to wait until we have more room for the best part, but…”

She switched on the red side first, showing him the grip she intended and offering it to him to try. He handled it delicately under her excited eyes, and watching the way his long fingers caressed its slim surface made her think of him caressing… other things.

His eyes flickered up, catching her thoughts. He handed it back to her quickly.

“I assume the other side is blue?”

He got up and watched intently as she activated it, easily sliding into the same stance she had preferred when she used the blue saber on her own before. But the handle was slimmer, the blade longer, making her movements more fluid. He watched until she switched it off, then came around the bed and drew her into an intense kiss. His hands slid underneath her tunic and up the skin of her back, and he pressed his palms flat against her spine.

Pulling away from the kiss, he buried his face in her neck, inhaling the scent of her loose hair and squeezing her in an rough, iron grip.

“Rey.”

Her heart would always skip a beat when he said her name. It was just a simple word, but the way he said it, everytime as if it were a single sentence all by itself, pierced her core.

“I’m sorry. I’m proud of you, and I am sorry.”
He let her pull back, finally, and she met his gaze, frowning.

“We’re going to argue, Ben. I’m still here, aren’t I?”

He sighed.

“Yes, you are.” His eyes traveled to the Jedi lorebook. “I see you stayed up all night reading that scintillating trash. Find out anything useful?”

“I don’t know. Luke is the one who taught me that balance is the Force, but he was so afraid of the dark. I think… I think a true Jedi Knight is supposed to be a master of both sides. At least, that seems like what it says, but…”

“But?”

She picked up the book and showed him a passage.

“This part, about the Trials. It says something about the Trial of the Light and the Trial of the Dark, and, how each is seductive in its own way, but it doesn’t say what the Trials are.”

“Mmm.” His eyes traveled over the passage. He frowned, taking it from her hands and using a finger to draw along the strange writing. “This sounds like its a place. The Home of the Whills?”

Rey shrugged.

“You know more than I do.”

“The First Order has some of the Empire’s archives. Maybe we can look it up.”

He caught the look of fear on her face and took a deep breath.

“You agreed-”

“Yes. I did. Just because I don’t want to, doesn’t mean I’m not going to.” She stashed the Jedi book in her satchel, meaning to gather her things, then frowned. “I don’t… I don’t think we should take these with us.”

“What else would we do with them?”

She thought for a minute.

“I have an idea.”
Chapter Summary

Hux tries some shit. He somehow thinks he can overpower two Force users and take over the fleet.
Phasma's back, ready to choose a side.
Gratuitous smut at the end ;)

Rey’s detour was blessedly simple, and he had agreed to it without argument because he didn’t really think it mattered too much, but she was very protective of those stupid books. If it made her feel better about returning to the First Order with him, Ren was happy to oblige.

He glanced over at her, fidgeting next to him in the copilot’s seat, her beautifully-constructed weapon spinning in her hands. He couldn’t blame her for being a little handsy with it. It really was incredibly constructed. He had been shocked to see what she had done, and even more impressed that it worked. And she was right, if she had run the idea by him first, he would have told her it was impossible, but he was quickly learning that one did not tell Rey something was impossible.

He could not recall seeing a record of white sabers anywhere in the Imperial records, though they had most of the old Jedi archives dating back thousands of years. Only the strange woman from his dreams - the woman Rey insisted was Anakin Skywalker’s padawan - was recorded as using them. He wondered how she had made them, and what the significance was that Rey’s weapon turned out the way it had.

He had dreamed of white light weapons for years. Sometimes the woman in the cave, sometimes someone else, a hidden figure on an island with a staff… He had not had that particular dream since he met Rey, and the thought made him smile inwardly.

The ship dropped out of hyperspace gentle as a pouncing cat, and he heard Rey gasp as the Supremacy and Ren’s former Star Destroyer, the Finalizer, along with two other Destroyers, came into view.

He reached over and squeezed her hand.

“I know. I know. But please, try. For me.”

Her brown eyes were wide like a frightened animal, and he could sense her terror flowing over the bond, but he did his best to project peace and… love.

“I love you, too,” she whispered.

He let go of her hand and piloted the shuttle down into the hangar of his previous Star Destroyer. He had conceded to Rey’s request to avoid Snoke’s massive ship, and had his former quarters on the Finalizer prepared for them.

They were going to have to scrap the Supremacy eventually, anyway, and it didn't really matter to him where he slept, so long as she was with him. Anything he needed to do could be done just as easily on any ship in the fleet, and if things worked the way he intended, the Finalizer would
fall under her command one day.

The Rebel’s suicide jump had crippled almost half of the capitol ship, and it couldn't even be moved safely through hyperspace at the moment. He planned to commission something new and less grandiose for his own flagship once they were done deconstructing Snoke's ship. It occurred to him that Rey could probably be a great help with that, having scavenged Star Destroyers most of her life, and he felt an unexpected swell of pride.

Of course, he couldn’t order anything until their funding was secured, and Hux had bungled that beautifully.

He kissed Rey’s hand one more time before disembarking, feeling her slowly edging behind him. He used her proximity and the Bond to their advantage, projecting words directly inside her mind.

*Confidence. These people can sense weakness like jackals smell blood.*

*Thanks for that. You told them I killed your Supreme Leader.*

*I am the Supreme Leader now. That’s all that matters.*

He could feel her shudder and pause at the shuttle door. He was glad she did. He only had a second to react as the squadron of Stormtroopers at the base of the ramp cleared to make way for General Hux, striding forward with his hands clasped behind his back. Ren could see the man had added stripes to his uniform, giving himself the rank of Grand Marshal. What the hell did he think he was doing?

“I see you’ve been busy in my absence. Grand Marshal Hux, is it now?”

“You are correct.”

And then the weasel pulled a blaster from behind his back. He deflected the stun bolt back with his lightsaber, crippling the pretentious imbecile, but he struggled when the Storm Troopers opened fire.

He had come too far down the ramp, there were blasts coming from behind him, and as he tried to dodge and reflect, he couldn't gain a single step backwards. He let out an agonized howl when he felt a blast hit his shoulder.

And then she was there, at his back, staff spinning like liquid metal, giving him coverage so they could retreat to the ship, and for a second he thought they were free.

An explosion from behind sent her tumbling into him, knocking them both down off the ramp as his shuttle burst into flames. He was up in a second, searching out her mind just as she was reaching for him, relieved to find Rey uninjured.

*Ben, the ship!*

*I know.*

*What about those TIE fighters?*

He saw the line of fighters preparing to take off at the edge of the hangar. They were just outside the range of the interior cannons that had destroyed his shuttle. But there were about twenty Storm Troopers between them and the TIEs.
Only twenty?

He smiled a feral smile as they stood back-to-back amid a cluster of troops that had been knocked down by the blast.

Watch out for the defensive cannons.

Oh, this might be a bit of a challenge.

No.

He almost felt giddy at the feeling of fighting with her again, their movements perfectly timed, light weapons flashing and dancing, cutting through the opposition like a single sharp knife. The pain in his shoulder was getting worse, but for the moment it gave him strength as he Force-pushed the last of the guards out of their path.

Can you fly one of these things?

I don't know, I've never piloted a fighter. I think I can manage the guns though.

He made for the pilot's seat as she climbed in behind him, swiftly bringing the guns online to target the cannons firing at them. She had already taken one out by the time he got the fighter in the air.

Where are we going?

These things can't jump to hyperspace.

Good question.

There was a sudden heaviness as another Star Destroyer came into view before them. He recognized it, but he wasn't sure why it was in this sector. He switched on the comms to see if he could pick up any of the radio chatter.

“This is Grand Marshal Armitage Hux, to the Absolution. I order you to stand down!”

“I was not aware you were given a promotion, General,” Phasma's voice was cool and emotionless. “Where is the Supreme Leader?”

“Kylo Ren is a traitor! He is in league with that... Jedi whore who assassinated Supreme Leader Snoke,” Hux sneered. “I am assuming control of this fleet! Disengage at once, Captain!”

"I'm afraid I cannot authorize your authority, General.”

Really? Whore? That's the best insult he's got?

Maybe it's a compliment. His mother was one of many mistresses.

For some reason it feels even more insulting now.

I agree, he has no right to imply you're anything like his mother.

So... Phasma's on our side...?

I gave her command of a Destroyer.
Ahh...I have an idea.

She usually did. Usually they were fairly clever, too.

They think you've been injured. Let's let them think the worst.

“Captain Phasma. This is TIE 381R, requesting permission to land. The Supreme Leader is on board,” she spoke hesitantly into the comms.

“Please submit the correct code, 381R.”

“I'm sorry, but I don't know any codes. Kylo Ren has been injured. Please let me dock, we need a med bay now!”

She made her voice sound so desperate. He was injured, but not badly enough to be unable to communicate.

Hux doesn't know that, though.

“381R, you are authorized to land in hangar 2. We'll have medical ready for you.”

“Thank you.”

Rey lounged on a couch in Ren’s quarters, a smaller suite than he'd had on the Supremacy, but there were shades of gray and white instead of his all black decor. She was absolutely exhausted.

Getting Hux out of the Supremacy’s command center once he'd fled back to it had proven more difficult than it should have. He had managed to gain a substantial following for his mutiny, and had his own squadron of loyal officers guarding the top of the elevator.

They had managed to take back control of another Star Destroyer, the Depredation, after her captain regained control of the bridge and declared support for Kylo Ren. Rey had retaken the Finalizer almost single-handedly, giving her a chance to shine before Phasma and Ren’s other loyalists. She had snuck aboard the flagship with an unregistered TIE, crawled through the electrical ducts to disable power to the bridge command, then held off a whole squadron of Hux’s troops while Captain Peavey and a small contingent of officers loyal to Ren had regained manual control of their ship.

And then they had jumped the three Star Destroyers in their possession to hyperspace, leaving Hux with the damaged Supremacy and the fourth Star Destroyer whose captain had remained loyal to him. Currently, they were in orbit over Naboo, while Ben and Phasma discussed strategies.

Rey hated these oppressive Star Destroyers. Almost everything was black, there was no decoration or personalization anywhere, and they were colder than the Jakku desert at night. She had found some extra blankets in a storage cabinet, also black, but at least they were warm.

She didn’t remember falling asleep, but she woke with the most pleasant feeling, wrapped in something warm and solid. She opened her eyes slowly and was met with Ben's warm gaze, peering down at her as he held her, bundled up in blankets on his lap. He must have come in and found her asleep on the couch.

“You're so warm.”
He smiled and leaned down to kiss her, beginning as a gentle, soft exchange of affection, but building slowly to something that caught fire in her veins. Maker, she was tired, but she could not get enough of him, she had meant it when she was she was never not interested.

He caressed the side of her face, adjusting them slightly so he could keep kissing her without straining his neck. She freed a hand to hold over his, leaning into the warmth of his palm while she gently nibbled on his lip and invited his tongue into her mouth.

They broke apart breathlessly after a minute, and he trailed his warm lips down her jaw to her neck and shoulder, while she hummed with pleasure. She whined when he pulled away, her eyes opening again to meet his.

“Rey. You're incredible.”

He always looked at her like she was some kind of miracle that he'd never seen before, adoring and slightly awestruck. She smiled and freed her other hand from the blanket so she could reach for his, lacing their fingers together.

“You were pretty impressive yourself.”

She remembered suddenly about his injury and sat up, gently pushing his clothes aside so she could see the bandages. They looked clean and well-done, but she frowned seeing that the wound went all the way from back to front.

“I am going to murder that red-haired jackal.” He laughed and she studied his face carefully. Then she climbed off of his lap, letting the blankets fall, and tugged on his hands. “Get up, let me see it.”

As soon as he stood, she was tugging at his clothes, undoing his surcoat and pulling at his shirt.

“It's almost like you want to see me naked,” he quipped.

She stood back and smirked.

“Maybe I do.”

His eyes followed her as she walked around him, fingers dancing carefully around the bandages and trailing, featherlight, over the skin of his neck and shoulder until he shuddered and grabbed her hand. He pulled her around and wrapped his arms around her from behind, pressing more urgent kisses against her neck.

“I thought you were tired.”

“I took a nap.”

She sighed softly when he sank his teeth into her skin, his grip around her waist tightening and pulling her flush against him. She could feel him stirring against the curve of her backside, and she smiled as she turned around.

“Are you tired?”

He looked down at her with his heated gaze, returning her smile with a faintly predatory grin.

“No.”

She let her hands roam over his bare skin, feeling the muscles of his shoulders move as he pulled
her to him, his lips suddenly crushed against hers again with renewed intensity. She pressed her palms flat against his back, meeting his fervor, trapping his tongue against the roof of her mouth and sucking until he groaned and pulled away, panting.

He moved against her, pushing her back into the cold wall with his body and continuing his kisses down to her neck, his hands exploring under her clothes. She pushed him away so she could quickly get rid of her tunic and breast binding, discarding them to the floor as he didn’t give her a second to move before he reclaimed her body.

He lifted her, his hands firmly supporting her bottom as he nibbled and traced his tongue along her neck and shoulders, and she wrapped her legs around his waist. She could feel his hard length pressed against her and she moaned softly, one hand buried in his hair and the other around his neck, holding onto him.

“Bed,” she commanded.

He carried her there, letting her down for a moment to finish undressing himself while she did the same, only she wasn’t fast enough for him. He slipped his hands under the waist of her leggings and underclothes and yanked hard, stripping her bare with a distinct sound of fabric tearing.

“What do you have against my clothes?”

He stood over her for a moment, his hungry eyes traveling over her body with his usual intense stare, as if he were trying to decide where to start.

“If I had my way, you would never wear anything ever again.”

Their eyes met, and she knew he caught the flickering spark of desire mixed with fear that crossed her face. He grasped her hips roughly, pulling her to the edge of the bed. He knelt on the floor, dragging her legs up over his shoulders, and pressed his mouth against her center.

He was so fast, so unapologetically possessive, he drew out a secret part of her mind that she didn’t even know was there. She moaned and clenched her legs around him, her hands winding through his hair as he traced soft circles with his tongue.

She gave a cry of displeasure when he stopped, but she knew what he wanted, and he met her waiting gaze with his lovely half-smile.

“Would you like that?”

“Like what?”

He had started drawing his fingers through her wet heat, making it difficult for her to concentrate on his words. His eyes never leaving hers, he brought his fingers to his lips and tasted her, and she struggled to keep her gaze focused, already sensing what he would do next.

“Would you like it if I kept you here? Locked in my room? Alone and naked.”

She inhaled deeply when he pushed a finger inside her, teasing with a gentleness she knew was a lie, and she bit her lip to hold back a moan.

“I did hear Phasma talking about the Supreme Leader’s personal slut.”

Oh? Oh, that was a fascinating expression. She smiled sweetly, as if she were discussing the weather or a particular flavor of tea.
“Is that what you want? I thought you were going to show me the ways of the Force,” she chided mildly.

“I will show you… everything.”

He gave her a menacing glare to back up his words, but she just giggled, antagonizing and infuriating him.

“Liar. You're as uneducated in the bedroom as I am.”

“I'm a quick learner.”

A second finger joined the first, and this time he was not gentle at all. Her eyelids fluttered under his gaze, and she writhed on the bed, nearly panting as he reached that spot inside that made her whole body flood with warmth, and his touch was exquisitely accurate.

“I'll give you that,” she managed to gasp.

“You'll give me whatever I want.”

She reached for him, her hands gripping his shoulders with all her strength, desperately wanting him, the sweet, impossible pleasure when they were sharing. He knew without her asking, but of course that wasn’t enough for him. He rose from his knees and she pulled him on top of her, her hands already reaching for his length, but he grabbed them and held them down, lacing his fingers through hers.

“Please,” she leaned up to whisper in his ear, and caught his earlobe in her teeth, gently at first, but with increasing pressure as she writhed around him.

“Yes, and you love it.

“Oh for fuck’s sake.

Did it always have to be a game with him now? She glared at him, her eyes defiant.

“Yes, and you love it.”

“You know what.”

“Maybe I don't.”

“Say it, Rey. Tell me you want me.”

She wrapped her legs around him, pulling him in so she could feel how hard he was, pressed up against the bare flesh of her abdomen. She ran her tongue delicately over his ear, kissing and nibbling along the line of his scar, smiling to herself as his hands squeezed hers with a painful grip. She could feel the agony of withholding in his mind, the fire of need built to the point of pain.

“You tell me. I’m your slut, remember?”

“Fuck.”

He reached down and she helped him, both gasping as he slid inside and she was filled to the hilt in a few movements. She was still for a moment, savoring the feeling, then he reached out with his mind, finally seeking entrance there too, and she yielded gladly.
Yes. All of you. I want everything.

Rey.

Say it out loud. Give them a name for Kylo Ren’s whore.

He looked down at her, his eyes filled with wonder and disbelief. She gazed back, her fingers clutching his hand with a fierce grip while her free hand twined in his hair. Her hips rocked against his insistently, silently begging him to move faster.

“Yes.” He whispered it.

It wasn’t good enough. She wanted every gods-be-damned person on the entire kripping ship to know her name.

“Yes.”

Yes. More everything.

She was filled with him, physically and mentally, so complete every movement carried an echo, she didn’t know her body from his, or her mind from his, they moved together and he moaned, and she did too, and everything went still - he was definitely yelling her name out loud.

But Rey found she didn’t care so much anymore, because they had found that place, the white-hot center, where they were one -

Balanced.

Yes. Oh, yes.

It was indescribable.

Beautiful, overwhelming and slightly terrifying.

“Yes?”

He held her hand to his lips and kissed it, and when he let go, she raised it to brush against his eye.

“You’re crying.”

“So are you.”
Ah, the Joys of Living Together

Chapter Summary

Jakku again?

Poe tries a Solo Landing.

Rey is not accustomed to sharing her space. Or occupying someone else's space. Maybe moving in with your new boyfriend after a couple days in a hotel room isn't the most brilliant plan...

“Jakku? Are we seriously having this conversation right now?”

“It was important enough to be the last stop of the old Empire. We're going to find out why.”

Poe sat at the pilot’s console of their little ship, finally able to pilot himself, although the gunship was nothing like the Falcon or an X-Wing. Finn could tell it annoyed the Resistance leader, but he was doing his best to remain upbeat. This was their last stop in the Outer Rim, thankfully. Finn had seen all he ever wanted to see of the barren, depressing dregs of the galaxy.

He had been surprised to hear Jakku was the site of the last battle between the New Republic forces and the Empire, although it did explain how it had become a veritable graveyard of starships.

They had parted ways from Chewie and Rose a few days ago, as Chewie didn’t want to risk taking the Falcon into the Outer Rim, and Rose had some matches to pass out across the old Rebel Alliance bases they were starting to resupply.

Finn had volunteered to come along when Poe mentioned checking up on Imperial intelligence, figuring some of his knowledge about the current First Order might be useful. They had agreed to meet back at Yavin, Poe’s home in the Core Worlds and one of the dwindling strongholds left to the Resistance, but Finn and Poe had been having trouble with their newly-acquired ship and were running behind schedule. It had made both of them edgy, and while they weren’t quite arguing, the last day had been far from their usual easy friendship.

Finn could sense something was bothering the General, and had been since the day Rey had left them on Mandalore, but as angry as he had been at the betrayal, Finn had a feeling there was something else making his friend uneasy. Even BB-8 moved quietly around him, his usual chipper spunk restrained to soft cheeps of ‘yes’ or ‘no’ or just generic information.

They were closing in on the hyperspace marker when the ship’s proximity alert triggered, and Poe shouted curse words, frantically hitting buttons and toggles while BB-8 chirped worriedly.

“What the hell is that?” Finn yelled at the giant blinking red triangle. “Is that a Star Destroyer?”

“Looks like it,” Poe confirmed, resetting buttons to turn off the alarm and reroute the ship. BB-8 whistled urgently. “Yeah, yeah, I got it.”

“Got what?”
“That’s definitely a Star Destroyer alright, but this other marker here? That’s the Supremacy.”

“How did they even get that here!? A whole half of it was sliced off!”

Poe shook his head, pointing at the data readouts.

“I don’t know, but we’ve got to find out.”

He started typing swiftly on one of the consoles, while Finn stared in shock.

“You’re going to take this tiny little gunship up against a Star Destroyer? I know it’s been difficult lately, but Poe, that’s suicide!”

“Bear with me, I’m not entirely stupid.” He gave Finn one of his charming smiles, but it had the opposite effect, as Finn just narrowed his eyes. “Look, we bought this ship unregistered, right? No one knows who’s on board. We’ll just find a place to land on the other side of the planet and do some listening. We won’t even have to get out of the ship, I promise.”

Finn crossed his arms over his chest, wobbling slightly as the little light fighter changed course hard. He had a sudden, nauseating memory, and he looked at Poe with wide eyes.

“No. Nononono, Dameron, tell me you’re not pulling a Solo Landing.” When Finn and Rey had told the story of Han’s death on Starkiller, everyone had wanted to know how they landed on the planet without alerting the First Order. Only General Leia seemed unimpressed with Chewie’s explanation, rolling her eyes and walking away.

Probably to cry in private, Finn suspected. The woman may have been Solo’s wife and the mother of his son, but she would not let her emotions overcome her purpose. Finn could tell it affected her. He was pretty sure everyone could, but the news itself had not come as a surprise, and Rey told him later that while Leia was not a Jedi, she was just as Force-sensitive as Luke Skywalker. She had known exactly what happened the moment her son killed his father.

Rey had mentioned something then about Ben Solo’s struggle with the light, but he had ignored it, thinking it came from Leia’s wishful thinking as a mother. Now he wondered if it were Rey doing the wishful thinking.

He sat in the copilot’s chair and buckled himself in as Poe grinned in response to his question. A “Solo Landing” had quickly become slang for the dangerous, suicidal maneuver of coming out of hyperspace inside a planet’s atmosphere. It was also slang for a nigh-impossible task with little hope of success. But Finn stayed silent, knowing that if any pilot could pull off that kind of stunt, it would be Poe Dameron. It was probably a heresy, but he thought his friend might actually be a better pilot than Solo. If they lived that long.

“Poe, the rocks!”

“I see them!”

Alarms blared. BB-8 whistled wildly as he rolled unintentionally through the ship, his braided wire teethers shooting in multiple directions. Finn and Poe both screamed, half in terror, half adrenaline, as the ship skidded along a sandy embankment towards a quickly advancing line of large, craggy boulders on the edge of an open stretch of desert. With seconds to impact, Finn instinctively raised his arms for cover and ducked his head, but the impact never came. Instead the ship bounced twice and skidded to a slow halt, a tiny metallic ping ringing out as the front of the hull just barely tapped the furthest forward bit of rock.
Silence spread through the cockpit for a good ten seconds, before Finn and Poe jumped up at the same time, with a furious high five and shouts of relief.

“Yeah! I knew you could do it!” Finn roared, clapping his friend’s arm. “This is why I believe in you!”

Poe grinned, and BB-8 hesitantly let go of its teethers and joined them, chirping excitedly. The Resistance leader flipped switches, shutting down all but the ship’s most basic functions to keep it from showing up on radar.

“Now what?” Finn asked.

“Now,” Poe replied, bringing a heavy portable old radar unit out from under his seat and opening it over the ship’s console, “We wait.”

Ben was showering when Rey woke up, peering at the datapad on his bedside table and frowning. It wasn’t even sunrise, or wouldn’t be if they were actually on-planet, and she could feel her brain trying to slip back into sleep.

She dragged herself out of bed, wandering into the front of his quarters where a little machine in the wall was busy preparing a pitcher of the disgusting, hot, brackish-looking drink he liked. She curled her lip at it with disgust. Supposedly, the stuff was good as a stimulant, but she couldn’t get past the taste, even when he loaded it up with several spoonfuls of sugar.

She would never understand his habit of bathing first thing in the morning, either. They had had a playful sort of discussion about it, with him suggesting that she join him so he could show her how invigorating it was, but Rey wasn’t wild about that kind of thing first thing in the morning, either.

Although, he was rather nice to look at with his dark hair wet and his pale skin faintly reddish from the heat, wrapped in only a towel so she could kiss all the little freckles and scars and dark moles on his body… She shook herself, feeling annoyance build in the back of her mind. She loved him, and she definitely enjoyed occupying his bed, but Rey was beginning to feel like that was the whole of her existence.

Ben had promised to teach her, not just lock her in his room and fuck her.... Okay, she wasn't locked in. She was perfectly free to wander the whole Star Destroyer if she wanted, but there were so many people, everywhere, and they were curious, and Rey stood out like a waterfall in the desert. Somehow that led her to retreat to his quarters, because he was busy most of the day an she was... not.

She shook herself, stretching, and summoned her lightsaber from the table, slowly working her way through simple forms to warm up and get blood moving through her sluggish limbs. She had to pick her way between piles of black clothes, discarded haphazardly around the room, and she scowled at his cloak and gloves strewn over the sofa. Really, there were hooks right by the door, one of which was occupied by her cloak. Which she quickly put on, already feeling the cold floor seep into her bones. She hung his clothes up, and then shot a dark look at the closed shower door as she retrieved a spare blanket from the cabinet wherr she stored them. Because unlike some people, I clean up after myself.

Why these Star Destroyers had to be kept so cold, when they had massive engines powering a dozen other support systems was a mystery to her, but Rey had taken to wearing long sleeves
underneath her tunics and extra socks pulled up just below the knees of her leggings. She didn’t like a lot of clothing, she had only ever used head coverings to block out the blinding sun on Jakku, but she was very grateful for the Jedi cloak she had picked up in Cloud City, and the extra blankets left by the cleaning crew that she had begun hoarding.

Ben had coaxed her into letting him order her some more clothes, and she was happy to have a few extra tunics and underthings, but she had only agreed after checking the prices with the supply clerk. She paid for a few things herself with the coin she’d gotten from Maz, but she let him pay for the things he ruined since he enjoyed being so destructive and wasn’t inclined to stop.

She was considering seeing how much another cloak or something similar would cost, since she didn’t think it was very appropriate for the Supreme Leader’s apprentice to be walking around in a Jedi cloak. It didn’t really matter, she knew she would always be Ren’s whore to these people, especially given how he treated her when they were in public together, but at least she could stop feeling like she was committing blasphemy on a daily basis.

She heard the water stop and paused, hating how awkward she felt, even though they had been on the Finalizer for almost a week. Save for a very short few weeks and a childhood she couldn’t remember, she had lived most of her life alone on Jakku.

As much as she cared for Ben, it was just strange for her to spend so much time with another person, eating, sleeping… Just trying to exist in all the empty moments when they weren’t directly interacting was awkward to her. He didn’t seem uncomfortable, but these were his living quarters, his home before he had taken over Snoke’s rooms on the Supremacy. She just felt like she was in the way all the time, and tried her best to take up as little of his space as she could.

And she really had not expected Kylo Ren to be so... carelessly messy.

"Why are you sitting on the floor?"

"I was stretching, but I heard you coming out and I didn’t want to be in the way."

He looked at her like she had momentarily slipped into a language he didn’t speak.

"You can sit on the furniture."

"I would, but your datapad and notebooks are all over the couch, and I didn't want to take your chair."

Did he really not notice that literally every piece of furniture was occupied by datapads, clothes and all the other clutter he managed to trail everywhere?

"Just move my stuff."

He turned around to make his caf, and she glowered at his back, a completely unreasonable anger surging through her.

"Where?" She struggled to keep her tone civil.

"What?"

"Where do I put your things?" She was clenching her teeth. Was it really too much to ask for him to put away his own stuff?

"I don't care. Wherever," he shrugged, still facing away from her.
She scrambled to her feet, and found herself going to the door.

“Rey? Where-?”

“I... I just...need to be alone.”

She didn’t want to sound angry. She had no reason to be angry with him, none at all, but she just could not stand the sight of him suddenly. Rey tried very hard to numb her feelings through the bond, worried he would sense something and then she would have to try and explain something she couldn’t even explain to herself.

“Oh, just leave. That’s fine,” he growled at the closing door.

She sighed. How did she think she could possibly hide from him? She left anyway, looking up and down the sleek, featureless hallway, trying to find someplace she could get to before he came after her - and he was, she could sense him. There was a tiny alcove with a maintenance shaft above it just ahead, and she jumped into it, Force-propelling herself up to grasp the nearest ledge and climbing inside.

*What do you think you’re doing?*

She had tried to close the Bond as much as possible, surprised that he could still project words at her even with her concentrating on blocking him out.

*I need to be alone!*

*Did I say some-*

*No! No. You... I just... I can’t do this right now.*

Oh no. No, now he was angry, and she felt tears coming to her eyes. Rey drew herself up as small as she could, hugging her knees to her chest, and laid her head against her arms. She could feel him, looking for her, trying to figure out if there was a way he could get to her, and she laughed at the idea of Kylo Ren trying to fit his gangly frame down the tiny shaft of wiring and electronics.

*Please don’t.*

*THEN COME OUT. NOW!*

*No.*

She sensed him tense up, felt the heat of his lightsaber in his hand.

*Oh, of course, throw a tantrum. That’ll make me want to come out.*

He powered it off and shouted - out loud, because he still had to vent his anger somehow -

“Do as I command!”

He regretted it instantly without her saying anything. She had agreed that their dynamic in front of the First Order had to reflect certain accepted customs, and usually she took his abuse with cold disinterest or submissive silence, but today she just felt lost. She was almost physically ill, sobbing softly to herself in the dark, as Ren stalked off in the opposite direction, probably to go yell at the maintenance staff and insist they go looking for her.

She wouldn’t want to be in that position. She wouldn’t even want to be in the vicinity.
She sighed and crawled through to the hangar bay. He had promised she could leave whenever she wanted. He hadn’t given her a ship, though, so she decided to take one. And since they were already acting like children, Rey was going to make a statement.
Plotting, Scheming and Rebuilding

Chapter Summary

Rey and Kylo try to make up, with varying degrees of success. The officers of the Finalizer try to cope with the Supreme Leader's PDA.

Canto Bight kids struggle with the realities of the Purge.

The Knights of Ren again! Seriously, we're taking it back.

Chapter Notes

Long chapter is loooong.....

Introducing some important OC who will be around for the rest of the series - Captain Sloane and the Canto Bight revolutionaries.

Also Apprentice Number One!

I'm really curious to see how you guys like the apprentices. There will be more in later chapters, and in Part 2 which I am currently working on.

If you've read the Aftermath novels, Captain Sloane is directly related to Grand Admiral Sloane ;)

Ren was pacing the bridge, barking orders at the security monitors until suddenly he saw something out of the corner of his eye.

“Wait. There. Hangar Two.”

“It looks clear, sir,” Peavey insisted.

“No, go back to - Shit!”

He didn’t need to see it, although the footage was there when the security officer replayed it. She had timed it perfectly, waiting for the camera to turn before making her move, then waiting again before powering up and zipping through the airlock in one single sweep.

He watched his own, unused, freshly-rebranded command shuttle disappear into the void of space. Angrily, he stormed out of the bridge back to his quarters, where he proceeded to destroy mostly everything in the front room.

Then he went back to the bridge and spoke briefly with Captain Peavey in as calm a manner as he could manage.

She had gone down to Naboo. She stole his own shuttle, out from under the eyes of his
security personnel, and flew it directly down to the planet they were orbiting. Kylo Ren took a deep
breath, letting his hands unclench from the fists he'd been holding.

She wasn’t running away. She just wanted to talk. Where they couldn’t be overheard having
an argument by passing personnel or Stormtroopers. Where they wouldn’t risk destroying his ship or
equipment or undermining his leadership.

It was dusk when he landed his TIE Silencer on the small shipyard, next to the shuttle sitting
defiantly in almost the middle of the yard. He knew she had done that on purpose. It was too
perfectly lined up, and he didn’t know very many pilots who could land a spaceship like that, even if
they had someone on the ground to measure and guide them.

There were no lights on in the estate proper, other than some solar lighting on the pathways,
but he could see a small fire going on the beach beside the lake. Very hesitantly, he felt for her
through the bond, hoping she had cooled off a little over the day, but expecting to be met with
hostility.

Ren had almost forgotten what she was like, the way she let go of her emotions so easily, her
passionate, but kind nature. He stood for a while and watched her as she looked out over the water
rippling in the evening breeze.

“You can come over here, I’m not mad at you.”

He stayed still, and she looked up, her eyes finding his. He couldn’t read her expression, and it
bothered him. She never seemed to have that problem, she could read his every thought the moment
she looked into his eyes.

Instead of going to her, he held out his hand.

Something flickered through her eyes, and he felt a memory surface. He hadn’t even realized
it, and he smiled faintly at the way her eyes dropped to his ungloved hand, before she climbed to her
feet and came to take it.

He pulled her in and held her gently. He wanted other things, but he didn’t know where they
stood. He didn’t even know what had sent her fleeing his presence in the first place.

He had treated her precisely as if she were his apprentice in every way, except for the physical
relationship that they had decided not to hide, and he knew he had sometimes been cruel, but she
never complained. Sometimes she even seemed to enjoy their interactions, speaking out to incur
punishment, pitching her voice in that low taunt that sounded cold, but drove him to distraction. If
she had grown weary of it, he could give her some time to rest here at his grandmother’s house, but
eventually she would have to come back to him. She knew it as well as he did.

She sighed and wrapped her arms around him in the same familiar way he had grown
accustomed to, and he couldn’t help his own sigh of relief.

“I’m sorry. I’ve never lived with anyone before. I didn’t know it would be so hard to adjust to.
I thought because, you know... the way we are, the Force bond and everything, that it would just be
natural.”

He pulled back so he could look her in the eyes again, trying to fight the feelings of panic and
anger filling him. He had made it clear, he was the way he was, and she accepted it. If she wanted
something different...

He wasn’t sure what to do about it. He didn’t relish the idea of keeping her captive, but he
couldn't let her go now. Surely she realized that. Her eyes went wide immediately and she shook her head, bringing her hands up to hold his face.

“No. Be- Kylo Ren. Please don’t.”

“I will have you with me. Whether it’s willingly or by force, it’s your choice.”

“No. That’s not what I…” She dropped her hands and looked out over the water. “Can I please just have my own space? I need something - just a single room, it doesn’t have to be a big one, I just… I need a place to be alone.”

“Yes. Keep the shuttle if you want.”

He moved behind her and wrapped his arms around her, resting them just beneath her breasts, and kissed the top of her head.

“You can have the whole estate. I don’t know who technically owns it now, but it belonged to my mother. And my grandmother.”

She turned suddenly, her lovely eyes full of warmth and affection again, her mouth open slightly in surprise.

“I knew I recognized it! I saw it when I was flying in, and there weren’t any ships, so I thought maybe they wouldn’t mind if I used the beach for a while. I didn’t want to dock in the city in case…”

“In case we fought. You came here, and landed outside the city, because you wanted to talk and you were afraid if I got angry that I would hurt someone. Not you - just someone in the wrong place at the wrong time.”

He didn’t know how to process that, but he could see it all in her thoughts. She still wasn’t afraid of him. He had just threatened to hold her captive against her will for the rest of their lives, and she ignored it like it was nothing, but she had gone to extensive lengths to make sure he didn’t hurt anyone else.

“Rey. Do you love me?”

He was afraid to look at her. But she reached out and laced her fingers through his with familiar ease. He squeezed her hand tightly, and she squeezed back with equal strength.

“You know I do.”

“Say it.”

“I love you. Kylo Ren, Ben Solo, whoever you want to be. I will still, always love you.”

He paused, steeling his nerves for the next question. But he had to know, he had to understand. Did she actually realize what she was doing? And if she did, did she really know what it meant?

“Do you still think I’m a monster?”

He could feel her panic through the bond, but he didn’t know what caused it, he couldn’t untangle all the emotions in her head, or his. Rey took a deep breath, and there was a strange feeling through the bond, as if she were standing on a precipice looking down, preparing herself to jump.
“Yes.”

“You’re not afraid I will hurt you?”

She breathed again, slowly, and he felt as if they were falling together.

“You already have. More times than you know. Maybe I like it.”

He grabbed her from behind, feverishly, possessively, forcing her head to the side so he could kiss and nip at her neck. He felt the need to mark her, as she had him, a reminder that she belonged to him, all of her, her body, her mind, her soul. Her lifeforce.

He felt her pulse race in her neck, the flush of heat that spread over her, and when he reached for her mind, she let him see.

Yes. I know what you are. But you’ve forgotten something.

His teeth on her neck were cruel and bruising, while his free hand traveled over her body, his fingers digging into her upper thigh. He could feel her pain, but he could feel the excitement too, and desire, passion, love. And something else, unfolding at his touch like a secret, night-blooming flower - darkness.

She moaned so softly, her voice hoarse with emotion, and arched her back, pressing her shoulders into his chest, her hand tangled in his hair. He had thought his desire for her was overwhelming before, that he could not possibly love or need her more than he already did, but he had been so very wrong.

He felt her moving, sliding down his body to kneel at his feet. He could see clearly what was in her mind, and he groaned.

“Yesss… You owe me.”

"No," she corrected. "I own you."

He didn’t realize he had spoken the thought out loud until she responded, looking up at him, her eyes so dark under the night sky they appeared black.

Her fingers worked quickly at his clothes, and she didn’t hesitate at all, firmly wrapping her hand around his length, her mouth warm and velvety soft when she took him in. She reached out for his thoughts, like they always did, moving her hand faster, sucking him in more as she sensed his needs.

He could feel her desperately struggling to satisfy him and breathe, using his feelings to guide her pace and movements. He really, really wanted this to last longer, but even though she could sense everything he felt, she stubbornly resisted his attempts to pull her away.

“Rey. Stop,” He begged.

Make me.

And then he couldn’t move. His eyes went wide with shock, and she pulled back almost completely, then took him in again in one movement, as much as she could, over and over again as he moaned and cursed and breathed her name with reverence.

Do you really want me to stop?
No. I just-

You belong to me, too.

She let him go just after he climaxed and turned away, resting her head against his leg, coughing and gasping. He got his clothes resettled quickly and sat down next to her, too weak to keep himself on his feet now that she wasn't holding him still.

He reached out and smoothed her hair, stroking her face and shoulders until she let him take her into his arms while they both caught their breath. He kissed the top of her head and waited until she relaxed finally and her breathing came back to normal.

"I'm sorry," she murmured.

He moved back to see her face, completely confused.

"What do you have to be sorry for?"

"That was... more difficult than I thought it would be."

Her face flushed and she looked away, but he hugged her against him tightly, kissing her head, her face, her neck, everywhere he could reach.

"No, Rey."

He let his feelings for flow through the bond, idly stroking the exposed skin of her shoulders.

"I mean, it's-" He shook his head, cutting her off.

"Dear Great Force, what did I ever do to deserve being tied to this horrible woman who can't perform every sex act perfectly the first time?" He murmured with the fakest inflection he could manage. "Please, save me from the miserable fate you have inflicted upon me!"

He could feel her shoulders shaking against his chest as she giggled.

"Okay, you don't have to be sarcastic."

"You don't have to swallow."

Now she really was laughing, but as she turned and looked up at him, a possessive gleam in her eyes, he remembered suddenly the darkness that he had sensed.

"All of you is mine. All of it." She looked so fierce for a moment, he thought she might pounce on him and try again to perfect her technique.

"I really hope you don't mean that. There are times-"

"I didn't mean..." She rolled her eyes. "Just then, okay? Me and you. Kriff, I didn't mean it literally. I am sorry, though. For running away."

"I'm sorry for yelling." He sighed. "And we're going to sleep here tonight because I may have... taken my lightsaber to some things."

"You trashed our quarters, didn't you?"

He could feel her viewing the memory in his mind and she snorted in mild annoyance.
"Just the front room. The droids are cleaning it up."

He was quiet for a moment, looking into her eyes as they danced with mirth. He remembered the day of the Force vision when he had told her he wanted her with him and she had pulled his hair into her fist and insisted that he belonged with her. He had seen her darkness then and wondered at it. Now he stroked her cheek, studying her face. Her eyes narrowed inquisitively.

“What? What are you thinking?”

“I did some research in the Imperial archives. Do you remember when I said the old Force users didn’t divide themselves between dark and light?”

She sat up, focused on him intently.

“Of course I remember.”

“You said you didn’t want to change me.”

“I don’t.”

“What if we are… changing each other… just by being together?”

“I’m not going to turn-”

“You keep saying you’re not a Jedi. I’m not a Sith, either. I never said I was.”

He could see her thinking, sense her taking inventory of her feelings. She looked frightened for a moment, then curious. Finally she laid back against him, her smaller body eclipsed by his long limbs.

“Is that going to be a problem for you?” He prodded eventually.

“I don’t know. Do you think it’s possible we could… corrupt each other completely? Like… me with the dark and you with the light?”

“No. Like you said. It’s a balance.”

He could feel her mulling it over, reworking the pieces, fitting it all together in her head, as he had just now when he felt her dark side so clearly. He felt her memory of their first night on his Star Destroyer, when they had joined so perfectly. The intense moment on Mandalore when they discovered she shared his lifeforce.

He got to his feet and pulled her up with him, scooping her up in his arms because he selfishly liked the feeling of her weight against him.

“Let’s go see who’s home up there.”

“You are not carrying me all the way to that house.”

“We’ll see.”

Canto Bight had been burning for days, but it didn't make life as easy as Shaya thought it would. Sure, it solved a lot of problems - no more beatings, no creepy old people trying to grope the slaves, no working twenty hours a day and sleeping in straw on the ground for the remaining six -
but now, she had new problems.

“That lousy bucket-head was right,” she told her brother as they sat around a beaten-up card table pouring over handwritten lists of supplies and people who needed them.

So many necessary tasks, and so few people interested in doing them. Everyone wanted to be a soldier, no one wanted to cook or do the laundry.

“This is too hard.”

“Which part ya think? The part where ya figure out what needs to be done, or trynna get people to do it?”

Trask wasn’t really her brother. He was a human from Tatooine or some desert place. But they were the same age, and both had been slaves from birth. He was the only thing like family she had ever known.

“Everything,” she complained. “Plenty of us are old enough to act like adults, but it feels like we’re the only ones trying.”

It had sounded good to begin with. Sharing food, so everyone got their fill. Sleeping in real beds. Letting the fathiers go. Work by volunteers only. For the first few weeks, the fighting had been intense, and the rebels had rewarded themselves with all the repossessed luxuries from dead or fleeing owners, and their spirits soared high.

Then, slowly, Shaya started getting complaints. Two bedroom slaves were fighting over their master’s estate. It should have been simple to divide things evenly between them, but it got complicated when the children were brought up. Surely the girl with more children deserved a bigger cut? But the other one was older, old enough that some of hers had already been sold offplanet. She wanted money to buy them back.

The Wookies in the storage warehouses refused to work without recompense. They didn’t want food, or nice things, they wanted credits and ships so they could go home to Kashyyk. But if they all left, who would run the warehouses? They were built around a Wookie labor force. No one else could run the machines made for long limbs and superior physical strength.

Every day there was something. Now people were complaining to Trask about her judgments. They accused her of being a tyrant, and blamed her for the lack of foresight that had them scrambling for food and supplies. She and her brother had been up all night, trying to create a rotating schedule for all of the chores that needed to be done, so the drudgery was distributed fairly, and she knew they would get no gratitude for it.

“Could we round up some of the fathiers for helping, ya think?” Trask asked suddenly, not commenting on her previous statement. There was nothing to say really, they had been through this before and argued over it. “In the warehouses? At least with the food supplies, yeah?”

She sighed, putting down the pen she was chewing on.

“I guess it’s worth running by the grooms, but you know they won’t like it.” She waited for him to look up so she could make eye contact. “Have you heard anything from your ‘contacts’?”

Trask had sent messages to several Resistance and Rebel frequencies as soon as they gained control of the big comm center in the city. Shaya had sent a message, too, to someone else. Her brother met her slightly antagonistic gaze with his own stubborn, bright blue eyes.
“No. Have you?”

She blinked at him. So he knew she had sent the message to Captain Phasma, despite her precautions to hide it. Whatever. At this point, they didn't have the luxury to be picky about their rescuers. She steeled her gaze and met his eyes.

“No.”

Rey was startled to hear someone knocking on the door. After her panicked flight to the surface of Naboo, Ben had ordered them larger quarters, in addition to granting her use of the shuttle whenever she pleased.

She had thought he was kidding about the house, but when she woke up there in the morning and realized he was probably serious, she had flown back to the Finalizer and absolutely refused. It was too big, she had no idea how to be responsible for something like that, and she just didn't want it, for a long list of other reasons.

He had been surprisingly understanding, even when Rey expressed her uneasiness at his careless way of giving her extravagant things. He did not need to buy her affection. But she did want some space.

So now she had her own sitting room and bathing facilities branching off of their shared bedroom. The sitting room had an entrance to the hall, and both doors could be locked if she wanted privacy, although he still seemed to think he should be allowed access to her whenever he wished and threatened to get ugly when she tried to enforce basic boundaries. So she knew it wasn't him. The door was unlocked and he would have simply let himself in.

Cautiously, she set down the datapad she was using and went to the door.

“Who’s there?” She called, without opening it.

“Captain Sloane, ma’am. We've received a message asking for you. The Supreme Leader requests your presence.”

Rey opened the door, taking in the sharply-dressed officer with a suspicious gaze. The First Order officers had been distant, but polite, and in the two weeks since she returned they had slowly stopped whispering and giving her sidelong glances, but in her mind she still thought of them as the enemy.

She was surprised he had sent for her instead of coming himself, but she was relieved to see Sloane. In an attempt to ensure his officers’ loyalty, Ren had transferred the more experienced Captain Peavey to the Depredation, and put its captain in charge of the Finalizer where he could evaluate her more closely.

The other woman had treated Rey with nothing but respect, and she had once come across the captain dressing down a pair of lesser officers for speculating crudely about the Supreme Leader’s private life. She had a suspicion this was also the reason for the transfer, as Peavey had been annoyed and mildly scandalized by her presence. Ren assured her it wasn't abnormal for officers to keep paramours, but they seemed unsure of what kind of status to accord a paramour who was also the Supreme Leader’s apprentice.

She summoned her lightsaber from where she had been sitting and stepped into the corridor. They did not speak as they walked through the Star Destroyer, but both kept an easy, professional
pace, walking side by side. Rey nodded politely as they reached the bridge and the other woman returned to her console while she went to kneel before Kylo Ren.

This was the most uncomfortable part, the humiliating subservience, but he had done the same before Snoke and now that he had his own apprentice, he had to maintain appearances.

And that was where the similarities in their public interactions as master and apprentice ended. It wasn't the kneeling or commanding part Rey disliked. It was the fact that they were in public and it was almost impossible to hide her reactions. So she did her best to simply avoid being around his officers altogether, and so far she had been mostly successful.

But he wasn't dumb, and he loved to torment her any time he could get away with it, so she assumed this was going to become a more regular occurrence. She couldn't quite keep her irritation at the idea from slipping into her voice.

“You wished to speak with me?”

She kept her gaze downward as he strode towards her, until he reached out with his hand and tilted her face up towards him. His eyes were amused.

"Master," he corrected gently. “Say it.”

She tried not to react, but it didn't matter how still she was, or how calm her expression might be. This was their game. He could feel everything she felt, just as she felt him, and he was smirking down with amusement. She met his eyes, confronting him directly with the heat that kindled within her. She let a sly smile ghost over her lips.

“You wished to speak with me, Master.”

If he didn't want to be manipulated, he shouldn't have made the first move. She sensed his body's response to her low whisper, and smiled innocently while he turned around and tried to adjust his clothes stealthily.

“We... ah, we've intercepted a transmission from Kashyyk. Mentioning you personally.”

She frowned. How would anyone know to contact her here? Well, her friends knew she was with him now, and Poe Dameron definitely knew which ship was Kylo’s. Maz probably did too.

“I see.”

She waited. If he wanted something from her, he was going to have to offer more information. She wasn't going to volunteer anything before the bridge crew.

“You're not surprised? Do you have friends there? Rebel friends?”

“Friends, yes. Rebels, no.”

Rey watched him pace along the pristine laminate floor, having gathered some control over himself by simply not looking at her. She had to admit it was a little disappointing. Obviously he was making a display of power for the benefit of his officers, but it wasn't going to be very effective if he refused to even look at her. Ren waved a hand at the communications officer.

“Play it,” he commanded.

A blue hologram of Pashi played out before her, and she watched impassively. The Wookie
was repeating a message they had received from Onderon, one of the planets where Poe and Rose were handing out matches. A co-op of miners had taken over the facilities there and requested backup from any nearby friendlies. Pashi was passing the message on.

Rey wondered if that was all of it, or if the Wookies would go offer assistance themselves. If they did, she doubted they would broadcast it, especially to her. The transmission ended, and she didn't realize Kylo Ren was standing so close to her. He put his hand out and stroked her head, a casual gesture meant to imply ownership that she knew he did intentionally to irritate her. She closed her eyes briefly, focusing on controlling her breath and letting the wave of conflicting emotions pass over her.

Am I your pet, now?

Yes. You are. Don't lie to yourself.

“That's Khawapashi, one of the elders. I spent some time in her village for a while. When I was with… When I was on the Millenium Falcon after Crait. But they're a peaceful people. They refused to join forces with the… Rebels.”

It's where your mother left us. Green and beautiful and thriving with the Force.

I want to see it one day. Alone.

He said alone, but she knew what he meant. She would be perfectly happy to see Pashi and her family again, but they might not be thrilled to see Kylo Ren.

“Why does everyone think ‘peaceful’ is a beneficial trait? Wookies aren't peaceful. They're savage monsters.” Rey started to speak and he cut her off. “That's a compliment! Peaceful people get invaded. Monsters defend themselves.”

Her eyes darted up to him and he caught her quick look. He was making a point, she supposed. And he wasn't necessarily wrong. But she couldn't help herself, she had never been very good at keeping her mouth shut, and he was too easy to antagonize.

“You don't have to be a monster to defend yourself.”

Several officers glanced over in surprise. Captain Sloane threw her a concerned look. She just smiled serenely as her master's face became a mask of rage. He growled at the comms officer.

“Play the rest of it!”

Once again, Pashi appeared, her pale fur noticeable even in the monotone blue light. She was kneeling, with a young Wookie who might as well have been her carbon copy beside her.

“My grandson, Gahengeen. He needs your help, if you are willing, my friend Rey. There is no one else I know.”

Rey gasped, her hand coming up to cover her mouth.

Before them, the young Wookie held out his paw, palm up. Floating six or seven inches above it was a very large rock, a stone Rey would have struggled to lift with purely physical strength. But Pashi's grandson was not using his considerable physical strength.

She recognized a display of Force power when she saw one. And when she looked over at Kylo Ren, she knew he could recognize it too. Her heart caught in her throat. What would he do?
The only other Force users besides the two of them that she had ever known were dead. The Empire had all but eradicated Force-sensitives in the time between the Old Republic and the New. A new fear shivered through her. What was the First Order’s policy anymore?

*Please, she begged. Pashi was nothing but kind to me. I won’t have any choice but to fight you. Please don’t hurt them.*

*I’m not going to hurt them. I have no wish to take on angry Wookies.*

Rey breathed a sigh of relief, but it was short-lived. She was still on one knee beside him, and he moved the hand that stroked her hair down to caress her face, before he gently lifted her chin to meet his eyes.

“Go to Kashyyk and retrieve the child.”

Her eyes widened, but he shook his head slightly, imploring her not to be afraid. He leaned down and kissed her, gaining some slight enjoyment from her discomfort at the public display.

*You can’t punish them for calling me your concubine if you are going to carry on like this in front of your officers.*

*Your objection is noted.*

*I think Sloane actually respects me.*

*I know. That’s why I sent her to fetch you.*

*I would like for her to continue to respect me.*

*‘Hux is out there, plotting. The Rebels are lighting fires.’*

He let go of her and gestured, finally, for her to stand. Rey glared at him as she rose, feeling the pain of sensation coming back to her leg after spending so long on the hard, cold floor. Kylo Ren gave his apprentice an approving smile.

*‘It’s time to rebuild the Knights of Ren.’*
Chapter Notes

I have no idea where I screwed up here, but a huge chunk of this chapter got published twice so I had to do some stealth rewrites.

Poe had gone to bed, giving Finn the night shift of listening to nothing. It was his second night, and he was going mad. The ship was like an oven during the day, finally forcing them to run some basic life support systems so they didn’t die of heat stroke. Their water and food would last for probably another few days, three days max, and that included getting from Jakku to someplace more hospitable. He had found an old deck of cards in the maintenance cabinet and got BB-8 to play with him, but the damn droid won every round. Now they were trying dice.

Suddenly, the little orange and white ball started bouncing and chattering excitedly. Finn thought it was because it had beaten him yet again, but he realized some of the sounds weren’t actually coming from the droid.

“POE!!!!!” BB-8 whistled shrilly on top of Finn’s booming shout. It was a small ship. The General was already climbing down from the two tiny aft bunk beds before the droid stopped dancing noisily.

“Yeah, I got it, guys, I got it.” He rubbed at his eyes, doing nothing to smooth out the dark circles underneath them. Finn thought his friend looked as haggard as he felt, then realized he hadn’t looked in a mirror in days and his clothes smelled like a swamp rat. They were all excited to get the hell off of this kriffing piece of rock.

Their excitement was short-lived, however, as Poe and BB-8 began interpreting the information printing out of the ancient receiver. Finn watched his friend’s brows crease with confusion, then concern. He flung himself into the pilot’s seat, beginning preflight checks as soon as the power came blinking back to life. The ex-trooper sat beside him, looking between Poe and the sadly cheeping droid.

“What is it, what’s wrong?”

“You remember when I told you Jakku was the site of the Empire’s last stand?”

“Yeah.” Poe’s tired eyes looked even more overburdened than before, and Finn’s brow creased with worry.
“There’s something the Empire was after inside this planet. At the core of Jakku. Some kind of ancient weapon, made by the Sith almost a thousand years ago. That’s why the Empire was here. They were trying to access it, to use it somehow.”

Poe buckled himself in and Finn followed suit quietly, giving the pilot some time to get them out of the atmosphere while the planet itself still sat between them and the First Order forces.

“You mean the whole planet is a weapon. Like Starkiller.” Finn was floored. “But Kylo Ren was here before, searching for Luke Skywalker. Why didn’t he go after it then?”

“Funny thing, that.” Poe looked at Finn out of the corner of his eye. “Do I recall you saying at some point that we were all underestimating Rey?”

“Well… Yeah, but I haven’t heard anything since the Rebel Memorial. So I mean, I guess you were right. She chose her side.”

He tried to make his voice as cold as possible, but he couldn’t hide the pain her sudden betrayal caused. She led that monster right to them, and then ran off with him.

“Here’s the thing. The Supremacy is here. There are two Star Destroyers up there with her. But the Finalizer’s not with them. Kylo Ren isn’t up there.” Poe flipped some switches, then cursed. “TIEs coming in on the starboard side. I’m gonna need you to man the guns.”

Finn stumbled hurriedly back to the weapons control. There was one advantage to the tiny ship - it was a gun ship. They had plenty of firepower to level at their enemies.

“Ren said he had nothing to do with Starkiller,” he shouted to Poe. “That was all Hux’s work.”

“You wanna guess who’s running the show now?”

“That vile weasel!” He shouted as one of his heat-seekers slamming into an enemy TIE and it fell in pieces down to the planet. “Where the hell is Ren? And Rey?”

“Somewhere else, I imagine. Grand Marshall Hux has proclaimed Ren a traitor for conspiring with the Jedi to kill old man Snoke.”

“Wait, what? General Hux is calling Kylo Ren a traitor?” Finn grinned, firing another round as he got the hang of the ship’s autocannon. “Is it my birthday? Poe, you shouldn’t have.”

“The best presents are the ones everyone can enjoy,” the pilot quipped. Finn fired on the final TIE, but couldn’t seem to keep it in his sights.

“I hope we’re on our way out, Dameron. This son of a bitch isn’t making it easy to target him. And I’ve got to try and get a message to Rey.”

“Five seconds to lightspeed. Don’t worry, buddy. We’ll get a message out. ‘Dear Rey, Sorry, I was wrong about your boyfriend. wanna meet up? Drinks are on me,’” Poe cackled.

“I’m glad you think you’re funny, but you’re the one who needs to apologize, General. Unless you want to strike out on your own and start calling yourself Grand Admiral.”

“Grand Marshal. And believe me, I’m sorry I doubted her. I’m sorry I doubted all of you.”

He murmured something else that Finn couldn’t quite make out.

“What was that?”
“Going into lightspeed now!”

“You can’t come with me,” Rey insisted.

Ben sat on the edge of her bathtub - hers, he had had it installed for her knowing it was the one thing she wouldn’t be able to refuse - looking very imposing in his all black garb and ragged cloak. His gloves were tucked into his belt, although he did still wear them outside. Rey had forbidden them in their private quarters.

This was the compromise they had slowly worked out. If she was going to be submissive to him in public, he would concede to her authority in their private quarters. So far, it seemed to be suiting them both, although it could get… interesting… if he continued to demand she attend him in her public role as his apprentice. His warm brown eyes traveled slowly over her body, covered only by the exquisitely warm water she preferred, brightening noticeably when he reached her face.

“It’s the first time we’ll be apart since you came to me.”

His voice was quiet and affectionate, so different than the public facade of Kylo Ren. In her head they were two different people, not separate, but distinct. She loved them both, but Ben Solo was hers alone.

“I’ll come back. You’ll be tracking the shuttle anyway.”

“You could disable the tracker.”

She watched his thoughts flicker in his eyes. She could read paragraphs just by watching his face, he didn’t have to speak out loud to her at all, but she liked the sound of his voice. She leaned forward, reaching out a wet hand to lay over his, holding his gaze.

“When have I ever lied to you?”

He shook his head, meeting her eyes, still unhappy with the situation. He bent over the water and cupped her head in his hands, his long fingers buried in her dripping hair, and kissed her. It started gentle, like it always did, an affirmation of the affection between them, but when she started to pull away, he seized her hair and held her.

Heat that had nothing to do with the hot water spread through her as he pressed her mouth open, his tongue caressing hers, his teeth nibbling on her lip. She moved across the bath to get closer to him, going up on her knees as he trailed kisses down her neck and over her shoulder. He drew his hand down her left arm, pulling it out over the edge so he could kiss the trail of scars from her frostbite wounds, still not completely healed.

She moaned, watching him, and when he grasped her upper arm and pulled her up to stand, she let him. Rey was not fond of being carried like a child, but Ben was strangely fond of doing it, so she let him sweep her into his arms and carry her to the bed they shared. He showered kisses down her body, gentle, slow caresses that graduated to sucking and biting from her neck down to her chest, until he wrapped his warm mouth around her nipples one at a time.

She reached out to tug at his clothes, needing to feel his skin, but he batted her hands away while he continued to move his mouth down over her abdomen, nibbling at her hips and spreading her thighs with his hands.

“Don’t make me hold you down.”
“I need to feel you!”

She gasped loudly as his fingers slipped inside of her, arching her back and unintentionally drawing her legs together to trap his hand.

“Do you feel that?”

His fingers moved, his mind reaching to read her needs, playing her body like a familiar instrument. It had been weeks - no, several months now, she thought - since their first night together, and his touch was as intense as it ever was. More, now that they knew just how to reach that place where they were truly joined together.

She writhed under his hand, and called out his name when he pressed his tongue to her center. She felt thoroughly undone, naked and moaning while he had not removed a single piece of clothing besides his gloves, and there was something strangely dirty about it.

He paused to look at her, and she recognized his arrogant smile. This was his intent all along. She had no way of explaining how he could elicit these reactions from her with just the look in his eyes, but knowing that he was enjoying the spectacle of her breathless, disheveled form, ignited the heat within her even more. She felt her climax rising, her body twisting at the waves of warmth that he drew from her with his strong fingers and the steady, rapid strokes of his tongue, until she trembled and cried out her release, hands clenched in the sheets, giving him the performance he wanted.

She closed her eyes as she came down, her chest heaving, and he took the moment to undress himself swiftly, discarding his clothes where they fell. He sat on the edge of the bed and roughly pulled her into his lap, finally giving her freedom to touch and kiss and leave sharp bites of her own. She pulled herself up on her knees, straddling him, and firmly grasped his hard length in her hand, guiding him into her. They both gasped in shock at how quickly he filled her, and she whimpered when he began to thrust, surprised at the depth this position gave him.

“How could I ever not come back to you?” She said softly, finding his hand and wrapping hers around it. “You really are the best thing that's ever happened to me.”

He laughed.
happened to you.”

She pushed herself up to look in his eyes.

“No, don't do that. It's not a competition.”

“I've hurt you so much. You told me that yourself.”

He was trying to make his words hard, but his eyes begged for absolution. She touched his cheek where the scar she gave him crossed over his flesh.

“I think we're even.”

“You saved me from Snoke. I wanted to get away from that monster for years, but I didn't have the strength to accept it until... I had someone to protect.”

“You saved me too.”

“I would never have let him kill you. Even after you left, I was glad you were safe. Furious, but glad.”

"So glad ypu shot at me," she teased gently.

He sighed and tightened his arms around her.

"I didn't know you were in the Falcon. I was angry. I wanted you so badly and I thought you rejected me... I'm an idiot, okay?"

"You're not an idiot, you're just mental. It's alright, so am I."

"Sure, but only one of us is dangerously mental," he insisted.

Rey propped herself up on her arms and looked down at him, trying to decide if he really meant to imply that he was dangerous and she wasn't. He met her eyes and sighed.

"You can think whatever you want, if it means I get to keep you," he said at last.

His love for her was astounding. She never ceased to be awed by it. It was the one piece of light in his soul that he was willing to accept completely. Seeing him like this, gentle, affectionate, vulnerable - she was filled with rage at Snoke, and Luke, and the parents who abandoned him. Some part of her thoughts bled through. He frowned, reaching up to cup her face in his palm.

“Are you upset with me? Rey?”

“No. I was just thinking of all the people who stole Ben Solo from me. Luke, Snoke. Your parents.”

He was quiet, just gazing into her eyes. Then he crushed her against him with bruising strength.

“My fierce little scavenger. If it weren't for Kylo Ren, we'd never have met. And I would never have taken my mask off for anyone else.”

“What made you do it? I didn't exactly ask nicely.”

She had felt something instantly, as soon as she saw his face. Then when he killed his father and nearly killed Finn, she had tried desperately to block it out. Until that day on Luke's island.
“I…” He blushed suddenly. “You were so beautiful. Angry and wild, but beautiful. I’d never seen a girl like that. And then…”

“The Force bond. It was like gravity. You’re right, I was so terrified and angry, but it drew me in anyway. I don’t know what I was expecting to see under that helmet, but it wasn’t you.” She had a sudden thought and she laughed. “We’re idiots.”

“What?”

“The bond. While I’m away, we can work on it. I know we can figure out how to control it if we try.”

She loved the way his eyes lit up as he processed the idea. He pulled her against him again, pressing kisses into her hair.

“Maker, I love you, Rey. You’re brilliant.”

He woke up in a dark mood the next day. Rey had left early, waking him briefly to say goodbye, but it wouldn’t look good for him to stand in the hangar and watch her leave like a moping child. He had to show some faith in his apprentice. So he had gone back to sleep, but waking up alone again made her absence already trying.

He gathered up his clothes and went to shower, pausing to see she had turned on his caf machine before she left. She was always doing things like that, little things to make him happy, like using the lavender soap he liked and leaving her hair half down when she could because he liked to run his hands over it.

It never ceased to amaze him how thoughtful Rey was on a daily basis. Not just to him, but everyone she cared for. Despite her insistence that she wasn’t, she had the natural compassion of a Jedi.

When he finished his morning ritual and sat down with his datapad to drink his caf, there was already a blinking red message indicator. He wasn’t in the mood for it, but he couldn’t just stop being the Supreme Leader because his apprentice was away. He opened it, and was surprised to see the goggle-widened eyes of Maz Kanata.

She was looking for Rey, which seemed to be a repeating theme, although it didn’t really bother him. However, the message claimed urgent information about Hux, so he decided to see if Maz would take his call.

“You!” The little woman was surprisingly frightening when angry. “You destroyed my property! I hope you’re prepared to compensate me. The repairs will take all year!”

“I’ll see what I can do,” he offered mildly. "You wouldn't be interested in a lake house on Naboo, would you, Maz?"

"That property is haunted and you know it! I can't run a business with crying ghosts roaming the hallways."

He blinked, startled. He had thought it only a childish fancy, even though his mother had told him honestly that she saw the ghosts as well. But he had never heard anyone else mention them, not even Rey.
“I’m pretty sure she’s harmless,” he said softly. “Just sad, like the rest of my family.”

She adjusted her lenses and peered at him intently.

“Oh-ho. Look at you. I see Ben Solo’s eyes. Leia’s passion and Han Solo’s heart. I hope you’re taking care of our girl. The last thing the galaxy needs is another Skywalker tragedy.”

He made himself press on, ignoring the comments about his parents and family.

“Rey’s fine. She’s on a mission to Kashyyyk.”

All of these people trusted her so easily. Even Maz Kanata, and she hardly trusted anyone. Ren cleared his throat.

“Your message said you had information about Hux.”

“Oh, yes. I suppose it concerns you just as much. Grand Marshall Hux is doing some research on Jakku. Something in the core of the planet.” Her kind eyes looked weary. “I hope it’s not another Starkiller. This galaxy is still reeling from the last attack.”

“I hope not as well. Thank you for the information. I’ll do what I can.”

"Am I going senile, or did you just agree to work against your own organization?"

"I'm a traitor now. Haven't you heard?" He couldn't help his faint smile. "Conspiring with Jedi. Possibly even going to bed with the enemy."

Maz leaned forward, her curiosity clearly piqued.

"Those are serious charges, young man. I hope they're true," she said with a wink.

He had a thought, and decided to risk it. He seemed to be doing that a lot lately, making plans and considering the future in ways he hadn't before. But Maz Kanata knew everyone, and if anyone in the galaxy could help secure financing for his thinly-stretched forces, it was her.

“Ah, Maz. Since I have your attention. Could I beg for your wisdom?”

She leaned into the recorder again, her ancient eyes crinkled with interest. He realized the last time he had seen his father's old friend he was scarcely taller than her.

“Young man, if there is any wisdom I possess that can free you from your predicament, I will gladly share it with you.”

“Thank you. I will see that you are compensated.”

She waved his offer away.

“I don’t make a habit of charging for advice. Though, perhaps I would be a wealthier woman if I did.”

“I meant about your property damage.”

“My, my. Ben Solo’s eyes indeed.”
He switched off the hologram after a lengthy conversation, leaning back in his chair thoughtfully. What could Hux possibly want with Jakku? He got up and turned on his wrist comm, gathering his intelligence officers for a meeting. He paged Phasma, too. She responded instantly.

“Yes, Supreme Leader?”

“I have received some information about Hux that I would like your opinion on, Captain.” Was she really only a Captain? She definitely deserved a reward for her loyalty, and he was short on trustworthy personnel. “Meet me in the briefing room and be prepared to assemble a surveillance team.”

(Of course, sir.)

“And since we have some vacancies in our ranks, I think you are overdue for a promotion. Are you prepared to take on additional responsibilities, Commander Phasma?”

“It would be my honor, sir.”

“There's an added pay grade.”

“It was my understanding that the First Order was low on funding, sir.”

“It's surprising how quickly galactic politics change, isn't it?”

He did not have to tell her that this next mission would be a test. Phasma had been with the First Order longer than he had. She understood that trial by fire was an integral part of every promotion. He also didn't tell her that Ben Solo had spent the better part of the morning contacting and securing funding from previous New Republic governments willing to back General Organa's son in exchange for the promise of protection from Hux’s possible new weapon. He was well aware of the importance of credits in war. It was one of the first things he learned from his mother. Han Solo made it even simpler. The galaxy is a big place, kid, but when it comes to credits, almost everyone speaks the same language.
The Collection Begins

Chapter Summary

Introducing Apprentice Number One!

Kashyyyk is a really cool setting.

Rey does some light reading.

Chapter Notes

The heirloom lightsaber Genji has is actually cannon and was crafted by the Wookie Gungi in an episode of Clone Wars. In my story, Khawapashi is around 200 years old. Gungi was her younger brother killed by Anakin Skywalker. :( 

The Wookie on the spaceport comm sounded familiar. He was definitely surprised to hear her voice coming from Kylo Ren's black shuttle.

“Of course I know who's ship I'm in!” She laughed, finally placing the voice. “It's good to see you too, Washa! Can you tell Khawapashi I'm here, please?”

The elder, along with several of her sons and one of her daughters-in-law, waited to greet her when she came down the ramp. She hugged all of them, but Pashi held her tight.

“I did not believe it, but Chewbacca was right, as usual. You do not seem unhappy with your choices.” She held Rey at arm’s length and looked her over, a flicker of distaste in her kindly gray eyes. “Our Rey is alive like the forest. She should not be dressed in darkness like the dead.”

“Oh, I don't know, I'm beginning to like it. It just takes some getting used to.”

She followed the Wookies into Pashi's big home, a multi-level dwelling above the War Room. One of the elder's many daughter-in-laws served them tea made of some type of musky flower that Rey found she quite liked. The young female smiled when Rey complimented it.

“Shekebba is a master herbalist,” Pashi explained. “She is Genji's mother.”

Rey gave the young Wookie a look of respect, bowing low in greeting. It was difficult to tell, but the shy female seemed quite young to be mated with a child already. She knew the daughters-in-law were special to Pashi, as having given birth to only sons, it would be her grand-daughters who inherited Khawapashi’s possessions and status.

“A master herbalist wife and a Force-sensitive son. Your son has been quite lucky.” She didn't miss the look that passed between the two females, and had a feeling she'd said something troubling. “I'm sorry, have I offended in some way?”

“No offense,” the herbalist replied. “Gahengeen is my only child. His father died in a hunting
Oh! I see.” She touched Shekebba’s smooth-furred elbow gently. “I’m so very sorry for your pain.”

Then she realized she had come here to take the poor woman’s son away too, after she had already lost her mate. She glanced to Pashi in concern.

“How old is Genji?”

Pashi and her daughter-in-law both rumbled at once, but Shekebba was quickly silent.

The boy was eighteen, just beginning adolescence for a Wookie. Rey could see what was going on, and her heart hurt for both of them. The elder had told her of her younger brother, the last Force-sensitive from Kashyyyk, taken away by the Jedi before his tenth nameday and murdered while training at the Temple on Coruscant.

The elder was worried Genji was already too old to start training, but his mother did not want to let go of her only child. She knew she had a difficult task to face.

“I’m afraid I can’t make this any easier on you.” She glanced at Pashi. “You know I have been training under Kylo Ren. We aren’t Sith, but we aren’t Jedi, either. Honestly, I don’t know what we are. Kylo wants to start a new order of knights, and I think his intentions are good. But I can’t promise anything, except that if you trust me with your young, I will protect him with all my strength.”

Shekebba looked at her sadly, her light brown eyes filled with emotion.

“Even from Kylo Ren?”

Rey met the young mother’s gaze firmly. Pashi was quiet.

“Yes.”

With her communicator tucked in her pocket as backup, Rey had climbed up to the canopy platform to meditate. She breathed in the cool, misty night air and let her emotions roll over her until she felt empty and still. Then she reached out, seeking the warm place in her mind where she could still feel Ben’s steady presence.

She thought of his scent on the pillows of their bed, the bitter taste of caf on his lips when he kissed her in the morning. Kneeling at his feet on the command bridge with his hand on her shoulder. His eyes, dark and arrogant when he paralyzed her with the Force so he could manipulate her body at his leisure. His beautiful black hair hanging over his face as he bent his head to decipher Luke’s books.

She gasped as the world spun around her, opening her eyes to see star systems flash before her, suddenly erased by the perfect, clear image of him, lying in their bed with his datapad and a glass of amber-colored alcohol.

He looked up immediately and they shared a smile.

“It’s not time yet,” he scolded gently.
She raised her eyebrows.

“I'm sorry, don't you mean, 'Wow, Rey, you did it all by yourself, I'm impressed.'”

“And you think I'm arrogant.” He still regarded her warmly. “What did you do? Describe it for me. Everything.”

She did, and he listened, his eyes never leaving her, in his calm, open way of focusing fully on her words without interruption. It wasn’t a common habit, most people would pepper a speaker with questions or try to finish sentences for you.

Ben simply listened and waited. It reminded her of his mother.

“Those memories are strong for you. Scent, taste. Fear.”

He paused thoughtfully, and she could tell he was sifting through his own memories of her. A vision of their battle in the woods came to her.

“I'll try tomorrow.”

She nodded, then explained about the Wookies and her reservations about separating the child from his mother. She was honest about her promise to protect Genji from him, but he didn't bring it up.

“Tell them he can contact his family regularly. Possibly even visit if there's time. Yearly, maybe.”

She eyed him in surprise. He met her gaze coolly.

“We're not running a prison. I see no reason to keep our students isolated. It didn't work very well for the old Jedi.” He caught the look of surprise that crossed her face and smiled grimly. “Alright, apprentice. You have a datapad. Look up the history of the Jedi and the Sith.”

“Are you giving me reading assignments now?”

“You stole ancient Jedi texts from Skywalker. I assume you intended to read them. You’re already in perfect physical form.” His eyes roamed over her and she flushed slightly. “So most of what I have to teach you is knowledge. Wisdom. You have the skills, but you don’t know where they come from. You’ve got three days on Kashyyyk. I expect a full report on your studies when you return.”

She expected him to make some kind of snarky comment about her reading comprehension or the circumstances she grew up in, but he didn’t.

His eyes were clear and honest. He really was doing his best to teach her what he could. She nodded.

“I'll take notes.”

Rey hesitated. There wasn’t much more to say, but she hadn’t expected to miss him so much already. He leaned across his bed, across time and space, where she sat cross-legged on the wooden platform, and squeezed her hand.

“I miss you,” she said softly.

“I love you. But I believe you have some work to attend to.”
She nodded and rose to her feet, letting her concentration relax. She watched until he faded completely from view, their gazes locked. The she sighed and went back down through the vine paths to the spaceport to retrieve her datapad.

She had expected it to be boring, historical accounts with no relevance to her limited experience with the galaxy, and much of it was, but when she skipped ahead to the Clone Wars era, she found some fascinating journal entries. She wondered if Kylo even knew they had these files.

Despite the fact that she had three days to pace herself, she stayed up most of the night on the shuttle bunk, reading and making note of people and subjects that drew her attention. He had been telling the truth. Luke had as well.

The Jedi Council was out of touch and corrupted by their own self-righteousness. But he had assigned her to read about the Sith, as well. She started with Vader and the history of Emperor Palpatine, but she was surprised to find just how old the records were. Before it was a term for dark Force adepts, the Sith were a race of beings from unknown space. And the Sith-Jedi war that everyone assumed was a war between the dark and the light was actually more of a war between interloping conquerors and the galaxy’s defensive Force users.

Sure, the Sith were mostly dark, with disturbing arcane rituals and decidedly vile artifacts. But the Jedi who fought them were a mix of individuals from every kind of personal code. It wasn’t until the defeat of the ancients that the Sith Lords instituted the law of two, and the surviving Jedi began to focus solely on championing the light, afraid of the possibility that embracing any dark side tactics at all would encourage another war.

By the end of the night, she had a list of topics so long there was no way she could cover them all in three days. She would have to pick her subjects carefully. Her next day was spent meeting the young Wookie and assessing his abilities. She walked him through several exercises, levitation, focus, control.

She was surprised to find he already had his own lightsaber, a family heirloom made of the strong wroshyr wood. And he was quite excited to go with her and learn about the Force, even when she explained that she was not a Jedi, that they would be the first in a new order of Force Knights. She asked him to spend the night in meditation, to open up to the energies of the planet so he could remember what it felt like, as Kashyyyk had an abundance of energy that was unusual in the rest of the galaxy.
And Then There Were Two

Chapter Summary

Rey has some opinions about the Jedi Code.

Enter Apprentice Number Two!

Also Sabine, again. What is it with broody dream boyfriends?

She was sitting on the floor of the shuttle, datapad in one hand while she scribbled notes on a pad of paper in her lap, when she suddenly became aware of his presence. She couldn’t see his surroundings, it appeared as if he were simply sitting across from her in the pilot’s chair.

“Found some things that interest you?” He gestured to the notepad.

“Actually, a lot of things.”

“Tell me.”

He adopted his active listening expression, watching her as she talked animatedly about the Sith Lords and the self-righteousness of the Jedi. She could see his eyebrows raise during parts of it, but he waited until she finished babbling to sip her tea before he asked questions.

“You mentioned something about Anakin’s padawan,” he prompted.

“Yes. She was setup by another apprentice… Anakin and Obi-wan believed in her, but the council turned her over to Palpatine for judgment. They shouldn’t have. The Jedi were supposed to have the authority to police their own, but they handed her over for purely political reasons.” She paused.

She knew he didn’t like the idea that Ahsoka was important somehow, but Rey had seen his dream. She knew now it was his dream, the crystal cave and the woman with the white sabers. The old padawan hadn’t been interested in her, even when she stumbled right into her talking to Sabine Wren.

“Anakin seems to have taken it pretty hard.”

“I didn’t know that. I knew about Ahsoka Tano, but I assumed she... failed the trials or something.”

“That’s the sad part. Eventually she was cleared of all charges, but… She refused to return. The Jedi broke her trust.” This was the most interesting part. The part she wanted him to understand. “I think Palpatine did it on purpose. There’s no clear ties, but… like Snoke, he was manipulating everyone.”

“I’m sure you’re right.” He didn’t seem to want to discuss it anymore, but his eyes were thoughtful. “Tell me about the early Jedi. From the Sith wars.”
“The first Jedi didn’t have a code. For the most part it seems like they worked alone. They joined together for some things, obviously, but there was no formal structure.” She glanced down at her notes. “The first council met to decide how to deal with criminal Force users. Not dark side users or Sith - actual, like, dangerous people using the Force to murder and torture and threaten the stability of the whole galaxy. Eventually, they decided it would be easier to agree on a code and… You know, went from there.”

“A code. Did you see the Jedi Code in its final form?”

He leaned forward, his eyes catching hers intensely. She swallowed. He had promised not to push her, that he didn’t want to change her, but sometimes it felt like he was still trying. Like he harbored a particular hatred for the Jedi in general and he desperately wanted her to share it.

“I read it. It’s garbage. The Sith had a code too. I don’t like either of them. How can you have compassion without attachments? And I don’t understand the Sith’s thirst for power. For all their talk of freedom, it’s just a different kind of slavery.”

His mouth was open, like he wanted to say something, but stopped as his mind processed all of her words.

“Why are you looking at me like that?”

“Nevermind.” He sighed and shook his head.

“No, tell me. What is it?”

“I just… You called the Jedi code garbage.”

“Well it is! It’s impossible, no one can be that selfless. It sets you up to fail.”

“Rey. You embody that code more perfectly than anyone I’ve ever known.”

She shrugged. “No, I don’t. I love you.”

“If I died tomorrow, what would you do with the rest of your life?”

Her eyes flashed up at him, the darkness within her suddenly breaking through and hardening her features.

“If you died tomorrow, I would die too. Like your mother. I would just… let go.”

Her hard gaze held him, and he believed her. She relaxed slowly, picking up her tea cup and sipping it while continuing to gaze at him over the brim.

“Do you want to hear about Genji?”

Rey ate dinner with Pashi and the boy’s mother the night before they were set to leave, and when she repeated what Kylo Ren said about allowing regular communication with family, Genji’s mother warbled like a happy songbird and wrapped Rey in a bone-crushing hug. She even gifted her with a whole satchel full of the tea she liked, and several bars of soap made from the same purple flower.

Before they left in the morning, Pashi insisted on bestowing another gift upon her as well, a finely-tooled belt of soft leather, dyed blue as the sky and stamped with a design of green and purple
flowers. The same flower in the tea. Shekebba had shown Rey the flexible, strong vine covered in vibrant flowers and tiny, prickly thorns. She couldn't pronounce the name, but it was something like “bright-thorn.” The inside of the belt was sewn with a hidden pocket to carry her lightsaber, and she noticed Genji wore something like it, crafted for his larger frame, as a sash over his shoulder. She slipped it over her shoulder as well, finding the hidden pocket was set at a perfect angle to carry her slim-hilted weapon.

“Our Rey is alive,” the elder insisted. “Sharp and vibrant. That which bends but does not break.”

It was a simple gift, but the thoughtfulness and kindness that went into it brought tears to Rey’s eyes. She couldn't refuse when it had clearly been made with her in mind. She hugged both Wookies tightly, letting the soft fur hide her wet eyes.

She was uncharacteristically gruff with Genji as they left the planet. She didn’t want to become a sobbing mess in front of a student who might become her responsibility. The young Wookie didn’t seem to notice, however, too excited by the spectacle of spaceflight.

She was happy to answer his flurry of questions, quickly distracted as he ranged from the shuttle functions, to the time in transit, to what he would be learning from her and her master when they got back to the Finalizer.

Rey still couldn’t believe Pashi had trusted her with their precious child. She had looked up statistics on Force-sensitivity while she was researching her other assignments. All Wookies had some sensitivity due to the planet’s strong connection to the Force, but an individual capable of channeling it was rarer than the pale fur Genji shared with his grandmother.

Ben had been evasive about his actual plans for the restructured Knights of Ren, but she could sense his excitement when they discussed possible training regimes. His eyes lit up whenever he had the opportunity to talk about his hopes for the future, for the galaxy, for them. It was easy to forget that he was Princess Leia’s son, but she could see his mother clearly in his passion for leadership and creative idealism.

As she plotted a course back to Kylo Ren’s flagship, she noticed how close it would take them to Mandalore, and a thought crossed her mind. She picked up the comm and requested contact with the bridge.

She had to remember to bow her head and not smile like an idiot when his face appeared in the blue light of the holo.

“May I have permission to make a quick stop on the way back, Master?”

She noted Genji watching the interaction closely, and realized it must come as a shock for the Wookie to see her demeanor change so abruptly. But Ren was on the bridge in front of his officers, she had to play the part. She would have to try and explain everything later.

“That depends on where.”

“Mandalore. You tasked me with a research project earlier. I left a few items there that I think might be useful to us.”

“Ah, I see. Permission granted.”

“Thank you.”
There was nowhere to hide on Jakku, which might have been a problem if Phasma weren’t accustomed wearing her voluminous stealth robes. Kylo Ren had been wise enough to acquire an unbranded freighter, a hulking pile of mis-matched outer paneling that could barely survive a hyperspace jump. It gave her a good reason to stop, however, and if Jakku had one major export, it was scrap.

So the two operatives she’d chosen to accompany her, both troopers from her specialty squadron, were haggling with traders while she nursed a truly vile beverage at the tiny outdoor cantina. They hadn’t had much luck with the locals, and she knew better than to ask too many questions, so she watched the sky instead. It was hard to miss Hux’s flagship, or the massive, battered outline of the Supremacy.

There was very little traffic from air to ground, however. It seemed that while Hux knew what he was looking for, he didn’t know where to find it, and had been entirely unsuccessful with the locals, even after killing a few of them for emphasis.

“Captain.” She recognized the voice of the soldier behind her and turned to the helmeted figure in piecemeal armor. She did not expect Hux would ever think of investigating a few meager junk traders, and it would never occur to him that the First Order would employ stealth as opposed to a show of force. She nodded as the man sat on the stool beside her.

“I heard there might be some kind of orphanage on this trash heap. Or at least, there was one at some point in the past.”

She glanced over to see if the barkeep had heard or reacted to his words, but the slimy fat alien didn’t seem to be paying them much attention.

“Continue.”

“Out to the west of the outpost. An anchorite monastery.” Interesting. What would an orphanage/monastery have to do with a secret weapon at the planet’s core? “Might be some ruins to search, even if no one’s home.”

She nodded.

“Go after dark. Keep out of sight.”

"Understood.”

Phasma placed a piece of the weird green compact rations the denizens of Jakku used as currency on the bar top and left. She had one more place to visit, a special mission from the Supreme Leader.

The battered shell of the AT-AT was quite possibly the most depressing thing she had ever seen. There was a bed, and a tiny scrap-fueled stove, and very little else. A few packages of instant bread and more rations. Extra blankets for the bed. A worn set of goggles and environmental wrappings to protect from the harsh desert sun.

She stopped on the way out, looking up at the wall beside the bed. It was full of little scratch marks, years’ and years’ worth. How anyone could survive like this for so long was beyond her. She felt a respect for the girl she would never have thought possible.

On the bed was a little handmade doll in the orange coveralls and white vest of a Rebel Alliance
pilot. She picked it up and put it away in her satchel. The Supreme Leader had asked her to recover anything of value, but while these things might have amounted to a fortune to the poor sods living on this gods-forsaken planet, they had no value outside of it.

She gathered up the rations and the blankets and took them back to town, where she discarded them in a nearby pile of scrap. She was aware of eyes on her every movement, and she knew a savvy scavenger would claim them in no time.

Rey wanted to order Genji to stay with the ship, but the Wookie regarded Mandalore with a naive awe that melted her heart. She gave him a communicator with a tracking device just in case, although Satine’s park was not far from the spaceport. She watched the child’s eyes take in every wondrously strange sight, and wondered if she had looked the same when she first came here.

“These people are very warlike,” he exclaimed after reading the fourth plaque beneath one of the many monuments. “Do they not get tired of so much violence all the time?”

“I think they did eventually. They’re trying hard to stay neutral now. But they still sell some of the best armor in the galaxy.”

His bright eyes shining, he hurried to walk beside her.

“Can you tell the story about the Darksaber again?”

Rey recounted the details of her battle against Sabine Wren for the third time. Genji had asked what it was like to fight lightsaber on lightsaber, and as soon as she started describing her most memorable encounters, he wanted more. It was a little worrisome that he was so focused on the melee aspect of the Force, but she didn’t hold it against him too much. He was an adolescent child with an heirloom sword that he had been dying to use for years. She supposed Ben - Kylo Ren - would understand perfectly.

She stopped in her tracks as they reached the park. There was someone there already, and they had used a shovel to dig up the chest Rey and Ben had buried the ancient tomes in.

She ordered Genji to stay back, and pulled her lightsaber from its pocket, slowly creeping forward, until she realized it was only a young girl. A Twi’lek, with beautiful light pink skin, wearing the gold filigree and loose, revealing clothing of a pleasure slave. Rey’s lips curled in disgust. The girl couldn’t possibly be more than sixteen.

She wheeled, her purple eyes wide as Rey strode into the park.

“Don’t be afraid,” she said gently.

She put her lightsaber away and saw the girl’s eyes dart down to it.

“I’m sorry!” She pleaded immediately. “Are they yours? I wasn’t going to steal them, I just… I felt something calling me.”

Projecting calm as much as she could, Rey sat down on one of the benches.

“I’m Rey. What’s your name?”

“Kirin. I belong to-” Rey stopped her abruptly, already angry, and made a split-second
“No, Kirin. You don’t belong to anyone anymore.”

She turned toward the street and called for Genji. The Wookie rushed into the small space, stopping short when he saw Rey sitting with the girl.

“This is Genji. Genji, this is Kirin. She’s coming with us. Escort her back to our ship, please.”

The Twi’lek’s eyes were frightened as she stared from Rey to Genji and back.

“I don’t understand. There’s no reason to kidnap me. My masters won’t pay, I’m not fully trained yet.”

She glanced at the book still in her hand and carefully fit it back in the chest.

“Please don’t hurt me. I couldn’t help it, it was like a dream or a… a trance or something. I heard these strange whispers and I followed them…”

“I believe you,” Rey assured her. “That’s why you’re coming with us. You’re sensitive to the Force. Like we are. Those books called to you for a reason.”

“The Force?” Kirin’s purple eyes slowly bled from fear to wonder. She locked eyes with Genji, who warbled encouragement. “You think I can be a Jedi?”

“The Jedi are gone. But a knight of the Force, yes. My master is trying to start a new order.”

It felt odd to refer to him as her master, even now, in front of these untrained children who clearly needed far more guidance than she did.

“Who’s your master?” The girl asked cautiously.

Rey hesitated, but decided honesty would be best. She would find out eventually anyway.

“Kylo Ren.” She could sense the Twi’lek’s fear, but she met Rey’s eyes all the same. “Do you really want to spend the rest of your life as someone else’s property?”

“No. But I don’t want to follow the dark side either.” She insisted stubbornly.

Rey smiled. She already felt a fondness for the girl.

“You don’t have to. I don’t.”

“Will you be my teacher? I… I think I could trust you.”

There was a strange feeling Rey was unprepared for. She had never in her life wanted responsibility for anyone or anything other than herself. But she was filled with a purpose suddenly, she could hear the Force whisper around her with the echoes of a future to come, a future that needed her, and these children. *These are the first steps…*

“I will teach you as much as I can. It’ll be okay, I promise. You can trust me.”

Kirin stood and looked to Genji, then Rey. She wondered if either of her new students had felt or heard some of what she had. The girl’s pupils were wide, and Rey felt a swirl of power around her, a Force signature that had been previously occluded. She nodded firmly.
“I will join you.”

Rey breathed a sigh of relief. Then she thought about what Kylo Ren would say when she returned to the Finalizer with not one, but two prospective students. She gathered up the books and secured them in the little chest she had bought for them, then covered up the hole in the earth as best she could. It was obvious someone had been digging, but it would have to do.

She had promised her master it would be a quick stop, and she had already complicated the situation by kidnapping an extra student. She thought Ben would understand, but if he didn’t, she was prepared to take a stand. Better to ask for forgiveness and accept punishment than leave the girl and risk never finding her again.

What she really wanted to do was track down the piece of garbage that had enslaved a sixteen-year-old, but she didn’t have time at the moment. They could always come back later, provided Kirin knew how to find the bastards.

Sabine caught her with her two followers as they were boarding the shuttle, and for a moment, Rey’s heart skipped a beat. But she calmly ordered Genji to take the girl into the ship and begin lift-off sequences while she stepped down to speak with the Mandalorian.

“What do you think you’re doing? Were you just going to leave without so much as a wave in my direction?”

She regarded Rey with a friendly smile, and her tone was clearly teasing. She felt herself relax slightly, adjusting her new belt over her shoulder.

“I’m sorry, it was just a short stop,” she explained.

Sabine smiled.

“A short stop to kidnap a slave? No, don't worry, as I told the claimant, slavery is illegal here so it is hardly worth my while to interfere with a First Order operative providing passage to a willing recruit.” She tilted her head to peer into the ship. “She is willing, right?”

“Yes,” came Kirin's tremulous voice. “I want to go with Master Rey. Please don't send me back to - back to where I was.”

“My dear child. Never in my life would I send someone back to slavery.” She raised an eyebrow and lowered her voice. “It's Master Rey, now?”

“Apparently that's the preferred form of address between teacher and student,” she said softly. “Does it sound weird? It sounds weird to me.”

“You'll get used to it, I bet.”

Sabine hesitated, as if for all her confidence she was somehow uncomfortable with what she had to say next. Finally she sighed, and motioned Rey closer so they could speak quietly.

“I know you… have a lot of responsibilities right now. I'm sorry to ask anymore of you, but… I have to try. I always do.” Her eyes glazed slightly, as if she were seeing something beyond Rey’s shoulder, in the distance. “I lost a friend, a long time ago, in a… Well, he went into a Force Temple and didn't come back. Ahsoka has always believed he didn't die, but it's been so long…”

“The Force does some really strange things,” Rey hazarded.
Sabine’s piercing gaze returned to her quickly.

“So I’ve heard. I’ve also heard that you met Ahsoka, in someone else's dream.”

“I have a Force Bond with Kylo Ren. I've never been in anyone else's dream that I know of. I kind of thought she started that with him. Because of—”

“Anakin. Yes. Ahsoka can be very… vague when she wants to be. Especially about the Force. But, here's the thing… My friend, who disappeared. I dream about him. Sometimes I see him even when I'm not dreaming. But I don't have the Force. Not even a tiny bit.”

Rey chewed her lip. She didn't want to let Sabine down, this was clearly something important to her, and Rey couldn't exactly deny that she had experience with Force visions, but…

“What does Ahsoka say? About your visions?”

Sabine shook her head, her lips pressed together thinly.

“She doesn't, really. We spent a long time trying to find him, and I think after so many years, that failure just became too much. I came back here when my aunt died and she said she would keep looking, but… I don't know. I don't really know what she does.”

The older woman's voice took on a touch of bitterness, but before Rey could say a word, she sensed movement behind her. Kirin gently touched her arm, looking from Rey to Sabine for permission. Rey nodded immediately, and the girl took Sabine’s hand.

“His name was Ezra?”

The Mandalorian’s dark eyes widened, and she nodded.

“I'll look for him.” She glanced to Rey again, worriedly. “If that's okay? I have… I can see other people's dreams, sometimes.”

Rey eyed her cautiously, intrigued but also uncertain. She had never heard of the Force allowing someone to wander through other people's dreams, but... there were a lot of things she had never heard of... Finally, she nodded, and Sabine gasped a ‘thank you’ as the girl retreated. Rey frowned, watching her.

“I’m really not much of a scholar on Force power, but I think… if I were having dreams and visions of the same person for years…” She glanced up and met Sabine’s hopeful gaze. “I had dreams and visions of someone for a few months and look where I ended up.”

“Does he love you?”

“I wouldn't be with him if I thought he didn't.” She tilted her head at Sabine. “He wasn't just a friend to you.”

“No,” she confirmed.

“Have you… has there ever been anyone else?”

“No,” she laughed. “I tried a few times, but he got so moody and irritable, I couldn’t stand it. It's really strange to have to turn down potential suitors because your dream boyfriend gets jealous.”

“Strangely enough, I understand,” Rey gave her a faint smile.
“It's really him, isn't it? I'm not just crazy?”

“I don't think you need me to tell you that.”

“No, I don't.” She held Rey's gaze. “If you come across anything… if Kylo Ren has any ideas…”

She squeezed Sabine’s shoulder firmly.

“I'll let you know.” She paused, thinking of Kirin. “Slavery is illegal here?”

“Oh, yes.”

The ruler’s dry tone told her Sabine knew exactly where she was headed.

“As a representative of the First Order, I'd like to file a complaint.”

“I'll forward some paperwork for you to sign.”
Kylo Ren Still Can't Keep It Together

Chapter Summary

Kylo finally gets the nerve to try out some of those fantasies back in chapter whatever.

Trust Kylo to need aftercare from his own dom play.

Why does Ahsoka always show up around these times? Does she have some kind of kinky voyuerism fetish? Guess he'll have to go find out in person.

Totalllly NOT running away because he can't handle leaving a few bruises on his precious, sweet, completely defensless girlfriend... Who is way more annoyed about being left alone to do the one thing that's a hard limit for her... being a kriffing leader.

Chapter Notes

WARNING: CONSENTING BDSM AHEAD. (Specifically, bondage with a belt, submissive oral sex and consenting roughness with bruises and mild discomfort later)

Kylo Ren glanced up through the viewport, feeling a familiar excitement in the back of his mind. It would not do to rush down there, but he walked as quickly as his long strides would carry him, reaching the hangar just as the shuttle landed precisely in its place.

He could hardly contain himself as the ramp opened, his hands squeezing into fists, and he realized he was wearing his gloves. He removed them as fast as he could, beyond caring what his officers and soldiers might think.

His lips parted when he saw her, hair half down, cascading over her shoulders, eyes drawing immediately towards him before she turned to head down the ramp. She still preferred light clothing that she could move in, but had switched to darker colors of deep purple and navy blue, under the heavy dark gray cloak she had insisted on paying for herself.

He noticed a flash of brighter color across her body, and saw she had acquired some kind of decorative leather sash. As she got closer, he could see that it was Wookie craftsmanship, something that would cost a fortune at market. It was obviously a gift, Rey would never buy something like that for herself, and a flash of rage flooded through him. How *dare* she accept such an expensive gift from her friends, but refuse anything even remotely nice that he tried to give her?

She turned to him fully then, catching the color if not the cause of his emotion, and their eyes met, before she remembered herself and cast her gaze downward. And that brief glance was all it took to quell his anger. He could not maintain his rage under the light of her warm gaze, and even though he still felt injured, all of his anger melted away by the time she reached him.

She dropped to one knee, bowing respectfully, and it was all he could do not to seize her and crush her against him.
“Master.”

Her voice trembled slightly, and then she pressed against his mind, and he didn't resist at all. For a single, blessed moment, they remained still, overwhelmed by the warmth of affection that flowed between them. Then she looked up, and he could not bring himself to reprimand her. Instead, he cradled the side of her face in his hand, and stooped low to kiss her.

_I missed you._

_Me too._

_Please don't get angry._

_Why…?_

He pulled away, looking down at her with concern. Why would he be angry? Had she sensed his thoughts about her gift from Kashyyyk? No, it had to be something else, something bigger.

“I have done as you asked, but there was a… complication.”

She tried so hard to maintain her submissive facade, but he sensed her stubbornness coiling underneath. His gaze hardened.

“What complication? Where is the child?”

He peered into the shuttle, and suddenly he understood. Two sets of frightened eyes peered back at him out of the gloom. The dark gray eyes of a Wookie, and purple, humanoid ones below it. Two distinct Force signatures rippled around them.

Rey turned and beckoned, and they came down the ramp, the young Wookie striding defensively with a shorter, slimmer figure behind him. A Twi’lek. He gestured for Rey to stand, and she did.

“Master Ren, allow me to present Gahengeen, and Kirin.”

_I found her reading the ancient texts. They called to her._ He sensed Rey gathering herself for an argument. _She was a slave._

_Well done._

He smirked at the sight of her mouth hanging open, and turned to the children. Well, they weren't exactly children, both were adolescents. Older than the traditional age of Jedi acolytes, but he was not restarting the Jedi. He clapped the Wookie on the shoulder and met the clear gray eyes. It amused him to find they were the same height, though he doubted it would last long.

“Wellcome.” He put as much warmth into his voice as he could. He knew he didn't exactly project friendliness, but he truly was excited to have a new student. Two new students.

He turned to the Twi’lek, only to find her shying away, half hiding behind the Wookie, her eyes downcast. He hesitated, looking to Rey, who shook her head very slightly. He sensed rage boiling through the bond, with a ferocity that made his eyes go wide.
Glancing back to the girl, taking in her appearance more carefully, he had a feeling he understood. Rey's anger usually passed like a summer storm, but this rage was cold and enduring.

*A slave,* she repeated.

He glanced at her in understanding. This required caution. A gentleness that was outside of his range. Fortunately, he had faith in Rey and her naturally boundless compassion.

He knelt, so the girl didn't have to look up, and he heard some of the officers in the shipyard murmuring.

“It's Kirin, right?” She nodded, still refusing to look directly at him. “Kirin. Look at me. Please.”

She did, quickly, but he could not hold her gaze.

“You are free to leave if you wish, Kirin. We are not running a prison.”

Purple eyes darted up and back down quickly, reminding him of another girl he had known long before. He could feel the intensity of Rey’s attention on him. He knew it was risky to appear weak before his forces, but this was more important. One Force user was worth a whole squadron of Stormtroopers.

“I think Master Rey would like it if you stayed. She can teach you to defend yourself. And you can study the books you were drawn to.”

He caught Kirin’s gaze flitting from him to Rey. She appeared to be comfortable making eye contact there, at least long enough for her prospective master to smile at her. She clung to the Wookie’s arm suddenly with both hands, and he warbled at her gently.

“That's right. Genji will be here too.” Ren agreed. “Master Rey will train you together.”

*Oh, I see. You want more students, but you don't want the responsibility.*

*I have other responsibilities. You don't.*

*Have you forgotten that my training is still incomplete? How can I be qualified to teach apprentices when I'm still learning myself. What about our training together?*

*They're just kids. How hard can it be?*

“I'll stay,” the girl said finally.

“I'm not going back to Jakku. I don't ever want to see that place again in my life.”

They were in Rey’s room. He leaned against the wall while she sat on the floor because she preferred rugs and pillows to actual furniture, using the room mainly for meditation. He had come to find her after receiving Phasma's report, and when she didn't answer his soft knock, he reached through the bond to find that she had fallen asleep while trying to practice her evening exercises.

As much as he had wanted to drag her back to their quarters the second she returned, they had both been too busy. She had to get her new charges settled, while he had meetings to attend and orders to oversee.

*“Do you know anything about this? The orphanage, the weapon in the core?”*
“No! I mean, I knew about the ruins, but the Anchorites were gone long before I was living there.” She nibbled a thumbnail thoughtfully. “Plutt probably knows something though, and I’m sure Hux could buy it off him for pennies.”

“Pennies is all he'll have,” Ren said in an amused tone. “He can call himself whatever he likes, but he doesn’t seem to recall who I used to be.”

Rey glanced at him, suddenly curious, and Ren smiled like an advancing predator. He had been busy while she was gone.

“It's funny what a difference a mask makes. I think I mentioned we were having trouble gathering funds.”

“I remember.”

“After she told me about Jakku, I spent some time talking to Maz Kanata.” He rolled his eyes at Rey’s incredulous look. “I know. What have I become?”

“Maz talked to you. Does she know about Ha-” She clapped her hands to her mouth, a horrified expression crossing her face. He knelt swiftly before her, taking her hands in his. “I'm so sorry, I wasn't thinking.”

“Don't be. It happened.”

He met her searching gaze steadily, but he had forgotten how well she could read him, how easily she slipped inside his cool facade without even trying. She pried a hand out of his grasp and lifted it to caress his face, and he closed his eyes, leaning into it.

It wasn’t enough. He needed more of her, of her skin against his, the absolution in her fierce embrace. His eyes opened and he leaned forward just as she did, their lips crushed together, the desperate need they had buried all day blazing to life now that they were finally alone. He knew she was tired, but he could feel her desire through the bond, just as strong and demanding as his, forcing aside weariness and overriding a storm of other emotions.

In the span of a few moments, he had (carefully) removed most of her clothing, leaving her in only her long tunic. His hands moved over her soft skin, his tongue exploring her mouth while her quick hands unfastened his belt and pushed down his pants. There would be time, later, for more thorough pleasures, now they simply needed to be together, to feel complete again.

He groaned when she wrapped her hand firmly around him and guided him into her, wiggling her body to make it accept him more quickly. He looked down worriedly, afraid they were moving too fast.

“Am I hurting you?”

Her eyes flashed, and he grunted in surprise when he felt her legs wrap around him. She moved again and they both exhaled in relief as he entered her more comfortably, but there was a resistance he wasn’t expecting.

“Rey? I can-”

“No.” Her fingers wound tightly in his hair, her other hand gripping his hip with painful strength. He moved, gently, and she moaned in a plaintive tone, different than he was accustomed to.

"I want you like this," she hissed firmly.
Her hips pressed against him and her legs tightened, begging for more, and he couldn’t stop himself. Her body was wrapped around him, filling his senses, and she was so incredibly tight. Too tight, although it felt exquisite to him, he didn’t want her to think she was obligated to go on if it was hurting-

"It does hurt," she murmured softly, following his thoughts. Her pupils were wide when he looked into her eyes, a glint of some new emotion coloring them. “But I like it.”

“If you want me to stop, tell me.”

He was gentle, feeling her body slowly grow accustomed to him as she closed her eyes and wrapped her limbs around him, moaning in a low, husky tone that he recognized from whenever she knelt before him as his apprentice.

“No, move. I want to feel it,” she demanded. “Don’t worry about hurting me.”

She adjusted herself again, taking him fully to the hilt, and drew his head down, pulling him in by his hair, to whisper in his ear.

“Please don’t stop, Master.”

“Dammit, Rey, I am not practiced in patience.”

"I think I’ve been perfectly clear that I don’t want your patience," she growled, eyes locked onto his, blazing with need.

He took a deep breath to steady himself, and peered into her open mind, surprised both at what he saw and the immediate, overwhelming response he felt searing through his body. She was thinking of his dream, in the cave, all those fantasies he had projected and her unexpected excitement. If that’s what she wanted…

*You can't possibly be surprised.*

He wasn’t, really, it was just…

*Not surprised.* He smiled slightly, looking down into her dark, seductive gaze. *Unprepared, mostly.*

*Oh, well, if you want something else-*

*I can improvise.*

He dragged her hands off of him and held them down, lacing his fingers through hers. He moved his mouth over her, cruelly, like he had done at the lake, his teeth bruising her flesh, sucking her nipples until he could feel the tingle of pain in her mind.

And she moaned and whined desperately, so incredibly responsive to his every touch, her hips moving against him desperately. He looked over her body, and he let her see some of the things that played through his mind.

“Yes,” she whispered.
He could sense some trepidation, but it was overshadowed by her current state of arousal.

_Something for later?_

_Yes. Yes, later. She was peaking, her thoughts nearly incoherent. Please just fuck me now. Hard, like I know you want to._

He gave her what she asked for, watching as her pleasure consumed her, waiting until she came down and caught her breath. When she opened her eyes, he met her gaze. Coldly.

“Turn over,” he ordered.

She gasped and her face flushed.

“Now?”

“Yes. I'm not done with you. Keep your mouth shut and do as I say.”

There was moment where they stared at each other, reading, minds searching once more to be sure that they could do this, that it wouldn’t hurt them. That she trusted him enough to let it happen. That she could stop it at any time.

_Is this your definition of ‘later’?_

_It doesn't have to be._

But he wanted it, and he could feel her interest rising. Abruptly, she nodded.

_No Force powers. If you bring that in, I reserve the right to respond with my own._

He couldn't help but imagine what _that_ would be like, and decided it probably wasn't safe to experiment with on a Star Destroyer full of people cruising through empty space.

_Agreed._

She did as he instructed with no further comments. Silent and obedient, even when he used his belt to bind her wrists. He kept watch over her thoughts, always ready to stop, to switch gears if he sensed something negative, but Rey was perfect. He could sense when her adrenaline spiked, but she was never truly frightened, simply… excited. _Enthralled._

At first he just bound her with her arms above her head, flat on her stomach while he explored her roughly with his mouth and teeth and hands, and the sounds she made just encouraged him. Her skin was so soft and pliable beneath his mouth, especially in the more secret places, and she gasped and moaned when he bit hard into her thighs.

He pushed her apart and tongued inside her, then shoved three fingers as deep as he could reach, encouraged by her hoarse, low moans and the slick moisture gathering around his touch. She let out a harsh, shocked sob when he added his other hand, his long fingers holding her open for him to thrust his tongue into the quivering, silken flesh within.
Tell me if it's too much.

It's... good, just... I...

Breathe, Rey.

I am. Don't stop. Whatever you do... don't stop...

He laughed inwardly, but her mind was nearly incoherent already. He brought her release that way, licking at the moisture that followed until she caught her breath and the aftershocks of her body faded. She was still beneath him, her eyes half-groggy with pleasure as he kissed up the curve of her spine and whispered in her.

“I take it you liked that?”

She nodded slowly, clearly remembering his instructions and struggling to project actual words through their mental link.

“Are you tired? Do you want to rest?”

No. I want you to come, too.

“I'm going to fuck you like you're really my slut.” His words were soft, but she shivered at the meaning. “I won't be gentle. Is that still what you want?”

He sent her an image, so she had a clear idea of what she was agreeing to, how much strength he had been holding at bay. They were matched equally in the Force, but physically... Rey was muscular and hardy, and possibly faster, but he outmatched almost every opponent he'd ever fought in the realm of strength and stamina. Without the Force, it would be like a Wookie wrestling with a kitten.

Whimpering softly, she nodded her assent.

He had to redo the bindings for what he really wanted, and her eyes followed him whenever he was within sight, dark and wide, apprehensive but not afraid. He repositioned her on her knees, her hands bound behind her back, and the memory that passed between them was so vivid, he had to close his eyes and back away before he came apart.

She opened her mouth obediently when he put his hard length to her lips, her eyes focused on his for a moment before she applied herself to the task. He couldn't take it long, her eager display of submission was so much more than he ever expected, and he needed more friction.

Swiftly, he jerked away, pushing her down so her firm bottom was lifted, and filled her fully with one hard stroke. She yelped, in anguish or pleasure, or both, and he was more violent than he intended, the sight of her helpless before him with her trusting eyes taking his cock in her mouth had been too much.

But she let him, and he could not believe the feelings of pleasure in her mind even when he was quite clearly causing her pain. He jerked into her with abandon, one hand gripping her hips while the other held her bound wrists tightly, her face pressed into the pillows.

And when he closed his eyes in his own release, she was there, incredibly, joined with him in
the still, white light of their lifeforce.

Yes. I'm still here.

I'm sorry.

You shouldn't be. This is... really... I didn't know I would like it so much.

But you do?

You're in my head, you idiot... Look for yourself.

He did, but it still seemed impossible. He felt her rolling her eyes and sighing tiredly, mildly amused at his disbelief.

"Rey. Rey," he kissed the nape of her neck before he pulled out, carefully untying her, kissing her wrists as he eased her onto her side. "Do you know how incredible you are?"

"Mmm... if you say so..."

Her eyes on his were unfocused, and he could tell she was truly exhausted. He let her rest while he ran a bath for her, and carried her there and held her while she relaxed against his chest, pressing gentle kisses into her hair and murmuring his affection repeatedly. He was glad he decided to get in with her, she was nearly falling asleep while he gently washed away what he could, and carefully examined and kissed the bruises he had left.

He carried her to their bed and held her against him while she slept, thinking, wondering, praying that she would still love him when she woke, despite her bemused sleepy assurances. Some of the marks he traced delicately with his fingers were frighteningly dark.

It had been over a month since he had had the cave dream. This time Rey wasn’t there. He was alone in the dark with the towering spikes of kyber crystals, sensing his adversary nearby, but unable to pinpoint her until she leapt at him from the ceiling, white blades flashing. He summoned his weapon to block, but it felt strange. The grip was off.

He realized just in time that he held Rey’s lightstaff, and he blocked the oncoming attack clumsily. His enemy somersaulted in the air, landing across from him, and her hood fell back. Not that he needed to see her face, Rey had been absolutely right.

"Why are you tormenting me? What do you want?"

He shouted, spinning the unfamiliar weapon in his hands. He was unaccustomed to a staff and that made it dangerous, so he switched to the single blue blade as she advanced on him. Their weapons crossed again, with him struggling to hold off her crossed blades.

“What happened to your lightsaber?” She asked mildly, as if he hadn’t just yelled in her face.

“Nothing! I don’t... This is a dream.”

“So why do you have your girlfriend’s weapon instead of your own?”

He looked at the slim, long bar of silver in his hands, just long enough to distract himself. She took advantage, and again, he only barely held her off. This time, instead of backing away, she pressed her edge.
“Think! Why does your mind want Rey’s blade instead of yours?”

“I don’t know!” He parried, poorly, and the tip of one of the white sabers seared over his hand, causing him to drop Rey’s blade, sending it clattering across the cave floor, powering off. He tried to force his mind to rework itself, to summon his own weapon, but he couldn’t.

The elderly woman came at him again, brutally, forcing him to dodge and hurl rocks at her in defense.

“You do know, you just don’t want to face it!”

She stepped back, giving him a chance to recover his footing. He summoned Rey’s weapon and it came to him. He glanced down at it briefly before he had to block another attack.

“Now you’re just blocking! Why don’t you come at me like before, Jedi Killer?”

“Because I don’t want to kill you!”

The words were out of his mouth before he realized what he’d said. They stopped, and Ahsoka powered down her blades. Ren did the same, his lips pressed together grimly.

“Now that that’s out of the way, are you ready to listen?”

“Why should I listen to you? You have nothing I want to hear!”

“No?” She waved her hand, and inexplicably, Rey’s lightsaber flew out of his grasp. He growled angrily, reaching after it, completely opening himself up to a sharp knock on the skull by Ahsoka’s white wooden staff.

Now that he could see it clearly, he realized the staff was a clever ruse, a sheath that held her saber hilts within.

“Stupid child! You know who I am, and you still think I have nothing of value to tell you?”

“I have decades of training! I don’t need teaching from someone who was never even a Master Jedi!”

“Teaching? You think I want to train you, Ben Solo? I am too old to train anyone.”

He stared at her, his eyes wide and confused. She sighed, sitting carefully on a rock formation with the aid of her staff. He realized belatedly that her body really was frail - most of her movements were made with the Force, including just the normal melee attacks she made with her paired sabers. Her arms and legs, not hidden by her cloak, were thin and wiry, and her large horns seemed to weigh down the rest of her frame.

“No. You have all the training you need.”

“Then what do you want?”

“To make up for my failures.”

Her blue eyes held his, and he realized they held a wealth of sadness. He knew if Rey were here she would sense more, she would know what to say and how to say it. Kylo Ren was just confused.

“What failures?”
“There’s so many…” she laughed softly. “But most importantly, I failed my master. Over, and over, and over again. You’re my last chance, Ben Solo.”

“It’s Kylo Ren.”

“Whatever you want to call yourself, you’re still Anakin’s grandson.”

Her eyes moved away from his suddenly, and he felt himself waking up.

“Wait, no! I need to-”

“You need to take care of your girlfriend. Whenever you want to talk, you can find me on Taris. You’ll know where to go.”

Rey was humming to herself. He opened his eyes to see her already dressed in her simple long-sleeved undershirt, a long dark tunic and leggings, her hair brushed, but down, rummaging in her satchel. She sat on her side of the bed with her back turned towards him, and for a moment he wondered what it was that woke him. Then he smelled the caf.

“You’re killing me. Did you really wake up before me and turn on the caf machine? For me?”

He reached out and put his arm around her waist. She turned, holding a bar of purple and white soap, and leaned over to kiss the top of his head.

“I did. And I brought you something from Kashyyyk.”

He frowned when she moved, and before she could resist, he had lifted up the edge of her tunic to see a dark black and purple bruise on her hip. She sighed and rolled her eyes, but he was up in an instant.

“Let me see you. Take off your shirt.”

She stood slowly, her eyes locked on his.

“No.”

“Rey.”

“No. Now get out of the way. I know you’re blocking me in so you can force me to show you. It’s not going to work.” She tossed the bar of soap across the bed at him. “Go take your shower and get dressed. I’m fine.”

He picked it up slowly, his eyes never leaving her.

“Stop. I am happy. Please don’t ruin it.” She sighed, her eyes warm on his. “If you want to, we can unpack this later. For now, just know, I don’t think I’ve slept that well in my entire life.”

She waited, her arms crossed over her chest, until he finally relented and went on to his morning ritual. He had almost forgotten about the dream with Ahsoka until he sat down at the little table in his quarters where Rey was sipping some kind of herbal tea and writing in a notebook.

“I thought I would start the students on meditation. It’s simple and takes a lot of practice, so we’ll have time to figure out where to go from there.” He gave a slight grunt of agreement as he sat down across from her.
“Rey.”

She always looked at him when he said her name, her eyes holding the same warmth they had the very first time he’d said it, in the elevator on the Supremacy. Even now after… last night. But she didn’t want to talk about it, so he pressed on.

“I had a dream about Ahsoka last night. The kyber crystal cave.”

“You agree that it’s her now?”

“I know it is. I saw her face.” A flicker of surprise crossed her expression, and she set down her pencil and leaned in with interest. “For some reason, I had your lightsaber. I couldn’t even summon mine.”

“Hmmm. Did you fight?”

“Yes. I lost badly. But she told me where to find her.”

“What?!” She was as surprised as he had been. “Where?”

“Taris. Apparently there’s a kyber cave there.”

“You mean... the one from the dream? It’s a real place?”

“Yes. I believe it is.”

“Well, I don’t know what to make of that.”

She looked at her notebook, then chewed her thumb. He could see some faint red marks on her wrist, and he wanted desperately to see the rest, to know what he’d done to her, but she saw his eyes and tugged her sleeve down firmly.

“I think I should go,” he said slowly.

“Now? You can’t just leave me here without you! What am I going to do about the students?”

“I have faith in you.”

“If you’re running away because last night got a little rough, and you’re suddenly afraid of yourself, Kylo Ren, I’d like to remind you that I was and am fully capable of stopping anything I don’t want to happen. Do you remember the Supremacy? How about that lovely scar on your face?” She forced him to meet her gaze, and locked him down with her eyes as she lunged to her feet. “I am not made of glass! Maybe next time, I’ll tie you up. I dare you to stop me!”

His face flushed and he couldn’t look away, so he reached out and took her hand. Without trying to look too closely at her wrist.

“I’m not running away. But I have to go.” He lifted her hand and kissed the top of it. “And I need you to stay here and run things while I’m gone.”

“No! Absolutely not! Why does everyone want me to lead them?”

“Because they trust you.”

“Do you trust me?”
She wrapped her fingers around his hand in a steel grip, glaring him down. He took a deep breath. Her meaning was clear.

“Yes, Rey.”

“Are we done then?”

“I still have to go to Taris.” She sighed and opened her mouth to argue, but he pressed onward. “It's not far. We have the Force bond. I'm promoting Captain Sloane to Commander. Okay?”

“I can't really stop you, I guess.” She thought for a minute. “I like Sloane...
I wonder if Kylo realizes he's left his First Order to be run by two female commanders and his badass girlfriend? Powerpuffs for the win?

(It's like 3am and I just took my sleep meds, I can't do serious right now)

Rey was *not* comfortable sitting in Kylo Ren's chair on the bridge of the *Finalizer*. She felt so out of place it was like a bizarre dream sequence. But she made herself do it for an hour, everyday, even though she spent most of the hour researching Jakku. Phasma’s information was correct, there was something in the core that the remnants of the Empire referred to as “The Emperor's Contingency Plan,” but the only people to actually see it were all dead.

Interestingly, one of those people was Brendol Hux. And the other was Grand Admiral Rae Sloane. She glanced at the time, then at the Commander sitting at the console beside her. Records indicated she was in fact the adopted daughter of the previous Sloane.

“Commander, do you have a minute?” She asked, but she kept her tone cool, making it clear refusal wasn't an option. The woman rose swiftly at the same time as Rey, keeping pace with her as she walked through the black corridor of the Star Destroyer.

“How can I be of service, Master Rey?”

*Master Rey*. She hadn't realized, when Kylo Ren said it out loud, that the soldiers and officers would begin using the title as well. She did her best not to let her discomfort be a distraction.

“I was reviewing General Hux's personnel records, and I discovered some interesting details.”

She liked Sloane, but that didn't mean she trusted her. She didn't really trust *any* of the First Order, but here she was, trying to lead them in Kylo Ren's absence. The woman was dark-skinned, like Finn, but she had short-cropped gray hair under her uniform hat, though according to her file, she was a few years shy of forty. Her eyes were narrow and amber-colored, lighter than Rey's own. But she had been raised in the First Order, her expression gave away nothing.

“You want to know if I am well-acquainted with Armitage? I was when we were children, but when Snoke took over, everything changed.”

Rey was startled. She'd assumed Snoke created the First Order himself from the dregs of the defeated Empire. This was turning into a very interesting conversation. And giving her more reading assignments.

“I looked into your file as well. How is it that Armitage Hux became a general, while you remained only a captain? Your parents were both instrumental in the final days of the Empire.”

Sloane was quiet, and Rey could sense some hesitation in her mind.

“My mother disappeared before the Supreme Leader took over. For reasons that are certainly not disclosed in the personnel files.” She stopped and turned to face Rey. “There was no friendliness
between her and Brendol Hux. They disagreed on the direction of the Order. When she went on a
mission and didn't return, everyone assumed Hux had something to do with it.”

“I see.” Rey tried to imagine what Kylo Ren would think, what he would say. He had
definitely inherited his mother's clever mind, but Rey was not prepared for this kind of thinking.
“Where do you stand, Commander?”

“With Supreme Leader Ren,” the woman said firmly.

Rey still had mixed feelings about using the Force this way, but she had to know. Gently, she
brushed the edges of the woman's mind, and breathed a sigh of relief. Not only was she was telling
the truth, this woman loathed Hux, and had a strong belief in a beneficent First Order under rational,
competent leadership.

“That's… good to hear.”

Ren would have something else to say, some kind of sharp dismissal that reinforced the
sentiment, but she felt like a bird underwater trying to interact with his forces. At least the Rebels had
a more informal style that was easy to adapt to.

The Commander glanced around, checking the hall, then ducked quickly into a monitoring
station, gesturing for Rey to follow. Intrigued, she followed, gently touching Sloane's mind again to
check for hostile intentions, but she seemed simply anxious.

“I beg your forgiveness for the intrusion. It is, of course, none of my business.” She
swallowed, and Rey kept her expression neutral, waiting. The Commander lowered her voice.
“What… ah… What are your intentions regarding Supreme Leader Ren?”

Rey's eyes widened before she could stop herself, and the other woman flinched as if waiting
to be punished. But she had no idea how to answer such a question. She didn’t know the answer
herself. When Ben had spoken briefly of marriage at Sabine’s estate, she had felt only panic and a
fierce urge to prove herself independent. Later that night she had considered it more calmly, but he
hadn’t brought it up since, and she had no desire to. She took a deep breath to center herself.

“I'm not sure what you mean, Commander. Are you referring to my apprenticeship to Kylo
Ren, or our personal relationship?”

“Aren't they the same?”

Something about Sloane's eyes caught her. Was she actually concerned that Rey would hurt
Kylo Ren emotionally? She thought about it for a moment, remembering his fits of anger, his
complete lack of control when it came to anything remotely emotional. If his officers were
accustomed to the sorts of tantrums like he'd had when she stole his shuttle, or his sheer, rabid anger
on Crait...

It occurred to her that in the few months that she had been with him, she had not seen him
engage in nearly as many outbursts of violence as she'd expected. Oh, he’d get angry and storm off,
or go to their room and destroy something with his lightsaber, but she imagined how it must seem to
his officers. She gave Sloane a confident smile.

“Don't worry. I am not going anywhere.”

“But what about your friends? The Resistance, the Rebels?”

Rey frowned. That was a subject they had left untouched since she chose to come to him. He
had gone to the memorial service without assaulting anyone, even when Rose slapped him for speaking of her so indiscreetly. Finn had attempted to contact her through Maz, and Kylo Ren had spoken to her, and enlisted her help in funding… He still hadn’t been very clear about that.

“I don’t know. I think right now… the enemy of my enemy is my friend, right? They’re certainly not going to team up with Hux.”

The more she thought about it, the more she thought it was time… Certainly they knew about Genji. Finn had been on Jakku scouting, it was his information that Kylo had sent Phasma to follow up on. It only made sense, the Resistance had only a few fighters and freighters in their fleet, while Ren’s First Order had three Star Destroyers. Neither of them could take on Hux alone, but if they were willing to work together…

She squeezed Sloane’s shoulder gently in gratitude.

“I think I’m going to try to send out some messages. Thank you for bringing it up. And thank you for your faith in Kylo Ren.”

The other woman nodded.

“Of course, Master Rey. I’m glad to be of assistance.”

Phasma blinked at the message displayed in bright orange across the black screen. What did Ren think he was doing, going off on a personal mission at a time like this? And leaving his slut in charge? But he had promoted Ceres Sloane to Commander, so at least the puppy had a watchdog. She frowned. Sloane seemed to have an actual… liking for the girl. Perhaps Phasma should withhold judgment until she had the chance to test the woman herself, but if satisfying the man’s needs could alleviate his volatile temper, she must have some incredible bedroom talent to match her fighting skills.

She had no idea what to make of them collecting teenagers to train into their mystic powers, but she could only hope it would add strength to their forces. As it stood, Hux had one or two Star Destroyers, some old Separatist cruiser donated from his allies in the crime syndicates, a few hundred fighters and the crippled Supremacy.

Kylo Ren had his flagship Star Destroyer, the Depredation and the Absolution and the few hundred or so TIEs associated with each ship. In a pitched battle, their forces would most likely be victorious, but she didn’t like the possible cost. They would lose one destroyer themselves, most likely, and Hux would rather add to Jakku’s graveyard than leave resources for Ren to claim. The Supremacy was useless, Hux’s ill-conceived jump to Jakku had further destroyed the super-ship’s systems, leaving only one-quarter of it even powered. It was mostly an orbiting ruin, and would probably remain such at this point. It would be cheaper just to commission a new ship, once they finished mopping up the deserters.

Gods only knew where the rest of the fleet was, or whom they would choose to follow. She imagined most captains would do as she was doing, stand back and attempt to let the two rabid wolves take each other out.

According to Master Rey, the horrible blobby alien running the scrap exchange was a primary source of information, and had already worked on behalf of the First Order before when they had put a bounty out on that stupid droid. It shouldn’t be too hard to gain his assistance, and Phasma was
relatively certain she could offer more than Hux had, given the magic the Supreme Leader had worked on behalf of their funding.

It appeared that in the face of Hux’s power grab, with no superior force and the loss of Leia Organa, certain governments had suddenly re-evaluated the idea of doing business with the Rebel leader’s son. Whether they thought they were supporting Ben Solo or the First Order, Phasma didn’t care. There was money flowing into their accounts again, and that meant more options for her assignment.

She turned to the two Stormtroopers behind her, sitting in the canteen over a game of cards. She was getting rather tired of their banter, and would be quite thrilled when this mission was over and she could go back to her actual command.

“Bring me Unkar Plutt. Don’t harm the beast if you don’t have to. Let him know there are credits to be made.”
Did You Really Drug the Supreme Leader?

Chapter Summary

You know, between studying to be a Jedi and being Snoke's attack dog, Kylo has had very little time to experiment like a normal young person. But still, it seems reasonable to expect Han Solo's kid to have some tolerance for illicit substances...

If you accidentally roofie the Supreme Leader, it's probably best not to be around when he wakes up...

Why does the scavenger lord's daughter share a name with Rey's Wookie friend Khawapashi? If you're gonna charm around the galaxy smuggling spice, you've gotta have the right co-pilot...

Chapter Notes

All credit for the character of Kayt Baasen goes to my BFF, and Medici was created from my spouse's weird obsession with K2-SO and HK-47. I don't know why he's a medical droid. I don't think he knows either.

Playing Edge of the Empire with these fucks is hella fun. Now you see why my Storyteller character is a motherly Wookie.

Further Warning: There's going to be a lot of OC from here on out. My proofreaders have entitled this series "Solo's School for Sensitive Teenagers." And here I was trying to write something more serious...

I promise there's plenty of cannon characters too, and the focus will remain on our favorite couple.

Taris was definitely in the top five worst places Kylo Ren had ever visited. The entire planet had been overwhelmed by pollution at ground level, leading progressive generations to build dwellings up above, on massive steel girders and concrete pillars. Generations after that, some kind of massive battle had taken place, leaving only a small fraction of the above-ground spaces available for the desperate scavengers to use as living space.

Until the Empire’s collapse the planet had been under the rule of a corrupt, puppet governor. Now it was run by the scavenger lord Kayt Baasen, a scoundrel in the same mold as Han Solo, ruling over a tiny empire of scrap because any nicer place might have a bounty on his head. There were rumors that Baasen was a Force-sensitive, and he had acquired a small fortune selling kyber in the days of the old Empire. Now it seemed he was happy to occupy the former governor’s luxury townhouse with his Twi’lek girlfriend and charge prospective hunters for the privilege of exploring the ruins below.

There was one tiny spaceport on Taris, and there was barely enough room for Ren’s shuttle to
land amid the beaten-up freighters and scrappy gunships. He did not like the sound of the hacker in
the control tower, but they had given him clearance to land. Hopefully his ship would still be there
when he came back for it.

He felt the ruined temple call to him as soon as he set foot on the concrete of the landing
ground. It was the first thing he saw on the horizon, the top twenty feet or so of the pyramid jutting
out of the surface fog in a smooth black triangle. But he couldn’t get to it directly from the spaceport,
he would have to go into town to find a guide. Hopefully.

Beyond the stalls of an open market, the living quarters of Taris were surprisingly well-kempt
for a scrapyard, with windows of actual glass and fresh paint on the walls. Children of all kinds
played in the street, chasing balls or rats and screeching like children did. He grimaced and moved
quickly to a door beneath a large sign that read simply Wastrel’s in electric purple light.

It was larger inside than it appeared, with several steps leading down from the door into a wide,
open space filled with couches and tables and adults with drinks and cards, and blessedly free of
shrii! yelling. No one seemed to pay him any mind as he made his way to the bar in the back, though
a few heads had turned when he entered. It was the kind of place where undue attention towards any
patron was a faux pas. Han Solo’s kind of place.

The Twi’lek at the bar had blue-green skin and dark human eyes and teeth. Ren was surprised -
hybrids were rare, even out here on the edge of space. The Twi’lek had an unusually low fertility
rate to begin with, and the chances of a successful cross-mating were abysmally low, something that
at least partially accounted for their popularity as… bedroom slaves. His lips twisted at the thought,
and he remember the way Kirin had hidden from him. But the bartender was friendly enough, even
with him, and there was no trace of fear in her swift movements as she poured his whiskey and
turned to help another customer.

Ren sipped and waited. He knew how these places worked. Eventually, someone would take
note of his unusual garb or word would come around of his First Order shuttle, and someone would
want to ask questions.

He didn’t expect it to be the barkeeper. With an unusually clean towel thrown over her shoulder,
she leaned on the counter across from him, her dark eyes flitting over the scar on his face.

“So are you really him, or is there money in impersonations now?”

Kylo Ren blinked. He was not expecting to be made fun of. Casually, he leaned away, adjusting
his saber on his belt.

“No. I mean, yes. I am… who you think I am.”

“Of course you are. I’d know if we had any Force-users with that kinda power locally.” She
frowned, chewing her lip thoughtfully, and it occurred to him that she was surprisingly young. How
foolish he was. He had just reviewed the information on Taris before coming out of hyperspace. The
Force-sensitive scavenger lord and his Twi’lek girlfriend.

“I assume your name is Baasen,” he said after a moment.

Her eyes were amused. He sensed something, and ducked instinctively before he fully absorbed
what was happening, just dodging the wine bottle that soared over his head. Cursing, he turned, and
watched as the bottle floated through the air behind him, refilling the glass of a patron who gave the
girl a friendly wave. Ren ducked again as it soared over his head, his eyes meeting the girl’s.
She put down the wine bottle with more precision than even he was capable of without full concentration, and offered her hand. A series of gold tattoos in swirls and dots scrolled down the skin of her arm.

“It’s Pashi. Pashi Baasen.” He stared at her hand, and she raised her eyebrows. Hesitantly, he took it in his gloved hand and shook it. It was so strange to have physical contact with someone besides Rey, it felt surreal. Ren wasn’t sure he’d purposely touched a single other person since he held Kellan’s dying body in his arms a decade ago.

The Twi’lek hybrid gave him an excited smile.

“Pleasure to meet you, Mr. Solo.”

“I’m not-” He stopped in shock mostly. She had put her finger to his lips. And winked.

“You want to meet my dad. Go on up the stairs.” She waved to a wire and steel staircase up the wall behind her. “He knows you’re here.”

“Ah, I see.” He nodded in what he hoped was an appreciative gesture. “Thank you, Pashi.”

Where had he heard that name before? It made him think of Rey. One of her friends? He prodded at his memory, trying to place it as he walked up the stairs. The traitor’s girlfriend? No. That was Rose. Very few people were brave enough to slap Kylo Ren, he would remember the rage on that woman’s face as long as he lived. He found himself in front of a door and knocked firmly.

The man who answered was older than he expected, but in all other ways, he reminded Kylo very much of his father. A scoundrel with a charming smile and a penchant for the riskiest jobs around. He wore a stained undershirt with a flak vest over it, and pants with more pockets than seemed necessary, and he was chewing a stick of something Ren was sure was a mild neurotoxin. He grinned and yanked the door wide.

“Supreme Leader. Pleasure to meet you.” His eyes drifted behind Ren for a moment, and he had to force himself to take a deep breath. This man was more Han Solo than Han Solo.

“I came alone,” he barked, sauntering into the finely-upholstered townhouse. Baasen followed him, waving towards a couple of white couches surrounding a fire pit. Ren smirked, imaging Rey’s response to white furniture. He glanced around to see if there was a time-keeping device somewhere, but didn’t see one. Not that it mattered, his wrist comm would alert him when it was time. There was still some of Taris’ gray sunlight filtering through the windows, so he imagined he had a few more hours to go. He sat gingerly on the edge of a couch.

“I need to go to the Sith ruins.”

“Of course you do.” He heard the man rummaging with glassware behind him. “What’s your poison? We’ve got vodka, blue coronet, red coronet, whatever this green stuff is… Corellian whiskey, spice wine…”

Ren turned around to regard an entire wall of liquor and other narcotic beverages. He stared at it awkwardly.

“Ah… Definitely not wine. I’m not much of a… connoisseur.”

He hadn’t had much time to sample mind-altering substances in his life, and until he turned to it to quell his visions of Rey, he hadn’t had much interest. He drank whiskey because it was Han Solo’s choice, and he knew what it tasted like and was well-acquainted with its effects. But he
stubbornly refused the top-shelf Corellian brand his father had kept on hand. On an unfamiliar planet, with people he didn’t know, he really had no desire to be impaired at all. But he considered how odd it would look for Kylo Ren to ask for water.

“Just… whatever you’re drinking is fine.”

He had a strange feeling it was the wrong thing to say, and he knew as soon as he swallowed the softly glowing liquid that he was going to have a bad night. He carefully set the glass down on the table as Kayt Baasen sat down across from him, with a much larger glass of whatever gods-awful liquid he was poisoning himself with. The older man smiled grimly.

“Now we’re on equal footing, Mr. Solo.”

Ren blinked as his vision blurred, everything going soft around the edges. He struggled to pay attention to the scavenger lord’s words.

“What… is in that…?”

“This?” He held up his glass, sipping appreciatively. “This, my new friend, is what I call Glitterball. I invented it myself, but Wastrel handles the manufacturing and distribution now. You’re lucky enough to be trying my own homemade batch. Always better than the bottled stuff.”

He winked as Ren tried very hard to focus on his words. He felt completely out of his element. Apart from sneaking sips of his parents’ liquor cabinet as a kid, Kylo Ren had not had much time to experiment with recreational substances. Luke forbid even alcohol, given the obvious dangers of Force-sensitives with lowered inhibitions, and Snoke watched his every move so closely, Ren was not stupid enough to give him any more opportunities to fuck around with his psyche.

“This is… a drug?”

“Ah, don’t get lost on me yet, kid. You haven’t even finished the glass!”

He leaned forward, peering into Ren’s eyes, his face suddenly concerned. He got to his feet quickly, and Ren only protested weakly when the scavenger lord dragged his feet up on the couch, making him lie back. He could feel his thoughts swimming around nonsensically, as he tried to focus on his mission here.

Here. Where was he? Something was glowing over his left eye and he reached out to catch it, but it disappeared. People were moving around him, he heard a woman shouting and a very irritated medical droid peered down at him.

"Good evening, I am MDC-13. Otherwise known as Medici. You appear to have ingested some of Master Kayt’s poisonous beverage. Please relax so that I may administer a counteractive treatment."

“No, Medici! Are you insane? Don’t wake him up now!” A woman’s voice, screeching very unpleasantly. Kylo was pretty sure she wasn’t screeching at him, which was a relief. The Twi’lek from the bar was watching him from the opposite chair, a soft snicker on her lips, head tails trembling in amusement.

“I beg your pardon, madam. It is Kayt who drugged the Supreme Leader, and you have the nerve to question my sanity? I assure you, all of my logic software is functional. I am uncertain if the same can be said for any of you organics.” Kayt Baasen ? The scavenger lord…. He flailed around for his lightsaber, managing to knock it off the table, but he saw a flash of gold tattoos and it flew out of his grasp. If he squinted, he could see the hilt spinning in a pair of blue-green hands.
“Seriously, pop? You left him his lightsaber?”

“I thought he'd have a higher tolerance…”

“You always say that. Stop using it as an excuse to test your filthy homebrewed concoctions.” Two women, there were definitely two. One was smirking and being infuriatingly handsy with his lightsaber, the other was somewhere behind him, still cursing angrily.

“I believe he will be fine, his vitals are surprisingly normal.” That droid had a strangely sinister voice for a medical unit. “However, for safety reasons, I propose that we remove ourselves from the immediate vicinity while our guest recovers…”

"I'm with the droid." The girl from the bar winked and stood up, taking his saber with her. "Let Ahsoka deal with him."

And just like that, the room was empty. Wait... Ahsoka? I can't face her like this! Panic filled him, and he reached out blindly, clumsily, seeking through the Force for someone familiar, for Rey's brilliant blue-white signature that meant safety, protection - help. Help...!

Rey…?

....Rey??...

BEN?! What's wrong? Are you okay?

I don’t… I don’t know where I am…

Ben was giggling. He had his eyes closed. Why were his eyes closed? Was he sleeping? Here? Where was here? Why in hell would he think that was funny?

He sat up suddenly, his memory of the previous night flooding back. That lousy scavenger had drugged him! He was still on the same white couch, his boots scuffing the pristine leather as he scrambled to his feet, gasping. He reached for his lightsaber, only to find it missing. Damn. Damn, damn, damn.

He had grown complacent. Forgotten that the First Order held no power over a place like Taris. That while his reputation might precede him, that wasn’t necessarily a good thing. He had always followed Snoke’s orders, and then relied on the reports and suggestions of his officers. It had been too long, far too long, since he faced such a challenge as waking up alone, on a strange planet, without his lightsaber. He checked the rest of his belongings. His wrist comm was gone too.

He took a deep breath, closed his eyes and reached out, searching… There were lifeforms downstairs, but none in the penthouse. Opening his eyes and getting to his feet, he almost missed the little square of paper underneath his glass from the night before, still filled with that potent glowing blue drug. He was careful not to touch the glass as he pried the paper out from under it.

Hazard gear and rebreather by the door.

Ahsoka is waiting. Apparently you know where to go.

It's dangerous, but you'll probably manage.
Your weapon is safe, but you will have to win it back.

She has your communicator too.

Sorry for last night.

Kayt thought you'd have a higher tolerance.

Your lady/apprentice was very upset with us, but we advised her of the situation.

Good luck,

Wastrel Baasen

PS: Please don’t trash my furniture. If you must vent your anger, Kayt has a lovely wall of expensive poisons that I won’t miss.

Ren gathered himself. He felt physically awful, as if he’d been in a fist fight with a Wookie and then tried to soothe his nerves by throwing the Wookie around with the Force for an hour. He gathered up the gear by the door and put it on. There were fine climbing ropes too, which gave him pause. What kind of trek had he gotten himself into? Should he just go to his shuttle (assuming it was still there) and retreat? No. He was not leaving without his lightsaber.

Hours later, after climbing hundreds of feet with only rope and the Force to keep him from falling to his death, he descended into the grimy, greenish fog of Taris’ surface. Now he really was grateful for the rebreather, although he would have preferred his old mask to the all-terrain goggles and breathing device.

....Leave the past behind…

What past had he meant to kill? Han Solo’s death certainly hadn’t had the effect he expected it to. Snoke’s was… cathartic, but he was rudderless. He had murdered his master without a back-up plan, his sole purpose to save Rey. When he closed his eyes sometimes, with her lying beside him as they went to sleep, he could still hear her screaming in pain and terror. She had rebounded so quickly. Remained defiant even in the face of certain destruction.

...Become what you were meant to be...

Their destinies were inseparable, wound together from the first moment she turned his mental probe against him. Regardless of what Snoke claimed, he knew it had begun then. Rey, the scavenger with no past, desperate for somewhere to belong, bound to him. Anakin Skywalker’s heir. Leia Organa’s heir. He had too much past. Rey had none. And none of it was relevant, anymore.

He was making his way along a crumbling wall, using the Force to jump over large gaps where the stonework had crumbled and disappeared into the deep gloom. The sky above was its usual watery gray, making all of the ruined walls and giant spiders even more disturbing.

He sensed something moving behind him and flung out his hand, freezing it, then clenched his fist, crushing the creature’s freakish limbs into itself until it shrieked and he felt the stubbornly strong carapace break apart. He glanced back at it in satisfaction. It was his fifth kill, and larger than the others.
Kylo Ren continued his advance, always keeping the towering black peak of the temple in his sight. And as he flung aside boulders, and crushed the mutant fiends with the Force, he felt a purity of spirit he had not thought possible. Alone, with no weapon, forced to rely on only the innate powers and skills he possessed, he felt young again.

He remembered the adrenaline of his first sparring practice, the wooden blades snapping as he and Jacen darted back and forth, laughing with the naive joy of a thirteen-year-old, trading insults and sarcastic taunts with the older boy. It was how they had become friends, besides Kellan, the green-haired young man was the only one who could match his skill and his wit.

He had always wondered what happened to Syndulla. If he was still out there in his mother's ship, needling the First Order when he could. He had halfway expected his old friend to appear in his path at some point, to confront him for the murder of the other students, but Jacen Syndulla was the son of two Rebel heroes, one of whom died before he was born. Maybe he just didn't want to get involved in more galactic warfare. Maybe Kylo should be the one to seek him out. Sabine Wren probably had some leads. Something to think about, if he ever got off of Taris...

He remembered the day Luke had poured out a bag of kyber crystals on a smooth wooden table to the awe and excitement of a select group of students, himself among them. The way the crystal - his crystal - sang to him immediately, and he had reached for it, unthinking, and it glowed so brilliantly in his hand. The image reminded him of Rey’s incredibly versatile weapon, how she had managed to merge the light and dark into a complete, perfect whole. One day, their apprentices would be building their own light weapons as well.

He paused, looking out across a wide field of lava flow. It was the last obstacle before he reached the temple. Rey might have been able to make it across with her faster, lighter frame, but Ben was hesitant. He looked around, seeing only the sheer drop from the wall and a wide expanse of horrifically-mutated jungle.

*Light and Dark.*

He looked up. A massive flying lizard with beautifully-feathered wings soared overhead. There was a skill of light users. An ability to commune with naturally Force-sensitive creatures. It was not something Luke had been able to do, so he had never seen it in action, but he had read about it in some of Obi-Wan Kenobi’s journals that he studied under his uncle’s care. He had a feeling Rey would be able to master it instinctively.

It was something like the mind trick used on sentient life, but gentler. Too strong and the creature’s inferior mind would crumble. *Gentleness...* He focused on a still-vivid recent image. The Twi’lek slave, Kirin. How carefully he had knelt to speak to her.

He closed his eyes and reached out as if he were approaching the scared, vibrant purple eyes, his hand outstretched with his palm flat.

*Please. Help.*
They're Just Kids

Chapter Summary

Force empathy seems like more of a curse than a blessing. What do you do with a teenager that suffers other people's drama on top of their own?

All these mopey Force Ghosts Really need to get their shit together. Seriously, the previous generation fucked up so hard, I feel like we could be learning from their failures for centuries. Right you were, Master Yoda.

Chapter Notes

Well, here we are nearing the end of Part One.

Lots of endings and some beginnings... Hope you're enjoying the ride!

Alone for the second night, Rey found she could not sleep in their bed. She had spoken to Ahsoka when she tried paging Ben’s communicator after feeling his panic the first night, but she was not happy with the situation. If he was fighting his way through a jungle and fields of lava, she did not want to distract him, but she needed to know he was safe. It was stupid, she knew it was. A giant spider was not going to take out Kylo Ren. Ahsoka believed in him, and Rey did too, rationally. But she could not quell the irrational part of her that was slowly panicking the longer she went without hearing from him.

She could feel him if she tried, that tiny corner of warmth in her mind, but he was distant, focused, and she didn’t want to risk distracting him at a crucial moment. So she paced his room in her pajamas, his spare cloak wrapped around her like a robe, and drank caf. It was horrible, but her cup was at least halfway full of sugar, and it smelled like him, and she didn’t care. She could only imagine what he would think if he could see her like this, trying desperately to surround herself with his things, folded up on the sofa in his room chewing her nails until they bled.

There was a knock at the door and she nearly jumped out of her skin in surprise. She glanced at the clock on the caf machine. It was the early hours of the morning. Who the hell…? And why were they knocking on Ben’s door? She felt something, a familiar Force signature…

Rey got up quickly and opened the door. Kirin, wearing some of Rey’s old clothes as pajamas, rubbed sleep from her eyes and regarded her with concern.

“Are you alright, Master? I felt… You feel distressed…” Her gaze took in Rey’s disheveled appearance, including Ben’s cloak, her red nail beds and the mug of caf in her hand. She peered curiously into the room. “Is it Master Kylo? Has something happened?”

_They're just kids_, she thought. She opened the door wider to let the girl pass.

“Everything’s fine, Kirin, but I wouldn’t mind some company since you’re already up. Do you
like caf? I have tea, too.”

“I like caf. Do you have anything milky?”

The Twi’lek laughed at Rey’s confused and slightly disgusted look. Milky? She thought of Luke Skywalker’s island. It was the only thing she could think of that she had seen an adult drinking that fit the description of milky. Prior to the green milk creatures, she had only ever thought of milk as something that females produced to feed their young. The idea of drinking something like that herself turned her stomach. But she opened the cooler in Ben’s small kitchenette to see. It was empty except for a half-finished bottle of whiskey. She shut the door quickly.

“I don’t see anything here. We have sugar though.”

“Sugar is good enough.”

The girl stood carefully just inside the door, watching Rey move around the room with nervous eyes. It reminded her of her first week here, how uncomfortable she’d felt on the Star Destroyer, how she had just needed to escape. She sat down at the table and put another cup across from her.

“Sit down, Kirin. Let me know if you want more sugar.”

“Okay.”

She did exactly as Rey asked, but her vivid eyes were heartbreakingly anxious. And she had come in response to Rey’s distress, seeking to comfort her master. Curling back up with Ben’s cloak, she studied the girl carefully. There was so much she wanted, needed to know before she could begin to teach Kirin anything, but there was no easy way of asking.

“Are you from Mandalore originally?” She hazarded. Kirin shook her head in a familiar way. Rey wasn’t surprised.

“I don’t know where I was born. I grew up on Ord Mantell. When my mother died, the landlord sold me and my sister to pay her debts. I lived in a brothel there until the Red Hand found me and after I was… old enough, they moved me to another temple on Mandalore.” Rey nodded.

“I don’t know where I was born either. My parents… sold me to a scrap yard on Jakku. But I don’t remember any other place. What do you mean by ‘temple’?”

Kirin sipped her drink.

“The people who owned me last specialize in Force-sensitives, and they have a wide network. They call the brothels temples, I guess because of the whole Jedi/Force thing. I don’t know a lot about it, they didn’t really give us a history lesson or anything, and you learn pretty quickly not to be too curious if you want to survive.”

Rey’s confession about her own history seemed to have drawn her out, but she didn’t want to press, so she decided to go on about her own history in the hope of keeping her talking. She understood the instinct that drove her to hesitate about talking, even now when she was away. It would take longer than a few weeks or months for either of them to actually feel safe enough to let go of the basic survival tactics that had kept them alive.

“Jakku is a desert, but it’s full of ships. Huge Star Destroyers. There was a battle there years ago, between the old Empire and the New Republic. The only way to survive there is to bring in scraps, and all the good parts are dangerous to get to. So if you find good scrap, you have to keep it to yourself, you don’t want to attract too much attention.”
She held out her hands, displaying the small scars left on her knuckles and fingers. The girl’s eyes traveled over Rey’s hands curiously, and she felt a surge of empathy through the Force.

“The price of survival on Jakku. I don’t even know how I got half of these. Sometimes I’d come home bleeding from somewhere and not even realize it until I cleaned up.”

“That sounds really awful… are you glad Kylo Ren took you away? It seems nice here. At least you won’t starve.” Her gaze traveled downwards, and Rey realized she was staring at the dark welts just visible on her wrists. She met the girl’s gaze, unashamed. “Does he hurt you a lot? I don’t know if I could get used to that…”

Rey blinked as she realized what was implied. She closed her eyes. *Of course, she’s not deaf, she hears how the officers talk.* She opened her eyes and looked intently into her caf.

“Kirin, I’m not… I mean… I want to be here. I love him. He didn’t just kidnap me and force me to be his…” She flushed, trying to gather the right words.

He *did* kidnap her once. And if she tried to run away, she was pretty sure he would tear the galaxy apart looking for her, but she didn’t know how to explain that it wasn’t one-sided. She remembered the ambassador on Mandalore.

“I know what the officers say, and I can’t deny that he’s possessive, but, believe me, it’s not one-sided.”

Kirin studied her, a mix of surprise and respect crossing her delicate features. Rey leaned in so she could be sure she had the girl’s full attention.

“I’m going to let you in on a secret, because I don’t want you to think poorly of Master Ren.” She waited until the deep purple eyes met hers. “I am just as powerful in the Force as he is. If I wanted to fight back, I could, and I might even win. And as for him hurting me… If I ask him to stop, he stops. Immediately.”

“He stops? When you ask?”

The expression of sheer disbelief on the girl’s face made cold anger burn in Rey’s stomach. The whole concept of consent was so foreign to her, it might as well not exist. She sat back, examining her cup thoughtfully.

“Why?” She asked finally.

“Why what?”

“Why does he let you stop him?”

“Because he loves me. Because that’s how it should be. Regardless of what’s going on… you *always* have the right to say no, Kirin.” She wanted to be sure she understood her actual purpose on the First Order flagship. “You’re here as our apprentice, to learn how to use the Force. That is your *only* role here.”

“Oh,” she paused, holding her breath. She let it out slowly, in one long sigh. “Some of the people in uniforms made offers, but I thought…”

“Who?” Rey snapped. Her sharp tone brought a worried look to Kirin’s face. “What ‘offers’ did they make?”
I'll carve them up so they have nothing left to make offers with.

Kirin shuddered.

“Don’t be angry, Master. They just assume that it’s okay because you’re here with Kylo Ren. I don’t think they would have said anything if they thought it wasn’t allowed.”

“No. Don’t defend them.” Breathe. Just breathe. “Honestly, I don’t know if it’s against protocol or not. Maybe they won’t be punished. But I need to know their names so I can speak with Commander Sloane.

She thought for minute.

“What will Master Ren do?”

Rey knew exactly what Ren would do, it was what she would do if she weren’t aware of the consequences. For a moment, she was glad he wasn’t there.

“Master Ren is not here. He left me in command. He doesn’t need to know every single decision I make while he’s gone.”

She felt Kirin’s gaze studying her, and something else, a tremor in the Force around them. One of her pink lekku twitched absently, and Rey realized the girl was reading her emotions, trying to gauge her sincerity. Rey reached across the table and lightly touched Kirin’s delicate wrist. The girl was so small, lithe and fine-boned. Unlike Rey’s calloused, muscular frame.

“It's okay, Kirin. You can trust me.” She relaxed her mental shields, letting the apprentice have easy access to her surface thoughts. She sat back, visibly reassured. Rey smiled slightly.

“Now, let’s talk about what you just did.” A brief look of guilt and fear came into her eyes, and Rey shook her head. “We already know you’re good at reading feelings. But you need to learn to control it. You can’t just go around reading everyone’s mind. Or influencing people to do what you want.”

This time, the guilt was clearer in her eyes as she flushed and looked away.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to do it, I just, you know - that’s how I survived. I could make people not want to hurt me, or not be interested in me or - “ she took a deep breath, then met Rey’s eye, clearly bracing herself. Her voice was little more than a whisper. “I could make them finish faster. Make them feel things more umm - strongly.”

Kriffing stars. She forced herself to breathe, center, not recoil in horror.

“Okay. Let’s just start with not reading everyone’s mind.”

They’re just kids.

She was going to murder Ben. Right after she collapsed in his arms. Or tied him up and covered him with kisses. Her cheeks flushed, and her student leaned forward. Rey tried to cool her feelings, giving Kirin a knowing look. She felt the girl breathe in and purposely withdraw her questing powers.

“It’s okay that you can sense me, or Be- Kylo, or Genji. Force-sensitives can do that. And we can block you out if we want. But… If you catch yourself hearing the Stormtroopers or anyone else, try to distract yourself.”
A flicker of surprise crossed the girl’s features. She frowned.

“Distract myself how?”

“Anything. Pinch yourself. Start counting your steps. Recite Sith poetry in your head.”

“The Sith wrote poetry?”

Rey smirked, getting up and going to a cabinet that held Ben’s weapon repair kit and some other personal items he kept out of the sight of nosey officers, selecting a holobook. She found one of her favorites, and read it out loud.

“Darkness flows in deep currents. It consumes my soul, yet I yearn to touch the light. To caress its purity. To possess it and drown it. Light to fill the dark. Dark, to swallow the light.”

Kirin’s eyes were wide with a hint of amusement.

“Is that Sith poetry, or just something Master Ren wrote? Because it sounds a lot like a love poem.”

Rey grinned, handing the book out to Kirin.

“Oh, they were very passionate, the Sith. You can borrow it, if you like.”

She took it, her eyes scanning the list of titles in the index, noting some of them were bookmarked.

“Are you sure it’s okay for me to borrow Master Ren’s poetry?” She turned the slim, clear holo, her eyes flickering over a randomly-chosen page. “Some of these are marked.”

“Those are the best ones,” Rey told her with a wink. “They’re mostly about seducing Jedi, and feeding the cold black heart of darkness with more darkness.”

She was rewarded, finally, with Kirin’s soft, infectious laughter. Rey sat back down at the table, a sudden idea coming to her mind. She glanced over at the viewport just barely visible on the opposite side of the open bedroom, and the beautiful clouded planet below.

“Would you like to go on a trip tomorrow? Just me and you and Genji? Naboo is really beautiful.”

“Oh, can we really? It looks so blue through the viewports!”

“Yes, we absolutely can.” Rey could not help but smile at Kirin’s excitement. “You should probably get to bed, if you want to be rested enough to enjoy the day.”

She took herself to bed once she ushered the girl out and rinsed and put away their cups. Wrapped in Ben’s cloak, she curled up on his side of the bed, and thought about making good on her previous threat. The great and terrible Kylo Ren, Supreme Leader of the First Order… tied to her bed, at her mercy. It was a nice thought to fall asleep to, although her dreams were not entirely relaxing.

She let Genji and Kirin loose on the Varykino estate, exploring the library and gardens while she slipped upstairs to the suite of rooms that had once belonged to Padme’ Amidala, and the bed that she and Ben had spent the night in after he carried her up from the beach. She had refused his
attempt to gift it to her, having no idea what she would do with so much house, but the furnishings and decorations were mesmerizing, like a castle from an adventure story. She supposed it was, really. Padme’ had been queen and then a senator (Rey had no idea how that political system worked) and she had a forbidden romance with a Jedi Knight. She let her fingers trail over silk tapestries and lace curtains, finding a secluded balcony that jutted out over the lake.

The place was so full of memories, she was not surprised to feel the presence of a Force ghost. She sighed, turning, calling sharp remarks into her head for Luke or Ben Kenobi. But there was nothing to see, even though she felt the presence quite clearly.

“I didn’t have much of a body left, at the end. There was no reason to hold onto it.”

Rey gasped. She had expected something, but she had not prepared herself for him. Immediately, her eyes narrowed.

“Why don’t you talk to Ben? I’m not the one who needs you.”

“I fear my grandson would be unable to accept the wisdom he seeks. I will not add to his litany of sorrows.”

That was fair enough, she supposed, although it still didn’t explain why he was here, appearing to her in the bedroom of his long-dead queen. She smiled slightly, looking around.

“What was she like? Your wife. Her home is so beautiful.”

“Kind. And proud. She had more strength than I imagined. I wanted to protect her so badly, I never gave her the chance to protect herself.”

“Hmm. Why does that sound familiar?”

“I would have given anything for her to have the Force. To be my equal, my partner-”

“To rule with you?” She interrupted sharply. There was a flash of anger, then sorrow and guilt, but she pressed on. “Would you have let her rule? Make decisions without your input? Have the freedom to go where she pleased and do as she pleased? Or did you just want a pretty girl on your arm while you ruled the galaxy?”

“She would have liked you.” Interesting. He didn’t defend himself at all. Was that an admission of guilt, or a refusal to face it?

“Yes. It’s a shame she never got to know her children, or her grandson. It seems like Leia followed in her footsteps without even knowing her.” She waited, wondering if he caught the hidden jab.

“He will always want to protect you. You can’t change him that much.”

“I don’t want to change him. I just want to protect him, too.”

She commed Sloane after she sent the apprentices to bed. It was late, but she had a feeling the officer would be awake.

“Is there a problem, Master Rey?”

“I’m not sure if it counts, but I thought you should know.” She explained Kirin’s confession,
and gave the names of the officers who had propositioned her. “I don’t know if it’s actually an infraction by First Order laws, but I want to make it clear that the apprentices are under my protection. And Kylo’s, of course. I’m notifying you as a courtesy, so it doesn’t appear that we’re… um… undermining your authority? But if I hear of anymore inappropriate treatment towards my apprentices, I will deliver—” how would Kylo Ren put it? “—I will dispense with formalities and punish them as I see fit.”

“I see. I appreciate the warning, ma’am.” Sloane’s response was smooth and emotionless, but she had the feeling the named officers would suddenly find themselves swabbing decks for the foreseeable future.

“Will you be returning with the students tomorrow?”

“Yes.”

“Might I make a suggestion, Master Rey?”

“You may, but I can’t promise anything will come of it.”

“Of course. I have noted that the girl, Kirin, and the Wookie are currently housed in separate rooms in the residential suite below yours, and I wonder if they might be amenable to a shared berth?”

Rey understood immediately what the commander was suggesting, and she smiled at the communication device. She couldn’t imagine any of those scumbags propositioning Kirin being willing to face down an angry Wookie, even the adolescent Genji.

“That’s an excellent suggestion! Is there a bigger room on the same floor?”

“Yes. I’ll put through the transfer and have housekeeping set it up before you return.”

“Thank you, Commander Sloane. I really appreciate it.”

“I appreciate your consideration in bringing this to my attention before it became…” Rey imagined her searching for a delicate way to refer to Kylo Ren’s violence. “Before it became a major personnel issue.”

A major personnel issue. Meaning important positions in the infrastructure becoming suddenly vacant. Rey reminded herself that this was the First Order, after all.

“That’s all I had to say, Commander. Sleep well.” She winced. She was pretty certain no one in the entirety of the Finalizer wished their subordinates a good night. But Sloane didn’t seem surprised.

“The same to you, ma’am.”

Rey laid on top of the pile of comforters and pillows that decorated Padme’s stupidly massive bed, thumbing through First Order and Imperial archives for any information on the elusive Whills of the Force, and where in the galaxy their ‘home’ might be. She didn’t really expect to fall asleep, but she didn’t expect her dreams to be so exhausting either.
Chapter Summary

Lightsabers! Kyber crystals! Ahsoka!
Ben...?
Anakin...?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Ben had no clue how he was going to get back across the lava field after the flying beast flew away from the top of the temple steps, but at least he was here now. He could feel the energy of the place even more strongly now, and it was disturbing even to him. He had seen Sith artifacts and read their manuscripts under Snoke’s teaching, but this place was far older than anything he’d experienced. It was ancient, a relic of the time before the Jedi Council, when the Sith race had come out of the wild regions and waged a war that spanned the galaxy. Before the Jedi, before the Empire, before Darth Vader and Obi-wan Kenobi.

He followed the very simple layout, close enough now that he could sense a presence. Silver-white and vibrant, though he knew the Togruta woman must be nearing the end of her natural life. What happened to a neutral Force-user with this kind of power? Did they die like everyone else, or could they remain as ghostly apparitions like his uncle?

She was easy to find. Her white sabers lit up the cave, just like his dream. Only he had no weapon. He sensed something behind him, something he could not believe, but was desperately, desperately grateful to feel. He didn’t need to turn around. He heard her staff power on.

“Are you kids prepared, then?”

“Prepared for what?” Rey snapped, just as he said, “This is impossible, she has nothing to do with this!”

Ahsoka laughed, infuriatingly, and then her weapons powered off and she disappeared. Ben leaned back against Rey as their eyes searched, sensing something building, something dark and vicious.

*I feel it too.*

*I think it’s the temple. Some kind of Sith spirit.*

That was all they had time for, as the shadows around them grew and began to take on form. He felt her move and he ducked as she swung her staff around her head, dispatching two of the shadowy beings. They advanced so fast, it was impossible to make out the form, but there was something disturbing Ben that he couldn’t place. He was trying to pinpoint his lightsaber, knowing Ahsoka must have it, too distracted to concentrate his focus. He was exhausted from the grueling hike, and the drugging the night before hadn’t really left him feeling well-rested.
Rey’s blade spun, and he sensed her muscles tense. Without his own saber, all he could do was support her, and instinctively, they worked in sync. She jumped and he moved his hands, giving her a higher purchase to somersault across his back, dispatching a creature that was climbing at them from the ceiling.

She landed on her feet in front of him and he threw his body, pulling her down with him to avoid a strike. She threw her lightstaff upwards like a javelin, blindly, using his senses to target, and he powered it off and caught it on the way down, switching to the single blade to stab something she saw behind him.

*What are these things?*

*They seem familiar. Do they look familiar to you?*

He sensed her looking at something behind him and he ducked, once again giving her a boost with her foot in his hands, so she could extend her reach behind him. She rolled to the side and he caught her with one arm, while she swung around so they were back to back again.

The shadow creatures kept coming, as if conjured by an endless sea of darkness. Rey’s blade flashed on inches from his face, and he saw one of the things clearly. He stumbled, and she instinctively switched it off before it sliced his face.

*Ben? What is it?*

*That was… my father.*

*What?*

And then she screamed, and he had to summon the saber to dispatch the fiend that had pounced on her. He didn’t recognize it, but it had the face of a dirty, vile-looking scavenger.

*I have a theory.*

*Yes?*

*These things are using our memories. Bad memories. The dark side.*

*So?*

He ducked again as she spun the double-bladed weapon over both their heads, then passed it to him so he could activate the red spear to stab one that crawled across the ground. He didn’t even want to know whose memory that was.

As soon as he was sure they had the space, he spun her around to face him, and powered down the blade, crushing her to him and claiming her mouth in a fevered, violent, deep kiss. She yielded instinctively to his lead, breathlessly parting her lips beneath his insistent tongue.

*What are-*

A brilliant burst of white light flared against his eyelids, and he knew exactly what it was. He had reached for it the second their lips touched, and as soon as she responded, it swelled out around them, a corona of pure, bright white. He felt her hands twine around his neck, the achingly familiar feel of her fingers in his hair, and he wrapped his long arms around her with all the strength he had.

*Thank you.*
For what?

You’ll see. I have to go talk to Ahsoka now.

Come back to me as soon as you can.

I will.

I love you, Ben.

I love you, too.

He didn’t correct her. She had always had it right. It was he who didn’t know who he was. He waited until the feeling of Rey in his arms and the corona of light around them dissipated before he opened his eyes. He could feel it without seeing it, even before he turned, and he walked across the cave to stand before the glowing green piece of kyber. He heard movement behind him, but he didn’t turn. Instead, he reached out and claimed what was his. It was warm in his hand, just like the first one. He stared at it for a while before turning. Of course it had to be green. He held out his other hand, and Ahsoka laid his lightsaber in it.

“Now. Are you ready to hear about Anakin Skywalker?”

Let the past die… Become what you were meant to be…

“Anakin’s sins are his own. My parents’ sins are their own. I can only be responsible for me. And I’ve sown enough darkness.”

The woman’s brilliant blue eyes were wide, and she smiled. She reached into her cloak and withdrew something, holding it out to him.

“You’ll need a hilt, and components.”

He took it slowly, turning it carefully in his hands with reverence.

“How long have you had this?”

“Long enough. I’m glad to finally be rid of it.” She met his confused stare with tired eyes. “He’s there, if you’re ready to reach him. Since you don’t want to hear it from me.”

Ben leaned back against the wall, slowly sliding down into a sitting position, turning the empty lightsaber in his hands. He had been looking for the relic, without much hope, for over a decade. The crystal was gone, and he did wonder what had happened to it, but it really didn’t matter, since he had a perfectly good crystal to set into it.

“I’ve leave you be then,” Ahsoka said softly. To his great surprise, she laid her white staff with her own lightsabers at his feet. “I don’t need this anymore. But, I hear you have students.”

She winked at him once, over her shoulder, before vanishing into the depths of the cave. He was expecting the rush of energy that followed, but the strength of it surprised him. He smiled slightly before settling into a meditative pose.

“Grandfather?” He whispered tentatively. And then, when there was only the faint whisper of a response, “Anakin?”

This time, the voice was clear.
“I’ve been waiting.”

~~~~~~~~~~~~ End of Part 1 ~~~~~~~~~~~

Chapter End Notes

What about Hux, you say? I need more Poe Dameron? Is she really gonna tie him up at some point? DON’T WORRY !!! I’m working on Vol 2. This just seemed like an appropriate break. More will come, I promise !!!

End Notes

I’m on Tumblr as @khawapashitheelder, if you want to follow or just say hi :) 

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!