Close Encounters

by deedreamer

Summary

It’s like Rey’s own personal porn reel is playing against the inside of her lids. Her body is reacting without her permission.

She sucks in a breath and re-crosses her legs, suddenly feeling a tingling sensation at her center. Her nipples harden and strain against the fabric of her bra and the silky material of her shell is cool against her belly, making the sensation even more extreme.

Rey feels her chest and cheeks flush, and she wonders if she looks as hot and bothered as she feels. Because that would be really embarrassing. She’s a professional, for God’s sake.

Notes

For sweet Rebecca, who asked for SMUT GALORE.

It's been an honor to write for you and I hope I delivered. xo
Her palms are damp with sweat as she grips the bedsheets, holding on for dear life as the force of his thrusts inches her further up the mattress.

The headboard thumps a lewd tattoo against the hotel wall, the sound somehow managing to provoke her arousal further as Rey feels the way Kylo slips in and out of her with ease, despite his size and the fact that only ten minutes earlier, she’d taken one look at the giant appendage standing at stiff attention between his legs and had been one hundred percent convinced he’d never fit.
Well, he fits. Oh, he fits so good.

His scruffy jaw brushes against her cheek as his steamy breath tickles the shell of her ear, the sensation somehow distinct even with every nerve in her body already alight with desire and pleasure. When Kylo hisses and releases a soft grunt on each rhythmic exhale, Rey’s nipples tighten, and the feel of her stiff buds brushing against the hot, bare skin of his chest just borders on painful.

“Hold up,” he grunts into her ear, his hips stilling for a brief second.

Rey feels her muscles tremble around him, desperate for him to resume his relentless pounding because in the last two hours since meeting him at the bar, she’s turned from a professional, law-abiding citizen to a wanton floozy who just might sell her soul to keep this man between her legs for all eternity.

Just as she’s about to whimper and squirm and literally beg him to keep moving, his bear-like hand slides up along the back of her left thigh and hitches it up to his waist before cupping his palm on her knee and holding her open to him. This time when Kylo thrusts he’s somehow even deeper, hitting a bundle of nerves Rey didn’t even know existed.

“Oh, fuck me, yes!” she moans, tilting her head back in ecstasy as her back arches and she exposes her neck to him, instinct and a wild, carnal behavior taking over her body.

There is no thought, only feeling.

Only him.

She tucks her right leg up to match the one he’s holding and his next thrust slips impossibly deeper. This time, it’s his voice that breaks through the lascivious grunting and rhythmic huffing.

“Holy fuck, I’m so deep.”

When he says it, the words don’t even sound vulgar. They can’t, because his voice is a resonant rumble laced with something Rey can only describe as surprised fascination. His tone, combined with the feeling of him pounding into the clutch of her body, the drop of his sweat that lands on her breastbone as he works above her, sends Rey’s trembling body over the edge.

Her orgasm is fierce, a tightening wave of sensation starting at her toes, tendrils of fire vining up her legs, down her arms, across her chest until the very center of her implodes in blinding white light, her core throbbing and clenching around his rock-hard cock while he grinds against her, heightening the sensation as she rides every last wave until there’s nothing left of her, until she’s disintegrated into ash.


Her eyesight returns and Kylo’s gone still above her, his breath coming in heavy pants through swollen, parted lips, his long dark hair hanging lanky and damp with sweat as his amber eyes find hers. His forehead wrinkles adorably as he whispers, “Okay?”

Rey can’t speak, but she nods. An aftershock catches her off-guard, making her quake as her inner muscles grip him once again.

And just like that, she’s a phoenix rising from the ash of her petite mort, the smoky embers of her little death reigniting and setting her body aflame with desire once more.

“Oh my God,” Rey whispers, her voice weak and trembling. This doesn’t usually happen to her. She
comes, and she’s ready for her partner to finish and be done so she can relish in the post-orgasmic
glow and the welcome rush of melatonin.

But this… this sensation unfamiliar. Her eyes blink open wide as this very different rush of insatiable
need surprises her.

Above her, the side of Kylo’s lip twitches into a rough approximation of a smirk. His eyes, though --
his eyes are bright and warm and knowing -- and Rey is certain he is somehow completely attuned to
both her fluttering heart and her greedy body.

“Again?” he asks, the single word a deep rumble Rey feels against her chest more than she hears.

She digs her teeth into her bottom lip so hard she tastes the tinge of iron on the tip of her tongue.

“Again.”

Her alarm blares and Rey wakes to an empty bed. She’s not surprised to be alone, but there’s a part
of her that already feels the loss of the man she’d spent the better part of the night fucking.

Rey wonders if she’ll see him again over the next two days of the conference. She wonders if she’ll
feel him inside her again.

She hopes so.

Stretching languorously, Rey slips from the war zone of loosened sheets and bedding left in
testament to a night she’s sure never to forget. After all, it’s not like she’s ever had a one night stand
before, and frankly, after the beginner’s luck she experienced the night before, she’s unlikely to ever
desire one again. She shrugs and grins sadly to herself as she stands from the bed. Nothing could live
up to it, anyway, she thinks.

Rey showers, wincing as the hot water stings along some of the raw spots on her skin where Kylo’s
close-cropped goatee scraped her raw… the ball of one shoulder, a spot along her collarbone… she
blushes when she realizes she’s got beard burn on the tender skin of both her inner thighs. Finishing
in the shower, she dresses quickly, donning a silky, kelly green shell and a charcoal pants suit. She
slips on some slingback heels and pins her damp hair into a French twist. After a little dab of
concealer under the dark circles beneath her eyes, a quick swipe of mascara and coating of lip gloss,
Rey’s satisfied she looks the part of a modern, liberal-leaning Cable TV pundit.

When she breezes into the hotel lobby downstairs and glances at the other Broadcast convention
attendees, she feels a burst of energy. She’s only just been promoted to an on-air personality -- hence
her producers’ insistence she attend the conference and do some serious schmoozing -- but Rey feels
like she’s finally amongst peers.

“Rey!” She turns to find Rose, one of the station’s production assistants and one of her closest
friends, dashing toward her with a wide grin on her face. “I am so proud of you, girl!”

Furrowing her brow, Rey shakes her head in confusion. “What? Why?”

“You left the bar with that hottie last night, didn’t you? I mean, it looked like you left with him
for…” she pauses and waggles brows before adding, “a specific reason.” The petite woman clasps
her hands in front of her chest and blinks up at Rey with a grin. “And I’m just super proud of you for
biting the bullet and doing it. Like, literally doing it.” She pauses again and cocks her head to the side, inquisitively eyeing her friend. “You did do it, right?”

“Rose. Oh my god.”

“You did!” Rose squeals. “Yay!”

Rey suppresses her laugh, bubbling up partly out of amusement over this whole conversation and partly out of pure mortification. “I’m not having this conversation.”

“What conversation are we not having?” Finn asks as he and Poe approach the ladies.

“Nothing,” Rey says at the same time as Rose exclaims, “Rey hooked up last night!”

Cheeks flaring red, Rey turns to glare at her overly excited friend. “Rose, keep your voice down, for God’s sake.”

“Wait? That tall, dark and handsome brooder from the bar last night?” Poe asks, brows disappearing into his hairline. “Nice,” he says as he nods, dragging out the word and holding a hand up for Rey to high-five.

She reluctantly presses her palm against Poe’s before clasping her fingers around his palm and yanking his hand back down. “Can we please drop this conversation?” she asks under her breath, stepping closer into the little circle her friends have formed around her.

“Sure, sure,” Finn agrees with a nod, waving his hand at the group to signal they disperse. “Let’s drop it, guys.”

As her college buddy and long-time friend, Rey knows she can count on Finn. He’d been Rey’s cameraman at her former job with the local station they’d both worked for right out of Syracuse. When Rey had the opportunity to move into radio for a bigger market, Finn moved, too, transferring to a small New Jersey station where he’d worked for the last three years. Now, with Rey’s big promotion back to TV, she’d pulled some strings to bring her friend along for the new show.

“Thanks,” she says, giving him a grateful smile.

“I’m just saying, there’s nothing to be ashamed of,” Poe says with a shrug. “You should be proud—that dude was smokin’.”

Rey rolls her eyes. “I thought we were dropping it.”

“Dropping it like it’s hot, maybe,” Poe mutters with a grin.

Rose wraps her arm around Rey and pulls her close for a hug. “We’re just saying we’re proud of you, sweetie. We know it’s not your usual style, but every woman needs a good dicking now and then and no one deserves it more than you do.”

Laughing, Rey shakes her head. “I don’t know how you can make something so crass sound so genuinely sweet.”

“It’s a talent,” Rose announces with a smile as she guides them over to the refreshment table. “Now, gimme some more coffee or I’ll never make it through this keynote.”

“Oh God, me either,” Rey agrees, reaching for a paper cup. “I think I maybe slept for, like, three hours?”
Rose’s eyebrows reach for the sky. “Damn, girl. After taking a look at the size of that man… I’m surprised you can even walk.”

Rey huffs out a laugh as she pulls the dispenser and watches somewhat dazedly as the steamy black brew fills her cup. “Yeah, me too.”

The keynote presentation isn’t as boring as they anticipated, but Rey finds it hard to stay focused. Her eyelids are heavy, and every time she closes them for just a few extra seconds of rest, she sees dark shaggy hair, giant shoulders, big hands and big… well, other things.

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Rey feels her chest and cheeks flush, and she wonders if she looks as hot and bothered as she feels. Because that would be really embarrassing. She’s a professional, for God’s sake.

She takes a few deep breaths and feels her flushing recede. She’s always been good and getting her emotions back in check, and thank goodness for it. She’s about to become a regular on a morning political talk show and she’s going to need to keep that tight control over herself and her reactions, considering the whole concept of the show is going to be antagonistic conversation between two people with opposing points of view.

Before she knows it, the crowd gathered in the Grand Ballroom is clapping, and Rey glances at the stage to see the keynote speaker has finished. She blinks and takes the last now cold sip of her coffee.

“You look like you could use a refill,” Finn says as he stands and holds a hand down to Rey to help her up from her seat.

“Ugh, you have no idea,” she replies as she takes his hand and rises. “I completely missed pretty much his whole talk — I was zoned out.”

“Yeah, I could tell,” Finn agrees jovially. “But you didn’t miss much. Same ol’, same ol’.”

They’re waiting in line at the coffee station in the lobby once more while Poe takes out the conference program to check the break-out sessions. “Okay,” he says as he runs a finger down the day’s agenda, “Finn, you’re heading to the Camera Operator’s breakout and I’m going to catch the session they so creatively titled ‘Sound, Light and Editing’” Poe says as he rolls his eyes. “Rosie, which one are you going to?”

Rose looks at the program over Poe’s shoulder and squints. “I’m sticking with Rey for ‘High Impact Broadcast Journalism’ in the Highland Room.”

“Alrighty, then. See you guys back here for the lunch presentation.”

The group nods and mutters a chorus of sleepy agreement before separating toward their various
presentation rooms. Rey’s thankful for Rose’s company, especially because despite her friend’s overzealous excitement over her very uncharacteristic sexcapade the night before, Rey knows full well that Rose would never push for more information than she’s willing to disclose.

And right now, Rey’s still processing the way her body reacted to the man she had in her bed only hours earlier -- the emotions he pulled from her almost as intense of the orgasms. As they take their seats in the conference room, Rey shivers as a tenderness between her legs sends the sweetest ache deep into her abdomen. She’s pretty sure her necks and cheeks flush as she takes the filled glass of water already poured in front of each participant’s seat and gulps down a few sips.

A woman Rey recognizes from a late-night program on CNN takes the stage to announce the session presenter, and Rey reaches down to make sure her phone is silenced. She’d hate to be an embarrassed distraction during the presentation.

Her eyes are downcast as she feels Rose’s hand clamp down around her left wrist like a vise.

“What the--?” Rey hisses beneath her breath, glancing over at her friend just as the group of a hundred or so communications and media professionals in the room erupt into polite applause.

Rose’s dark eyes are wide as saucers, her jaw slack as she lifts her chin to direct Rey’s attention toward the podium at the front of the room. Following her gaze, Rey turns forward, and in that singular moment three things happen in synchronicity: Rey’s phone slips from her hands and lands with a loud thud against the leg of the table beneath her; her heart stutters to a sudden stop before resuming in a frantic staccato; her mouth slides open as a rush of desire flares behind her ribs and courses through her veins with a burning heat that leaves her stunned and liquified in her seat.

Because the man behind the podium -- the man she’s now gaping at whose amber eyes are fixed on hers like a moth drawn to a flame -- had his mouth between her legs less than five hours ago.

Rose leans in close, placing her lips right at the shell of Rey’s ear, barely making as sound as she whispers, “I thought you said his name was Kylo?”
The presentation ends. Rey hasn’t heard a word.

After about a solid thirty seconds of Not-Kylo staring at her as he began his introduction, he broke eye contact with Rey and never once glanced at her again. His voice, deep and resonant in the hotel’s conference room, continued to do things to Rey’s body despite the way her eyes narrowed and a bout of confused anger surged through her periodically, sending flame to her cheeks and a arrhythmic glitch to her heartbeat.

But now it’s over, and there’s polite applause and a few people lining up to make their way toward the front of the room to speak with him as Rey and Rose sit side by side watching the scene unfold in disbelief.

“It says here he’s Ben Solo… the prime time anchor of a political news show at a San Fran station.” Rey flits her eyes over to see Rose reading from the program, her voice quiet and solemn. “Apparently he won the duPont-Columbia Award last year.”

“Jesus,” Rey hisses, lowering her head to her hands. “Let’s go. Right now, Rose,” she says, now with a sense of urgency swelling through her, forcing her heavy, cement-filled legs to stand and get her the hell out of that room. Immediately.

“Okay, okay,” Rose breathes out as she leans down to pick up her satchel, “we’re going.” Her friend must pick up on Rey’s sense of panic because her voice is soothing like a mother comforting her child. “Stay calm. Deep breaths.”

Rey is nearly to the conference room door when she hears her producer’s voice -- precise and composed, just like the woman it belongs to. Amilyn Holdo strides up to the two younger women from the back of the room and motions them over to the side corner.

“Oh, Rey, I’m so glad you chose this session to attend. How fortuitous!”

Holdo’s unique violet irises are shining with excitement, the little crinkles on the outer edges of her eyes the only hint of the true number of years she’s spent on this earth pushing boundaries and making things happen in her industry. In fact, the chance to work with the accomplished older woman with lavender-tinted hair is one of the main reasons Rey took her new position. Why she was willing to leave the comforts of traditional journalism behind for a job as a contentious, political hot-head which she’s absolutely sure will send her blood pressure rising.

“Amilyn, a pleasure as always,” Rey says, forcing a poise on herself she definitely does not feel. What she feels is a an acute need to get the hell out of that room before the giant man she fucked the night before can make his way toward the back of the room and join them as well.

“Ben’s spectacular, isn’t he?” Holdo says with a grin.

She manages to hum a noncommittal agreement, but her producer’s choice of words sends a flare of unbidden desire through Rey, her nipples standing at attention and pressing against the cool, silky fabric of her shell once more. The fine hairs on her arms rise along with goose flesh, and Rey remembers just how spectacular that man is.

“Oh good, he’s heading over,” Holdo announces, her head held high and regal, as her pleased smile summons a first flash of warning deep in Rey’s brain.
“Oh, good,” Rey echoes automatically, the two little words coming out more like a squeak than anything remotely sounding like English.

She needs to escape. Now.

Because even with her back to the front of the room, Rey can feel the echo of deep amber eyes on her. She can feel him as he approaches, the spice and heat of his form somehow registering with her despite the distance.

“Actually, I’ve just go to--” Rey makes to move toward the exit, fully intending to hide for the rest of the day in the ladies’ lounge if she needs to just as one of Holdo’s slim, manicured hands reaches for her arm.

“Oh, just one moment. This is perfect timing, truly.”

Yes, just perfect.

Rey plasters on a smile and blinks furiously, attempting to keep the hot tears of anxiety and embarrassment at bay. She glances at Rose, whose wide, round eyes are now the size of saucers.

“Thanks for your help,” she mutters beneath her breath.

Rose’s jaw drops open, a deep furrow creasing between her brows as she whispers an offended “Hey!”

Knowing Rose is right, Rey reaches over and nudges Rose’s shoulder in a silent apology. It’s not her friend’s fault she’s stuck in this moment of this utter mortification. It’s probably not even Holdo’s fault, she thinks as her skin prickles with sensation as he closes the distance between them, the back of her head tingling as she feels the space between dwindling.

In the last moments before her life ends and she dies of awkward embarrassment, Rey thinks it might not even be her fault this is happening, either. Surely it’s his fault, considering the man is clearly not who he said he was.

“Ben,” Holdo greets, her smile widening as her violet eyes focus just over Rey’s right shoulder. “Great presentation. Spellbinding, truly!”

Rey feels the man she knew as Kylo step beside her and then slightly in front before she watches him lean over to brush a friendly kiss along Holdo’s cheek. “Amilyn,” he says, the deep timbre of his voice sending a tremor right to her center.

Holdo grins up at the giant man beside her. “I suppose now’s as good a time as any to share our news.”

Rey doesn’t know what this news is, but she knows she feels another warning flare spike through her amygdala. She knows she wishes the floor would open up and swallow her whole rather than exist in this moment one second longer. She swallows and blinks at her producer, avoiding eye contact with the massive dark-haired man currently staring lasers at her.

“Rey, Ben Solo,” Holdo begins in introduction. “Ben, this is Rey Jackson -- your new cohost on Close Encounters.”

Rey stops blinking. She’s pretty sure she stops breathing. “What?”

Kylo-slash-Ben’s eyes narrow briefly before his face returns to a carefully neutral mask. “I didn’t
know the show had a name,” he replies smoothly, speaking to Holdo but never once taking his eyes off of Rey.

Holdo grins excitedly. “It’s perfect for our kind of intimate point-counterpoint show, isn’t it?” she says as she folds her arms smugly across her chest, looking between her two divergent hosts. “And I knew I wouldn’t need a screen test for the two of you. I can see the tension already.”

Swallowing hard, Rey lifts her chin, summoning every ounce of professional control and practiced poise she can. “Ben, is it?” she asks, as a single brow arches like an accusation.

He’s cool and aloof as he nods once. “Rey.”

Rey forces a wan smile. "I’m sure we’ll have much to say to one another over the course of this endeavor… but for now, please do excuse me.”

She can’t get to the ladies’ lounge on the opposite end of the hotel lobby quickly enough. Her heels clack on the tiled hotel floor, the noise somehow discordant and echoing even among the thrall of conference-goers milling about in the lobby before heading back into the main ballroom for the lunchtime keynote.

Finally, Rey reaches the bathrooms past the lobby desks, near the hotel’s cluster of restaurants and bars. Most of the establishments are geared toward late-night entertainment and they’re closed now, making the restrooms on this side of the lobby a ghost town compared to those by the ballroom and breakout rooms.

Yanking the bathroom door practically off its hinges, Rey storms inside and bypasses the plush couch of the lounge for the mirrors over the line of sinks opposite the stalls. Her palms press against the cold granite of the countertop as Rey lifts her head to face her reflection.

“Get yourself together, Jackson,” she mutters. She’s white as a sheet, all color drained from her face as she stares at the glass. “Just breathe.”

A moment later, she hears the door open and Rey dips her head to hide her face, ready to move back toward the vestibule where the couch is or maybe duck and hide into a stall if she needs to -- anything to keep her privacy and avoid having to talk to anyone.

But when she hears no one approach, she lifts her head and glances in the mirror to take in her surroundings. There’s a soft click of a door latch, and Rey knows -- before she sees anything in the mirror -- she knows exactly what’s happening. Her pulse pounds and her skin prickles like she’s just stuck her finger in a socket. The electric force tingling in the air around her signals only one thing.

She takes a breath just as he steps from the lounge into the brighter light of the restroom area, his giant body looming, his amber eyes dark and focused solely on hers in the reflection.

Rey shakes her head, baring her teeth at his reflection as she asks, “How the fuck did this happen, Ben?” His name rolls from her lips like poison. A shameful, confused rage vibrates beneath Rey’s skin. “Why didn’t you tell me you were here for the conference?”

Ben stares at her in their shared reflection, his face carefully composed and neutral before a slight tick at his jaw shakes the intriguing architecture of his visage, catching Rey’s eye as he finally replies. “You never asked.”

He’s right. She didn’t.

She’d been too keyed up on the liquid courage of her Cuervo to bother to have asked much about
him other than his name, and much, much later, before they stumbled hot and heavy into her darkened hotel room, if he was clean.

Another wave of embarrassment heats her. Rey can feel it creeping up from between her breasts to her neck and finally to her cheeks. She watches in the mirror as Kylo’s -- Ben’s -- eyes watch the flush travel along the contours of her body. It makes her flesh prickle. Her breath catch in her throat. Her blush a shade deeper.

Rey’s eyelids flutter and turn downward as she swallows. She’s afraid to know the answer to what she’ll ask next. Her voice is quiet when she finally spits out the words, tipping her chin up bravely to meet his inquisitive gaze once again. “Did you know who I was last night? When we met in the bar, did you know you and I would be… partners?”

He shakes his head, his amber eyes locked on hers. “No.”

She watches him, waiting for him to elaborate, waiting for her instincts to kick in and decide whether or not he’s telling the truth.

“I swear,” he states. ”Amilyn offered me the job two days ago. I never even told her I was coming here to present,” he explains with a shrug. “It was a good offer, and I wanted to move back to New York so I figured what the hell and accepted.”

“And she never said a word about me? Not even my name?”

“Not even your name.” His eyes are locked on hers. His pink tongue darts out to swipe at his bottom lip and Rey’s pulse pounds in her throat. “She wasadamant I’d be the… perfect fit … for her new anchor.”

Rey watches as his gaze in the mirror dips from her eyes to her lips. The way his voice sinks even deeper as he says ‘perfect fit’ makes the invisible band around Rey’s chest tighten with need and desire. She blinks slowly, seeing in her mind’s eye what she’s about to do and forcing her questioning, logical brain to shut the hell up about it.

Reaching behind her, Rey brushes her wrist against the thick line of Ben’s erection -- the one she knew she’d find there simply from the look in his eyes. He sucks in a breath at the contact, his eyes immediately flashing to hers with a look of pure, liquid heat. In the harsh light of the bathroom, Rey still sees the same look he gave her as he moved above her in her hotel room, his gaze firm and determined as he worked steadily to bring her to the highest of heights.

Her teeth dig into her lower lip as she twists her hand and her fingers brush up and down his considerable length. “This is such a bad idea,” she murmurs.

Ben’s eyelids flutter. “The worst.”

“Our contracts probably expressly forbid this,” Rey states, giving his erection a squeeze, feeling how much harder he’s become in the fraction of time since she allowed herself to touch him.

“Undoubtedly,” he agrees as his large, hot palms land on her hips. Rey has to slide her hand out of the way when he pulls her body tight against him and presses himself against the soft cleft of her rear.

Snaking her hands behind their bodies, she reaches for the globes of his ass and squeezes, pushing him against her harder. She lets her head fall back to rest on his firm pectoral.

“You locked the door, right?”
There’s a tiny tick at the corner of his lips, almost like he’s about to laugh before he schools his expression once again, his gaze hot and heavy as his hands slide from her hips along the flat plane of her abdomen, drifting their way over her ribs until her tits are blanketed by his palms.

“Of course.” He squeezes, almost a little too hard, and Rey reverts in the jolt of pleasure-pain. She can’t believe this is her life. She can’t believe what she’s about to do.

She couldn’t stop herself if she tried.

Rey’s fingers find the button of her suit pants, working it open as her thumbs hook into the band of her panties and she shoves both garments down to her knees unceremoniously.

“So why were you *Kylo Ren* last night, and not Ben Solo?”

He takes his right hand from her breasts and licks his pointer and middle finger before sliding down to her center. His considerate preparation is entirely unnecessary because Rey’s absolutely drenched. She knows he knows it, too, as she watches his brows raise and a tiny, self-satisfied smirk bloom along his lips. She tilts her hips up against him and bites on her lip once more as they engage in this wordless exchange.

Finally, he speaks again. “It’s an old nickname from college. In my -- *our* -- line of business, sometimes I prefer to be… not myself.”

He slides against her sensitive skin, the bundle of nerves beneath his fingertips raging with a desperation Rey couldn’t attempt to contain. As Ben slides one thick finger inside her wet heat, quickly following it with another, her knees grow weak as she locks eyes with his in the mirror.

“Don’t lie to me again.”

His lips find her neck, his tongue dancing on the pulse point pounding beneath her skin as he buries his nose in the tendrils coming loose from her twisted hair.

“I wouldn’t dream of it.”

And then his hands are on his belt, his slacks slipping loose to his knees. His cock is pressing against her for a brief moment. And then he buries himself deep inside her in a single, unforgiving, glorious thrust.
Rey sneaks out of the ladies’ lounge first, checking to ensure the coast is clear before she pops her head back in through the door to let Ben know he can leave, too. Once they’re in the hotel hallway, Rey makes a quick dash to the bank of elevators while Ben ambles back toward the ballroom.

On the ride up to her room, Rey feels around in her suit pocket for the room key Ben slipped inside after he’d finished fucking her from behind. “Room 810,” he’d murmured, watching her eyes in the mirror as he’d shoved his dark hair off his forehead.

Nodding slowly and in a daze, Rey had winced as Ben softened and slipped from her, her right shoulder stiff as she moved from her position half folded over the cold granite countertop. Her orgasm had been so intense, Rey’d buckled over, her hand leaving a hot steamy print on the glass as she’d desperately pressed her palm against the mirror to try and hold herself up. Ben had followed a moment later with a strangled cry, his fingertips gripping her hips so hard Rey knew right away that she’d have a slew of purple bruises to accompany the beard burn she’d discovered earlier that morning.

Now, as the elevator door opens to her floor with a ding, the ghost of his fingers on her skin sends a shiver traveling up her abdomen just as a trickle of wet dribbles down her leg.

“Gross,” she whispers, grimacing at herself.

In desperate need of fresh underwear, Rey enters her room and hits the bathroom, cleaning herself up and fixing her smudged makeup and loosened hair while she’s at it. She sends Rose a quick text, begging out of the lunchtime keynote.

REY: Not going to make the lunch session

ROSE: You disappeared

I’ll assume you’re with LOVERBOY

I mean I guess now he’s your coworker

But hey girl no regrets!!!!

REY: Too late

Rey plugs in her phone to charge, but turns it to silent. She really does need to rest, and she definitely needs to eat, but she doesn’t have enough time for a room service meal and she sure as hell isn’t going downstairs to face Holdo or her friends and definitely not Ben just yet. So Rey settles for the PowerBar in her travel bag and the $4.00 bottle of water conveniently left in her hotel room.

She wakes to a violent banging on her hotel room door.
Jerking upward, Rey blinks in the dim light of her room, completely disoriented. Her throat is thick cotton, and her stomach yowls an angry rumble as she slides her legs to the floor and rises to a wobbly stand.

“Coming!” she yells as she nearly trips her way to the door.

Through the peephole, she spies Finn, Poe, and Rose hovering at her door, Finn’s jaw locked and his gaze intense. “Oh she’s okay,” she hears him announce to the others as she unbolts the door, blinking in the harsh light of the hallway.

“‘Course I’m okay. Are you okay?” she asks, staring at the three of them.

“We’re fine,” Finn replies, eyeing her up and down as if he’s looking for signs of damage on her person. “We’ve been downstairs in breakout sessions all afternoon. You, on the other hand, disappeared and haven’t answered a single text in hours.”

“Oh God, I’m sorry. I must’ve fallen asleep?” she muses aloud, opening the door wider and stepping back to let the gang in. “I don’t even remember lying down…”

“We just wanted to make sure you were okay,” Poe says, glancing around the room.

Rey yawns and asks, “Looking for something?”

“More like some one,” Rose mutters, swatting Poe on the shoulder and gliding into the room. “This one here was convinced your lying loverboy had whisked you away somewhere.”

Finn sinks to the foot of the Bed, brows furrowed. “Yeah, what the hell, Rey?”

Crossing her arms over her chest, Rey can’t help but feel defensive. “Hey, it’s not my fault my only ever one-night-stand guy turns out to be my new co-host. How the hell was I to know!” She points her finger at each one of them in turn. “And you! You all were encouraging me to go on and live it up last night so keep that in mind, you, you... bad influences!”

“Alright, calm down,” Poe laughs. “This isn’t the end of the world.”

Rey relaxes her posture and collapses in a sad heap next to Finn. His arm slips around her immediately, and Rey is utterly thankful for his friendship and tender care.

“It might be the end of my job, though. And I just got it. Shit!” Rey whines, catching her chin with her palm.

“Nonsense,” Rose announces. “You’re two consenting adults, and yes, there’s the added complication of your professional relationship now, but I say you spend the next couple days here and get it out of your system. When we’re back home in New York, you can move on and leave all of this behind.”

Quirking a brow, Rey lifts her head to look up at her friend standing in front of her. “You think so?”

“Sure!” Rose says with an overly bright smile. “So what if you needed a little sexual healing? That’s totally normal, right?” Rey notices Finn nodding his head in agreement beside her, then catches Poe’s murmured assent. Rose, seemingly bolstered by the consensus, continues. “Healthy, even! Just talk to him. Agree to a plan and you should be fine.”

“I don’t know,” Rey mumbles, biting her lip. Nonetheless, her friends’ confidence seems to help alleviate some of her fears, and Rey sits up a little taller. “But I’ll try.”
Finn pats her shoulder before removing his arm and standing. His eyes are crinkling and his chin is dimpling and Rey knows that expression like the back of her own hand.

He’s about to make a comment.

“That’s a girl, giving it the old college try… better than she did in college,” Finn quips, tucking his lips over his teeth to try and hide his smile.

And there it is.

“Shut up, Finn!” Rey says on a laugh.

He’s the only one who knows how few times she actually had sex in college.

In fact, she muses to herself, she’s had more partner-induced orgasms in the last twenty-four hours than she likely did in the entire last two years at Syracuse.

“As long as loverboy is treating you right, I agree with Rose. Get your fill, peanut,” he decrees, waggling his brows.

“Ugh, you’re disgusting.”

“Am I, though? Am I?” Finn counters, darting away from Rey’s open palm to avoid a playful slap.

Poe smirks and blocks Finn’s body from Rey as he says, “You’re most certainly not, buddy.”

Finn rests his chin on Poe’s shoulder and shoots Rey a Cheshire grin. “See?”

“C’mon you two, let’s leave the poor girl alone,” Rose says as she uses both arms to engulf the boys in a powerful hug a woman of her stature shouldn’t be capable of. Rey watches, both curious and impressed, as Rose manhandles both of them, the two men turning to putty in her hands.

When Rey sees Finn and Poe’s eyes go soft as they silently obey her diminutive friend, Rey’s curiosity turns to shock.

Are they…? What... what the hell is going on?

Before her scrambled brain cells can make any sense of the clues she’s picking up on, Rose opens the door and ushers the boys outside. “Okay, shoo!” Rose commands as they file out into the hallway. “Out you go, you heathens.”

“Thanks for checking on me, guys,” Rey adds, her eyes soft and her heart full as she glances gratefully at the three of them.

“Oh!” Rose calls as she leads the threesome toward down the hall. “I almost forgot! You better turn your phone back on because I’m pretty sure Holdo mentioned trying to arrange a dinner with you tonight, so… gird your loins.” Rose tries to hide the grin creeping on her face. “Literally.”

“Yeah, maybe you should eat and make it an early night… you know, try and get some actual sleep, Rey,” Finn says with a grin. “Maybe you won’t have to nap the conference away all afternoon tomorrow?”

“Eh, she can sleep when she’s dead,” Poe counters, looping his arm over Finn’s shoulder as they walk side by side with what Rey can only describe as practiced ease. “Co-host or not, that guy is a fine specimen of a man and Rey should climb him like a fucking tree while she can.”
Squeezing her eyes shut on the strange vibes she’s getting from her friends, Rey knows she’ll need to explore this development further later. For now, she just hopes Poe’s loud commentary wasn’t overheard by any of her hotel neighbors. “Oh my God.”

“Just sayin’!” Poe says, shooting Rey a wink and cheeky grin.

“So, Rey, I want you and Ben to get to know all about each other tonight,” Holdo explains as their waiter places elegant menus in front of them.

Across the table from her, Ben clears his throat as Rey feels heat pinken her cheeks. She swallows thickly. “Oh?” she manages to reply.

Nodding, the woman continues. “Yes, because once we’re back in studio, in order to keep the tension between you two at its highest, and to keep the animosity between the two of you believable on screen, you should both spend as little time with one another outside of filming as possible.”

“Of course,” Rey says with a nod, glancing down at her menu.

“Makes sense,” Ben acquiesces. “Tell me,” he starts, a glint in his amber eyes telling Rey she’s not going to like the words that come out of his mouth next, “what did you think of the sessions this afternoon? Which was your favorite?”

Rey doesn’t miss a beat. “I quite liked your presentation this morning, actually.” She reaches for her iced water and takes a sip, watching his eyes go wide and his Adam’s apple bob as he swallows. “Your point was well taken. Definitely memorable when one thinks about ‘high impact’.”

“Hmm,” Ben murmurs, keeping his expression neutrally cool. “That’s nice to hear. Sometimes I think my presentations can be a little rushed. I’d hate not to leave the appropriate impression.”

Rey gives him a tepid smile, pushing the naughty grin fighting its way to her lips far, far away. “I’d say you absolutely left an impression.” Yes, about five on each hip, Rey thinks with a shiver as she recalls the little fingertip bruises that appeared as predicted since their bathroom tryst. “I think all of us in that room will be able to recall the points you made for some time.”

Ben lifts a brow and takes a sip of his own water. “I’m glad to hear I delivered.”

“Oh, it was sharp, Ben,” Holdo agrees, grinning happily and completely oblivious to the sexually explicit conversation happening right in front of her. “I’m chomping at the bit for word to get out that you’re on our team now.”

As the meal goes on, Rey begins to wonder why she thought being in Ben’s presence in a professional capacity would be so hard. Their banter is easy, and Rey’s black thong is practically soaked as a result of the tension hanging heavy like a sensual, spicy fog between the two of them.

She can totally do this. She can secretly fuck around with her new coworker and no one will be the wiser!

But then about halfway through the main course, Holdo turns their conversation toward politics. It all turns to shit really quickly after that.
Ben’s downright nasty as he spews a litany Rey can’t even wrap her head around regarding the debate on the wealthy buying their way into Higher Education. Rey’s blood boils when the topic shifts and she’s baring her teeth in a nasty snarl as she hurls insults like barbs across the table.

“Are you actually saying to my face right now that you believe separating children from their parents at the border is the right way to handle our immigration crisis? Like, truly, you’re really saying you believe that vile bullshit your party is shoveling?”

“Got a better idea, you bleeding heart liberal?”

Rey snorts. “Only about a million!”

“Excellent,” Ben talks around a mouthful of steak, somehow maintaining an air of elegance. He uses his fork to gesture toward her. “I’m waiting.”

Rey purses her lips as her nostrils flare. “You’ll be waiting a long, long time.”

She watches as Ben takes a smug sip of his wine. Then he clears his throat and mutters “doubtful” beneath his breath, just loud enough that only Rey can hear it. Beside her, Holdo’s eyes flick between the two of them with utter glee.

The door to Rey’s hotel room barely shuts with a quiet snick when a single, aggressive knock thuds from the opposite side. Through the peephole, Rey spies a mass of dark hair. A hollowness aches between her legs. Rey squeezes her eyes shut to block out her unwelcome desire as she simultaneously squeezes her thighs to relieve the tension. “Go away.”

“Why don’t you make me?” Ben asks, lifting his chin as a single amber eye fills the peephole glass. With a vicious grunt, Rey whips open the hotel room door. “Oh, I’ll make you, all right!” Reaching out, she wraps her fingers around Ben’s silk tie. And yanks. He’s a big man, but Rey’s ire and the way she catches him off guard allows her to succeed in sending Ben off kilter. He stumbles into Rey’s room as she slams the door shut behind him.

“Do you know how badly I wanted to slap that smug grin off your face downstairs?” She groans, tugging on his tie once again, hard and unrelenting. “How desperate I was to make those horrible words stop coming out of your goddamn mouth?” As she speaks, her face inches closer and closer to Ben’s. Their lips are mere millimeters apart.

Ben raises a single brow, his face a carefully constructed mask of neutrality. But his eyes... his eyes are pure fire.

“And you don't think I was imagining all the different ways I could stuff that mouth of yours shut?” Rey grimaces. “You’re disgusting.”

“And you’re fucking hot when you’re pissed.”
Rey blinks once, her mouth dropping open for a split second before her lips are on his, her tongue delving inside to taste the smoke of the whisky he’d sipped at dinner.

“I think I might hate you, Ben Solo,” Rey gasps between punishing kisses.

Only Rey's not sure just who's punishing whom anymore. Her fingers are tangling in his hair, pulling hard enough that she knows it must hurt. And yet she feels a smile tugging on Ben’s plush lips as his giant palms wrap beneath her ass and lift her against him like she's a scrap of thing. She thinks maybe she really is weightless when she hears a little laugh bubble beneath the wall of his massive chest when he utters his reply.

“I don’t give a shit as you long as you still fuck me, Rey.”

And she does. She fucks Ben Solo.

Hard.

Hard enough that she hopes maybe she can fuck his backward-thinking brains right out of his gorgeous, perfect skull.
Chapter 4

Those hands.

Rey could get used to his hands on her body, touching her awake. Her eyes closed, lost somewhere between dream and awareness, Rey senses his form hovering over her right shoulder as his knuckles brush the length of her bare arm. Then, his hand skims over her slim waist and up along her ribs, confident and certain. Finally, she feels the heat of his skin as his palm molds to the curve of her breast.

Rey sucks in a breath and turns toward his warmth, her sleep-addled mind rousing along with her body. The new position opens up the column of her neck, and Ben responds to her silent invitation with a drag of his soft lips against her skin, from shoulder to ear. At her lobe, he whispers a single word, his breath a puff of sultry steam.

“Yes?”

“Yes?” Rey manages in reply as she arches her back up, pressing the flesh of her breast more firmly into his palm, her hips tilting and making contact with the hard, desperate heat of him at her rear.

Ben hums in acknowledgment, the resonance of his deep voice sending a ticklish vibration along the surface of her skin. He gently squeezes her breast as his mouth opens and tastes the thin skin of her neck, part tongue, part teeth.

Reaching behind her, she skims her hand along the parts of him she can feel -- mostly just his thigh and hip, considering his massive, trunk-like leg is still flung over her hip, cradling her in his heat. She can’t remember when or how they got into this position, but Rey knows she’s never before felt more safe or treasured as she slept.

Rey’s nails dig into the firm skin of his quad as she arches and wishes she could purr. She feels like a languorous cat inviting more, more, more touch. “What time is it?” she whispers into the deep gray of the room.

Ben rolls her so she’s lying flat, his solid thigh sliding between her legs as he hovers over her, his nose and lips still enthralled with her neck. “Maybe an hour before dawn,” he murmurs. Then, “You’re delicious. I want to taste you all over.”

A full-body shiver rumbles through her, from Rey’s toes straight to her scalp. Her skin tightens and blood pumps hot, heavy, and she’s suddenly awake everywhere. After all the times he’s been inside her in the last thirty-six hours, what he’s suggesting is… new.

“You do?” Rey asks, a shot of anxiety pooling in his belly along with an empty clenching that signals her desire.

“Like you wouldn’t fucking believe.”

To prove it, Ben pulls back and shifts himself further down the mattress, taking the bed clothes with him until Rey is naked and open to him, her bare skin prickling in the cool air of the hotel room. It’s still dark, and all she can do is make out the deeper black of his head as she watches it settle above her center.

She tries to tuck her knees in, suddenly feeling exposed and nervous. Ben’s hands -- those hands --
slide along her thighs and up toward her knees, cupping them and gently opening her back up. In the dark, she sees the white of his eyes as his gaze travels up the length of her torso to remain firmly locked on her face.

“Do you not want me to?” He asks, his voice husky and quiet with a trace of uneasiness Rey can’t recall ever hearing before.

“Um, it’s just that I’m not too experienced with this,” she admits. She feels her face flame and she’s utterly thankful for the darkness. “Actually,” she begins, a shaky breath exhaling slowly through her nose as she gathers her courage, “I’m not too experienced with any of this.”

Thank God for the dark. For the safety of its cloak, for the hushed silence that somehow emboldens her to disclose how so unlike her this whole tryst of theirs has been.

“No?” Ben asks, the single word uttered in disbelief. His fingertips skim the soft skin of her left inner thigh, making her shiver despite the tenderness with which he touches her. She feels the prickle of his stubble against the inside of her knee before he presses a delicate kiss there. “Seems like your body was made for it. Made for me.”

Huffing out a self-conscious laugh, Rey whispers, “That’s nice to hear.”

“It’s the truth.” This time, as Ben speaks, his voice is full of conviction. “And it’s a shame you haven’t had the pleasure of more experiences, but damn if I’m not a selfish man.” His hot tongue sneaks out and licks a long stripe along the inside of Rey’s leg, from mid-thigh to knee.

An exclamation point on his statement, brooking no doubt.

“I can’t seem to control myself around you.” Rey’s confession is a whisper, another revelation protected by the dark.

“I wouldn’t ever want you to,” Ben murmurs as his head lowers, and Rey swears she can feel his deep timbre... right there.

Now, she can definitely feel his breath, warm and damp, hovering ever closer over her center. The nervousness she feels about whether or not she should be self-conscious or embarrassed seems to be engulfed by the prickles of desire shooting from what feels like every single nerve in her body. When Ben next speaks, his mouth so close that his breath tickles the trimmed coarse hair at the apex of her thighs, all of Rey’s hesitation melts away.

“Open up for me.”

She does.

She opens to him like a flower in the sun, and as his mouth and tongue explore her folds, Rey begins to feel less like the flower and more like the sun itself, heat pooling inside her, unbound energy swirling and surging with his every touch. Ben’s mouth is a gift; his lips supple yet firm, his tongue tender yet teasing.

“You taste so good,” Ben rasps. “Like honey.”

Oh, and now she’s a vortex of cosmic energy, on the cusp of uncharted territory ready to fall over an unseen edge when his hands -- those hands -- slide from Rey’s thighs to her core, the knuckles of one of them running along the dripping seam of her entrance.

“Oh my God,” Rey stutters as Ben slips two fingers, slick with her desire, into her wanting heat,
stretching her open as his tongue flicks at her clit. Inside, his fingers curl and find a spot Rey’s only ever managed to find on her own, and as he plays her like the finest instrument, Rey’s burning with a flame so pure she’s certain she’s actually ignited.

Rey arches her back, lifting her hips seeking more -- anything -- to send her over the edge. And then Ben’s licking and sucking, and she’s slingshotting through space and time.


Like their first searing night together, it takes Rey some time to come back to herself, but, oh, when she does, it’s to Ben’s massive hands petting her, his plush lips dancing on her inner thighs, his mouth whispering sweet nothings against her skin. Guiding her home.

Without her volition, Rey’s fingers reach down to rake through Ben’s unruly locks. He hums with what seems like contentment before shifting upward, stopping to place a tender kiss on the pliant skin beneath her navel before smattering her ribs and collarbone with open-mouthed kisses.

“You’re a vision,” he says between his ministrations. “Unworldly.”

Rey sighs. “I kinda feel out of this world,” she admits, a lazy smile on her lips.

When Ben’s mouth finds hers, she can taste remnants of herself on his lips and tongue, musky and sweet. Instead of pulling away, Rey slips her tongue into his mouth further, deepening their kiss as if she can’t get enough of her taste on his lips, can’t get enough of her being inside him just this little bit. She groans, her thighs opening wide as she wraps her legs around his waist, pressing his hard length against her yielding center.

She wants him inside.

Her arms snake around his back, holding him against her torso as his massive body blankets her. He pulls away, shifting to take some of his weight in his forearms.

“No,” Rey commands, squeezing harder and pulling him down against her breast once more.

Ben complies and instead slips his forearms underneath her, sliding those glorious hands up her back to cup her shoulders. His mouth is in the crook of her neck, his tongue licking and tasting her salty skin as she rocks her hips, nudging his tip with her damp heat.

At first, when his cock slides inside her the sensation is the same, heady, spine-tingling fullness she’s experienced each time they’ve fucked.

And then it’s not.

His mouth moves from her neck and shoulder to her lips, and it’s not even a kiss. Not really. It’s more like both their mouths hang open just enough that they share each other’s breath as he rocks inside her, lips and tongues brushing for split seconds before it’s back to just breathing.

Shared breath leads to a shared heartbeat. Rey can feel the echo of his heart as the chambers pound beneath the cage of his ribs, his skin pressed flush against her sternum, the pressure of his strong arms beneath her back binding their flesh and this… this is different.

This is tenderness. Maybe even longing.

Ben hits a perfect spot deep inside and Rey whimpers as her eyes flutter open, dark butterfly wings dancing in her periphery until she zeroes in on his gaze locked firmly on her own. She can’t see
much in the darkness, but she can tell his pupils are blown wide, his nostrils flaring with each exhale,
timed to each powerful, rhythmic thrust.

“Yes, Ben,” is all she can say, the two words shaky and strained in her throat as a sensation deep in
her core begins to swell.

“Yes,” Ben sighs.

Rey sees his lashes flutter, but Ben’s eyes remain fixed to hers. He flexes his fingers curled around
the backside of her shoulders and presses her ever closer despite the fact that they’re already as close
as two bodies could possibly be. There’s not a part of Rey’s body -- from her chin to her toes -- that’s
not touching Ben.

And then she reaches the point of no return. She’s climbing, climbing ever higher, feeling alive and
blind and lost and found. Her muscles begin to flutter erratically, teasing and tempting her edge.
It takes four tiny words for Rey to shatter.

“I feel you, baby,” Ben rasps, his fingertips digging into the flesh of her shoulders, rooting her to
earth because gravity is nothing anymore, not when she’s in a million pieces. Not when she’s
scattered among the stars.

“Ben, Ben!” It’s the only word she can say as her eyes roll back into her head.

“Stay with me, Rey,” he pleads. “Look at me.”

And when she does, Ben’s rhythm stutters and he’s thrusting hard once, twice, then stilling inside her
as her name slips from him in a deep, desperate groan. Her orgasm is still pulsing through her when
his come, fierce and warm, rushes inside, sending another series of tremors through her quivering
body.

It seems like time stands still for a moment. Neither of them can do much more than gasp for breath
until Ben uses his body as leverage and rolls them, still connected, to their sides. Rey feels his lips
brush the hair at her crown.

“I never want to move,” she groans into his massive, still-heaving chest.

“Mmm,” is all she gets in reply. It’s the only time she can count on Ben not being able to speak.

It might be seconds or minutes later when Rey seems to come to her senses, realizing the need to
clean up and use the bathroom. “I’ll be right back,” she says, nudging him and doing her best to
separate her body from his.

He cracks a half smile and holds her against him a bit tighter. “Nope.”

Laughing, Rey gives him a shove. “’C’mon, your legs are like tree trunks. You have to let me up.”

“Nope,” Ben repeats. “That was too good. We’re just going to have to stay here forever.”

His words are playful, but even Rey can detect the tiny hint of truth behind them. She takes a breath,
shoving down the little heap of anxiety beneath her ribs. She presses up as Ben’s arms slip away and
stares down at his face, his dark hair messy and strewn across his forehead haphazardly. He looks
fucking wrecked.

Rey’s never thought him more handsome.
“So… what happens we go do get home?” she asks.

Ben’s mouth works silently, his eyes speaking volumes. Then, he swallows hard. “It’s like this never happened.”

The little heap of anxiety beneath Rey’s ribs loses its shape and spills around her heart. She knew the answer to the question; she should never have asked.

“You’re right,” she says quietly.

Ben reaches up and tucks a loose curl behind Rey’s right ear. “We’ll enjoy it while we can.”

Suddenly, Rey’s stomach growls with a violent urgency and they both giggle. Grinning, Ben moves to sit up against the headboard.

“Holy shit, we better feed you.” He runs his fingers through his hair, pushing the shaggy dark locks back off of his face. “It’s so early,” he says, checking the time on the bedside clock. “C’mon, let’s go downstairs and eat.”

Rey nods and gives Ben a valiant smile before padding off to the bathroom. But the smile feels off, and Rey can’t help but get the sense that she’s mourning something that never really had a chance to become anything.

In the elevator on the way down to the lobby, Rey corners Ben, her hands on both of his cheeks, her tongue in his mouth. She pulls away to breathe somewhere halfway down from the eighth floor when Ben quirks a brow, silently questioning her actions.

“It’s the only way I can get you to shut up,” she says with a grin, going back in for another kiss. But just as her lips touch his, the elevator slows and comes to a stop.

Rey’s brain kicks in and she realizes the door is about to open so she manages to drop her hands from his face and pull away from Ben by about five whole inches before the elevator doors are opening with a perky ding.

Anyone could see that the man and woman hovering together in the corner were up to something, but it just so happens it’s not anyone who steps inside the lift. It’s Holdo. Her eyes wide, mouth pursed open in a tiny “o”.

“Good morning!” Rey exclaims at the same time Ben murmurs, “Amilyn.”

They must look like idiots, clinging to the corner, invading each other’s personal space. Rey smooths down the dress shirt she’s wearing and gives her boss a bright smile. “We’re just up for an early get-to-know-you breakfast, but somehow we were already arguing,” she explains with a shrug. “You know Ben,” she smacks his arm, “always making me want to throw something at his face.”

Holdo’s brows draw in close, her violet eyes darting between the two of them as the elevator resumes its descent in a miserable slow-motion crawl. “Uh… yes.”

The words are an agreement, but Holdo’s body language is anything but. She’s staring and curious and Rey once again thinks it might be better for the floor to dissolve so she can slip down the
elevator shaft to her peril and end this mortification.

“I do have that effect on people,” Ben says light-heartedly, giving Holdo a smirk.

Rey watches as Holdo blinks, then the older woman allows her lips to curl into a curious half-smile. “Yes, I suppose you do.”

“Well, we’ve got a lot to discuss, so we’ll see you at the conference,” Ben announces, steering Rey by her elbow just as the elevator doors open onto the lobby.

“Oh… of course,” Holdo stammers. “Enjoy!”

And with that, they decide without verbalizing a thing that they’ll be taking their breakfast at the diner across the street and getting the hell out of their hotel. Once they’re on the street, well before the madness of rush hour, Rey looks up at Ben with a wince.

“Do you think she bought it?”

Ben huffs a laugh as he leads the way across the street after a lone car passes. “If I know Amilyn? No fucking way.”

Biting her lip, Rey feels her heart sink to her feet. “Oh no, that’s bad.”

But Ben shakes his head and glances over his shoulder, giving Rey a light shrug. “Look, the woman knew she was playing with fire the minute she put the two of us together.”

His amber eyes are dancing and, suddenly, Rey doesn’t care much about Holdo or her job or anything at all other than his eyes. And maybe those hands.
SIX WEEKS LATER, NYC

Rey should be basking in the excitement of her new job. The early morning show has been well received in the three weeks since its premier in the station’s lineup. They’ve already had to do three separate media shoots for magazines and online culture and politics articles. Holdo is gleeful and the entire team, including her friends, couldn’t be happier with the show.

Yes, she should be ecstatic -- walking on air with the combination of hard work and fantastic luck that have led her right here, to this moment.

She should be all those things. And yet Rey is, in a word, miserable.

And in two words, the cause of her misery is Ben Solo.

“Ben fucking Solo is an asshole of biblical proportions,” she seethes as Kaydel, their makeup artist, touches up Rey’s foundation just off-set before Rey needs to shoot the next segment.

For her part, Kaydel gives Rey a tight smile, eyes wide. “Oh, we know,” she agrees. It’s clear she’s keeping her true feelings contained on the matter.

You know, like a real professional would. Unlike Rey, who has found it impossible to keep her ire at bay ever since she and Ben arrived back in Manhattan to begin work on Close Encounters. It’s like everything that happened between them at the conference on the west coast was a dream. Because right now, she can barely stand to look at Ben’s face, much less want his hands all over her.

Kind of. Sometimes.

Okay, so she still wants him and the fact that she does even while she hates him is making her bonkers. A shiver runs through her spine and Rey’s shoulders twitch at the memory of those hands.

“You okay?” Kay asks, her brow furrowed with concern, her blue eyes wide as she searches Rey’s hazel ones.

“Fine.” Rey replies with a terse nod.

So, so fine. I just remembered the size of Ben Solo’s hands, and how they felt on my naked body, and then how they felt as he held me tight against him while he fucked the life out of me. Except I don’t want to think about those things. Not anymore. Because Ben Solo is the devil. I’m totally fine!

Kaydel huffs out a tiny laugh. “If you say so.”

“Okay, girl, we’re ready for the candidate pool segment,” Rose announces as she appears in the
mirror behind Rey, slipping her headset down around her neck. Coming to stand behind Rey in her chair, Rose rests her chin on her friend’s shoulder and pulls a silly face in the makeup mirror. “I know you can’t wait to film this one,” she adds, waggling her brows.

Frowning, Rey rolls her eyes. “Ugh, don’t remind me.”

“C’mon, you liberal softie. Let’s give all of your fans out there something to gnaw on, hmm?”

Rose’s encouragement is appreciated, but the pit in Rey’s stomach seems to grow heavier with each passing day. She’s starting to wonder if this new job of hers is good for her mental health. Because it’s one thing to be a neutral journalist, and another to write for a left-leaning news publication. But it’s a whole other world debating on camera for what feels like the sheer purpose of making divisive discourse itself the source of entertainment.

She used to find debating fun. Not anymore. Not with Ben Solo as her opposition, his sharp mind and sharper tongue combined with the tenacity of a bulldog always looking for ways to clip her below the knee and take her down.

The man is ruthless.

Oh, but Rey is a professional, for God’s sake. She holds her own in the ring every damn day, volleying back with a poise, wit, and an unyielding self-control she’s proud of. She knows this is the job -- that they play to their bases and purposely push each other’s buttons, intentionally looking to exploit any tiny crack in each other’s arguments for the sake of TV drama and viewers’ excitement.

But for the love of all that’s holy, it’s exhausting.

Outside of their work interaction, she and Ben barely speak. When they do, Ben is quiet and professional, not at all like the raging trash fire he lets loose when they film. But he keeps himself at arm’s distance, and Rey finds she’s so utterly drained from dealing with him and talking in what feels like endless circles that she doesn’t have the energy to try to be more than professionally courteous off-set with him, either.

Yes, she’s a professional. She is, dammit. And she knows that beneath those stage lights and in front of that slick backdrop, they’re playing parts. They’re speaking truth, but at such extreme ends of the spectrum that Rey is starting to wonder what’s real anymore.

Does he really believe the things he says, or does he do it for the ratings? Does she?

Does he remember the way they couldn’t keep their hands off of one another just a few short weeks ago? Does he remember how they laughed and touched and -- God help her for even thinking it -- but maybe, even for just a brief moment, loved?

Because she does.

She remembers how she threw caution to the wind for once in her goddamn life and how for those few days in California it was… magical.

Plastering on a cheerful smile to quash the sadness seeping through her, Rey meets Rose’s gaze in the mirror, the makeup lights a bright circle of bulbs around its perimeter.

“Let’s go,” she says with much more conviction than she feels.
Thirty-four minutes later, as soon as Rey hears Poe call cut on the second of three segments their filming for tomorrow morning’s show, she’s bursting out of her chair, its wheels rolling wildly behind her along the shiny stage floor.

“Fuck you, Solo,” she hisses, her neck and face burning.

He leans back in his chair, cupping the back of his head with his hands. He stares up at her with fire in his eyes and a smug smirk on his lips. “Yes, we all know you want to, Ms. Jackson.”

Her heart thumps in her chest. How dare he make a comment like that, and in front of the crew? That's a low blow, even for him.

“You disgust me,” she says, little more than a whisper.

Then, before she can even blink, Solo’s nostrils are flaring and he’s up and out of his chair, storming off like a beast.

She’s so angry and offended she could cry. But she absolutely won’t. Will not. Ben Solo will never make her cry. She won't stand there like an idiot, mouth agape, eyes shining, while everyone wonders what the hell just happened. Even for their explosive oil and water personalities, the argument they just had pushed the envelope. Rey wraps her arm around her middle and strides toward the elevators, her heels clacking on the stage flooring.

The elevator door is about to close and enshroud her in privacy when Finn slides in, barely making it without being squashed by the mechanism. “Rey…” he starts, and the tender, caring way he looks at her makes the heat in her sinuses flare, sends a flash of hot tears beating beneath her lashes.

“Don’t, Finn. Just… don’t.” Her voice is trembling with a seething anger and so many other emotions Rey will absolutely not name. She hates it.

“Okay.” Finn shrugs, turning to stand beside her, shoulder to shoulder in silent solidarity as they ride up to the twenty-third floor. His simple support loosens the tight muscle of her pursed lips, and suddenly the floodgates have opened.

“He does this every time, Finn,” Rey begins, her pulse pounding beneath her heated skin, her eyes burning, her fingers curled into fists so tight she’s sure to leave half-moon marks on her palms. “He looks at me and it’s like he sees right through me, right into the heart of me. He’s got a sixth sense, and he knows exactly what his words will do to me! He knows exactly how to cut deepest. Every. Fucking. Time.”

The elevator lurches to a stop and Rey steps out, her long legs striding toward her office with a speed that makes Finn skip a little bit to catch up to her. By the time she pushes open her office door, Finn has reached her shoulder again, his palm clasping the curve of it to halt her movement and whip her around to face him.

“And do you ever think you do the same to him, Rey?”

She huffs a bitter laugh through her nose. “What?”

Finn shakes his head and gently steers Rey toward the small couch along the wall of her office. He pushes her to sit, then follows suit. “Don’t you notice after almost every segment you film he usually disappears and stalks off for twenty minutes? What do you think he’s doing all that time, hmm?”
Rey shakes her head. “Don’t be ridiculous.”

“I’m not the one being ridiculous, Peanut,” Finn says, his voice soft, his eyes glancing up at hers from beneath troubled brows. “He’s like a classic bully. He pokes and prods at you for attention. Because he doesn’t know what else to do with all the tension running through his veins. Because he likes you, and he can’t have you.”

Rey sucks in a breath, blinking at her oldest friend. “I don’t know…” she begins.

Placing his hand on her knee, Finn gives it a gentle squeeze. “I know you don’t,” he replies with a soft laugh. “But we all do. Me, Rosie, Poe… it’s so obvious it’s kind of disgustingly sad.”

Rey’s eyes open wide. “Really? Do you think Holdo…?”

Finn laughs. “Oh yeah. She’s eating it up with a spoon. That woman’s like a kid in a candy store each time you two go at it.”

Shaking her head, Rey feels a tremor of unease shudder through her. “I’m so confused,” she admits. “But dammit, Finn, I’m angry! I’m so angry with that man.”

“I know,” he says, patting her knee sympathetically.

As she walks down the hall from her office to his, Rey feels her heart pound beneath her ribs. When she lands in front of Ben Solo’s closed office door, she stands in front of it for a few long moments, focusing on her breathing as if meditating. Finally, Rey tosses her shoulders back and knocks three times, the sound echoing in the quiet hallway. It seems most everyone else is still down in the studio.

“Solo, open up.”

“Go away”. His words are muffled through the thick wood of the door, but she can hear his sullen tone perfectly fine.

“Sulking doesn’t suit you, Kylo.” She chooses to use that name carefully, one she hasn’t uttered since their first explosive night together when they were just strangers attracted to one another. When everything was a lot less complicated.

She hears a shuffling movement behind the door and the soft flick of the lock before the door is hinging open just a few inches. Dark amber eyes glare at her from the narrow opening.

“Go away, Rey.”

With a conviction Rey hasn’t felt since the night she invited him from the bar back to her hotel room, she places her palms on the cool wood of the door and pushes with all her strength. Unexpectedly, Solo’s tree trunk body yields to her power easily as he stumbles backward into his office and Rey shuts the door behind her.

“No,” she replies.

There’s no intensity to her voice, no anger or hurt… none of the emotions she’s been struggling with for days. Weeks, even. The single word is spoken simply as a fact, as if someone had asked if it was supposed to rain today.
Rey’s eyes examines Solo’s face. He looks like he could murder someone. Then her gaze travels down to his loosened necktie, the top buttons of his dress shirt undone and his jacket long gone. Her eyes sink lower and Rey sees that his belt buckle is undone and the clasp of his suit pants unfastened.

She sucks in a breath, her heartbeat hitching beneath her breast. With a trembling hand, Rey reaches behind her and flicks the lock on the office door.

“What were you doing in here, Solo?” she asks, single brow arching beneath a knowing stare.

His lips work silently for a moment, his throat bobbing with a thick swallow. “Nothing.”

She quirks a brow. “Nothing at all? Not thinking about me, perhaps?”

He shakes his head, eyes wide and nervous like a kid caught with his hands in the cookie jar. “No.”

With one finger against his chest, Rey pushes him backward toward his couch. He lets her maneuver him, his surprised gaze flicking between the finger on his sternum and her eyes. The back of his knees hit the couch and he flops down onto the leather, eyes never leaving hers.

Rey sinks to her knees. Her hands go to the flap of his suit pants and hold each side, unmoving. “Do you want this?”

His eyelids flutter closed, dark lashes brushing against his pale skin, the smattering of moles on his face standing out in stark contrast. In a strained voice, he replies, “So much that it’s killing me.”

Rey’s teeth dig into her bottom lip as she sucks in a breath. Suddenly she’s exposed wire, jumping with power and trembling with the raw energy flowing through her, ready to spark upon contact. Her nimble fingers work quickly, finishing the job Solo so clearly started, and it takes only moments for his fly to be completely opened and his length to be freed from the confines of his briefs.

Her eyes are on his as her pink tongue darts out to lick her lips. He watches the movement, looking at her like a stranded man at sea who’s just been rescued. And as her mouth wraps around him, her tongue taking in the sensation of his velvety shaft, Rey knows this is what she needed, too.

Because it’s just like he said it would be that morning on the way to the diner all those weeks ago -- that when they got home, it would be like California never happened.

Except that it did happen. And Rey can see now, clear as day, that trying to pretend that it didn’t has made both of them go a bit mad.

So she licks a strip down the length of his shaft and watches as his abdomen pinches and flexes making his cock bob eagerly against her chin. She grabs on to the root of him and takes as much as she can in her mouth, savoring his musk and the slightly salty flavor catching on her tongue before beginning to work in earnest. Rey feels one of his hands slide from her neck and cheek to the back of her head. But he’s not putting any pressure there, not guiding her rhythm or forcing her depth. He’s just simply holding on, cupping her skull with his massive palm.

In an instant, she decides she’s tired of holding back all these weeks. She’s been pent-up and angry and insulted and frustrated and, God help her, but Rey feels wild. She needs wild. One glance up from beneath her lashes at Solo’s face, his pupils blown wide and completely wrecked for her, she knows he needs it, too.

Taking her free hand, she places her palm on top of the back of his hand where it cups her scalp. She squeezes his massive fingers and puts some pressure on her head. Her eyes are locked on his as she does it, and she sees the muscle spasm -- the little twitch beneath his left eye -- mark the moment he
understands what she’s inviting him to do. The permission she’s giving him.

Solo’s giant fingers flex and curl against her hair, pressing into her scalp as he guides her head a little deeper. His hips thrust up in little jerky movements, just enough that she feels his rhythm and matches it. Rey’s gaze is locked on him as his mouth drops open, jaw slack.

She feels him trembling everywhere, hears him as he starts gulping in deep breaths. His fingers dig into her scalp further as his eyes go ever wider, the whites now saucers around his amber irises, his brows lifted almost in disbelief as he watches himself disappear into her mouth in an erratic rhythm.

Then his eyes are squeezing shut, and Solo is throbbing in her hand, coming in hot, wild spurts along her tongue. Her name is a strangled, single word gasped on his lips.

She swallows and uses her tongue to give him one last lick around the red, sensitive head before burying her face in the seam of his groin, catching her breath.

“Jesus,” he gasps.

Then, his hands are raking through her hair and Rey knows her curls will need to be redone before they film the next segment. She’s sure someone will come stalking upstairs to find them any moment, but she can’t find it in herself to move her head from the surprisingly comforting pillow of his rock-hard thigh. Gently, he cups the side of her face, tilting her chin to meet his gaze. His expression is that careful mask he’s so good at, but Rey sees the smile in his eyes. His thumb brushes her bottom lip and scrapes against the edge of her teeth.

“How can this nasty mouth be so, so good to me?”

Rey’s lips quiver into a smile. “How can I even want you, you backwards-thinking Neanderthal of a man?”

His face breaks into a beatific smile, and after what feels like unending weeks, Rey finally sees Ben again. Her Ben.

“I’d like to throw you over my shoulder and take you to my cave,” he says. His smile starts to waver as his tongue peeks out to swipe at his lip. “Where none of this mattered.”

A tightness pulls at Rey’s chest, a heartache most unwelcome. “But it does matter,” she replies, voice soft.

A pounding knock comes from the closed door and Rey sits back on her heels, eyes wide.

“Ben?” Holdo calls through the closed door. “What the hell are you doing? Everyone’s ready downstairs and you and Rey are both MIA.”

At the sound of her boss’s voice, Rey’s stomach lurches as her mouth drops open in surprise. Ben holds his finger to his lips, silently shushing her. Gently, he places his palm over her mouth to quiet her.

“How can this nasty mouth be so, so good to me?”

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A tightness pulls at Rey’s chest, a heartache most unwelcome. “But it does matter,” she replies, voice soft.
Rey’s pulse spikes again and Ben’s lips quiver as he fights a sinful grin. “I’m not well,” he calls. “But I guess I’ll come back down for the last segment. Give me a few minutes.”

“You’re an asshole, Ben. But you’re my asshole and I swear to God one day you’re going to give us all an aneurism,” Holdo says, her wry humor seeping through.

Above her, Ben cups Rey’s cheek again, the lines outside his eyes crinkling devilishly once more. “Yeah, well, tell Rey she has an extra couple of minutes to sharpen her teeth before she sinks into me one last time for the day.”

Rey’s eyes go wide, her cheeks flushing. Her mouth drops open. Again.

*The nerve!*

From the other side of the door, they hear Holdo muttering, then the sounds of her retreat down the hallway. Ben lifts a brow at her, his lips tugging into a half grin.

“For the record, I like it the way you did it. Very little teeth.”

Rey shakes her head at him, but feels her lips tug into an unavoidable smile. “Holdo’s right. You are such an asshole.”

Then, he giggles. Ben Solo actually giggles like a little boy and Rey can’t help but drop her head back to lay on his thigh and giggle right along with him.
Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

Thank you so much to you all for reading, for leaving kudos, and for sharing your kind comments. My heart is so full!

Rebecca, it was a joy writing for you! <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The weeks pass in a blur. Things with Ben are… complicated.

They’ve continued their affair, sneaking quickies in closets, empty conference rooms in the building, even once in the stairwell. Rey flushes at the memory, her skin prickling beneath her light linen suit jacket as the spring breeze tickles the hair along her neck.

She’s a block away from the studio, coffee in hand, as an MTA bus plastered with Ben’s and her face in an advertisement for Close Encounters ambles to a stop at the curb beside her. The tagline from a recent review below the show’s name reads “Power and politics cross swords!”

Her coffee swirls unsettled in her stomach. She hates that everything they do is designed to sell maliciousness. Her legs feel like lead as she makes her way up to the building, entering the lobby with a heart just as heavy.

Somehow, this dream job of Rey’s is starting to feel more like a nightmare.

And Ben? Well, Ben has become even more of a mystery than he ever was. He’s absolutely filthy to her when they’re at work. If he speaks to her at all outside of filming a segment, he’s nasty and terse. But when they’re fucking, he’s incredibly considerate. Almost tender despite the desperation they both seem to feel when they’re locked away clandestinely.

For her part, Rey feels as though she’s become a complete beast. She spews hatred back at him like it’s second nature. She barely needs to think and the angry, bitter words gush from her lips like she’s connected to some unseen force.

Later, they’re in the middle of a heated debate (when are they not?) when Ben says something so absurd Rey has to pause for a moment, the cogs of her brain working to process what he just said.

He’s shitting on SNAP, and Rey just can’t sit here and listen to him denigrate a program that was solidly responsible for keeping food in her belly from the age of four until seventeen.

“Oi!” she yells over his deep baritone, “wait just one minute there, Mr. Solo.”

He blinks and glances over at her, shocked by the fact that she interrupted him mid-sentence, something neither of them tend to do while filming. Instead, they usually wait for the other person to finish then trade barbs, quips, insults and facts, using the time while the other is speaking to fine-tune their biting rebuttals.

“Your complete disregard for the food stamp program is unacceptable. Like any federal aid program, there’s bureaucratic issues that should and do need to be addressed, of course. But you’re talking
about getting rid of something over forty million people rely on annually to get food on their plates, many of whom are children!"

“There you go again with your bleeding heart politics,” he replies snidely. “It’s a terrible system and *nothing* like it was intended to be with the inception of the Federal Food Stamp program in ‘64.”

Rey’s face flames. She swallows hard, willing herself to gain some control over her reactionary emotions. This conversation -- unplanned because it was from a Twitter user submission one of the producers chose at random -- is hitting a little too close to home and Rey is wholly unprepared.

“It may be a terrible program, but it’s necessary. Hunger in the United States remains a problem this country has no excuse having. These people need critical support and SNAP provides it.”

“Are you kidding me?” Ben asks, smirking at her. “Half the people using the benefit buy nothing but junk food and the other half work the system to pay for luxury items they have no business having.” He shakes his head, like he’s disappointed in her for being so gullible. “You show me a person who truly needs it for nutrition and then we’ll talk.”

Rey feels her fingers grip her now-empty coffee mug so tightly her hands shake. Her pulse is pounding in her veins, her breath coming in short bursts. “How about me? I was one of those people who needed SNAP for nutrition, so please do me a favor and shut your entitled, smug mouth about it until you get your facts straight, you self-indulgent imbecile!”

And then Rey watches almost outside herself as her anger and unexplainable shame overtake her and her hand acts on its own volition. Her mug, the one with the red white and blue *Close Encounters* logo printed on it, flings from her white-knuckled fingers and sails the few feet over the table between the two of them hitting Ben Solo square in the face.

“Oh!” he roars, bringing his hand up to cover the right side of his face. Rey sees blood trickle down through the cup of his palm.

She hears Poe yell “Whoa, cut!” followed by a bewildered “What the hell? Someone call the paramedics.”

“Jesus Christ, Rey, are you okay?” Rose says as she comes rushing up to the set, her dark eyes filled with worry.

Ben turns his head so one amber eye glares at the two women. “Yes, by all means, ask *her* if she’s okay. I’m only over her *bleeding from my damn face*!”

Finn and Holdo come running in, a paramedic following closely behind with a medical kit bag in tow. Holdo shoves some equipment out of the way and approaches the desk with disbelief all over her face. The paramedic kneels down beside Ben to check the damage.

“What the hell is going on here?” Holdo demands, her brows furrowed and her eyes blazing with anger.

Rey shakes her head and swallows thickly. “You don’t want to know,” she says quietly. Then, with more conviction, Rey raises her chin and meets Holdo’s confused, violet eyes. “And I quit.”

Turning on her heel, Rey breezes past a stunned Poe and Rose before walking off the set of *Close Encounters* for the last time.
It’s shortly after seven o’clock in the evening when there’s an impatient banging at the front door of Rey’s Brooklyn brownstone.

She’d just moved in a month earlier and stacks of unpacked boxes remain along the far wall of her living room. She’s barely had time to settle in, and she doesn’t even have a job anymore. She’ll never be able to afford her rent, now. Rey lays there on her couch, bundled in her favorite cozy blanket, thinking about all of these horrible things and not caring one bit about getting up to answer the door.

“I know you’re in there, Rey.” It’s Ben Solo’s voice she hears, booming from the other side of the door.

“Go away,” she calls, then tucks further into a ball.

“Rey, let me in. We… we need to talk.”

Sighing, Rey flips the blanket off and sits up slowly. He’s right. It’s not all his fault that she’s been so miserable at work. Well, it is his fault, but it’s also hers; she’s the one that agreed to take this job that basically stokes the hatred and the factions arising across the country.

And, well, it’s not Ben Solo’s fault that Rey has realized she wants nothing to do with it anymore.

She stands and shuffles to the front door and switches the locks open. Grabbing the handle she pulls the heavy door and steps back along with it. Immediately, she sees a series of stitches along Ben’s upper cheek. His skin is bruised and angry, but his eyes… there’s a wary sadness there that practically breaks Rey’s heart.

Shamed, she ducks her chin to her chest, casting her eyes on the parquet floor at her feet. “I’m sorry about your face.”

It’s quiet for a minute, and though Rey doesn’t look up, she hears him clear his throat before he replies, “I deserved it.”

In a voice so quiet that it's barely more than a whisper, she speaks. “We can’t do this anymore, Ben. I can’t do this anymore.”

“Oh, so now I’m Ben again?”

Glancing up, she sees his uninjured side of his face contort in confusion. Just seeing it hurts her and she feels tears burning behind her eyes. “ Haven’t you always been?” she asks, voice trembling.

Ben laughs without humor. “It was easier when I was Kylo, just some guy you met at a hotel bar.”

Nodding, Rey sniffs and motions for him to come inside. He obliges and Rey shuts the door behind him before turning and heading back to the couch. She sinks back down and wraps the blanket around her, tucking her feet up underneath. Ben ambles in slowly, then takes a seat at the far end of the couch.

“Why are you here, Ben?” Rey asks on a sigh.

His chin is down but his eyes glance up at her, sharp and focused. He holds his hands out in supplication, watching her with a cautious gaze like any hasty movements might startle and scare her away. Slowly, he shifts closer toward her until the solid, hard length of his thigh is brushing against Rey’s hip.
“Because I can’t stay away from you.”

Rey lets out a sound somewhere between a sob and a laugh. “Why do I want you so badly when all you do is make me crazy?”

Ben presses his lips together. His jaw ticks as Rey watches his thoughts fly a million miles a second through the windows of his eyes. Finally, he shakes his head and shrugs. “Because love is messy.”

Gasping, Rey’s jaw loosens as her hazel eyes meet his. “What are you saying?” she whispers.

He swallows hard. “I’m saying I’m in love with you. And it’s messy and complicated and maybe partially insane, but it’s been true since the night we met and trying to ignore what we have is making us both batshit crazy.”

“You’re in love with me,” Rey states, blinking. “You… you love me?”

Ben gives her a sad smile. “You’re the smartest woman I’ve ever met, Rey. Don’t tell me you can’t feel it.”

“I… when we’re…” Rey pauses, her brows creasing as she tries to find the right words. “When we’re together… you know, sexually… I feel something…”

Swallowing hard, Ben prompts, “But?”

Rey rolls her eyes. “But then you open your mouth and say something horrible and I weigh the benefits and risks of committing homicide.”

He barks out a laugh, then hisses and quickly straightens out his face. “Ouch. Don’t make me laugh.”

Rey sighs, placing a hand on Ben’s thigh. “I really am sorry about your face.”

“And I’m really sorry for acting like such a jackass for the last couple of months,” he admits. “I’ve been losing it trying to control the feelings I have for you and still try to stay true to what Amilyn wanted when she offered me the job—”

“Wait,” Rey interrupts, eyes widening. “Holdo didn’t send you here, did she?”

“Jesus, no. She’s probably already screaming my mother’s ear off over the phone about what a horrible hiring decision I turned out to be.”

Rey shakes her head, giving Ben a soft smile. “Don’t say that. You’re very good at what you do.” She swallows and feels her cheeks blush to admit it, but it’s true. “Your fans love you.”

Ben nods. “So do yours.” His massive hand covers hers where it rests on his thigh and squeezes. “We make a good team.”

“We do,” Rey acquiesces, then shakes her head slowly. “But not the way we have been, Ben. Not like we are on the show. I can’t put myself through it every day… can’t be part of something so… so manipulative… anymore”

Ben’s quiet for a moment, his eyes narrowing as he stare into the distance at nothing in particular. Then, he sucks in a breath and nods once, as if in agreement with something unsaid.

“You’re right. But what if we do something… different?”
Rey raises her brows. “Like?”

Leaning in, Ben speaks lowly right into the shell of Rey’s ear. His breath is warm and damp, the sensation sending butterflies deep in her belly. But the words he’s saying get Rey’s blood rushing for yet a completely different reason. His idea is, frankly, genius.

Rey bites her bottom lip and glances at Ben, trying to hide the excited smile working its way to her lips. “Do you think Holdo will buy it?”

Ben chortles. “I think she’ll only wish she thought of it herself.”

“You might be right,” Rey agrees, letting that smile of hers free. “Besides,” she begins, adding a waggle to her brows, “how close, exactly, do you think Holdo suspected we’d get when she came up with the concept for *Close Encounters*?”

Giving her a toothy grin, Rey realizes Ben looks happier than she’s ever seen him. Maybe even happier than the morning they’d escaped the hotel for their post-sex breakfast.

“I dunno,” he says with a carefree shrug. He looks boyish and innocent, full of love and hope, and it’s in that very moment that Rey realizes she’s mirroring his same expression.

“Well you know what I know?” she asks. He raises a brow in answer and she continues. “I know that I’ve fallen for you, too, Ben Solo. And I know that even though I’ve quite possibly scarred your face, I’d really like you to take me to bed. Right now.”

Ben touches her chin, then uses it to tip her face upward to catch his lips in a kiss. His lips are gentle, teasingly soft. “I’ll proudly wear your mark,” he murmurs against her lips. “And proudly take you to bed, sweetheart.”

Somehow, they make it down the hallway to the bedroom, only partially clothed. Rey’s kissing Ben and they’re bumping into walls, muttering low choruses of “ow’s” and “are you okay’s” beneath their breath every time they run into something or Ben accidentally brushes his injured cheek on her face.

But once they fall into Rey’s bed, it’s like they’ve come home.

Ben peels Rey’s yoga pants down and she kicks them off, leaving her only in her bra and panties and her cozy pink socks. She reaches down to catch one and pull the offending items off, too, when Ben stops her with a hand to her wrist. “Leave them on.” His words are gruff, his voice low and gravelly, his eyes partially lidded.

Rey huffs a tiny giggle, nose wrinkling. “What? Why? They’re so… not sexy.”

“Everything about you is sexy,” Ben counters. His tone of voice is the same one he uses on camera; the words spill out of his mouth with a certainty that shuts down any room for disagreement.

This is one argument Rey just might be willing to let Ben win.

“You sure about that?” she asks on a laugh, quirking her brows at him.

Smiling, Ben waggles his brows. “One hundred percent.” He slips his fingers under the waist of Rey’s panties and slides them down her slim thighs, his eyes locked firmly on hers. His tongue, hot and needy, skates along the smooth skin of her calf up to her inner thigh, then finally landing where she’s aching for him. “Super, super sure,” he mumbles as he works his tongue over her entrance, skimming the edges of her slit before the tip of his tongue finds the spot that makes her wild.
“Oh, God.” Rey’s voice hitches, her back arching off the bed. “How are you so good at this?” she asks the ceiling, her eyes rolling back in her head.

Ben slides one hand to her low abdomen, steadying Rey and keeping her from pulling away from the intense sensations. She feels the short stubble on his chin scratch along the tender skin of her inner thigh and it’s all she can do not to remember the very first night they were together.

The night Ben says he knew he was falling for her.

And Rey knows he wasn’t the only one. If she’s being honest, she’s certain that the minute she let Ben inside her room and inside her body, she’s never been the same.

“Good, baby?” Ben rasps, his other hand snaking up between her legs to gather the wetness there, teasing at her entrance. A moment later, a finger slides inside, curling to hit just that perfect spot that makes Rey’s heartbeat stutter in her chest. A sensation like a string being pulled taut reaches from her pelvis to her navel, then spreads like wildfire to her chest.

Her breath catches in her throat. “Oh, God,” she repeats. “I’m -- ohhhh, Ben. Ben, I’m coming,” she manages, her words straining in her throat.

“Yes, give it to me, Rey,” Ben demands, quiet and breathless.

And she does. She gives it to him -- all of it -- everything she is and has and will be. He can have it all. Every part of her.

She trembles and shakes as she comes down and Ben presses a kiss to her navel as he works his way back up her body. She loves how he does that, like she’s something precious to him. Like maybe, someday, she’ll grow something precious beneath her skin right there -- something just the two of them made together.

“You make me feel…” she whispers, letting her words trail off as she drags her fingers through his messy, ebony waves.

“I make you feel?” he prompts against the shell of her ear.

She smiles. “Like royalty."

Ben’s grin is genuine, his amber eyes crinkling at the corners. “Let me make you my queen.”

Pushing up on her elbows, Rey presses her lace covered breasts toward Ben. “Help me with my bra?” she asks, a single brow raising seductively.

“Anything,” Ben replies. His large hands slide behind her back, hot on her skin. In milliseconds, her breasts are freed from the lace, the garment tossed somewhere at the foot of the bed. His mouth, almost as hot as his hands, engulfs her right nipple, his teeth grazing the tender flesh.

Rey arches again, wanting his mouth on her, his hands on her, his cock deep inside. She reaches down and wraps her fingers around his length, reveling in the feel of him so hot and heavy, so perfect beneath her touch. With a small adjustment, the blunt head of him is pressing against her and she’s tipping her hips, and then… he slides home.

And she is home.

There’s nothing like the feel of him against her, the way he stretches her so perfectly. The feel of his hips flush against her, buried to the hilt. His giant hands find hers, their fingers entwining. Ben
hovers above her, taking as much of his weight as he can as his hips work, his abs contracting with each magnificent thrust.

“There’s nothing better than being inside you,” he grates, amber eyes blown wide. “I never wanna leave.”

Leaning up, Rey presses her lips against his, her tongue tasting his. “Let go, Ben,” she whispers into his mouth. “I love you, Ben. Let go.”

And he does. His powerful thrusts speed up, his rhythm becoming erratic before he finally presses deep -- so deep Rey feels him in her soul -- and comes inside her with a strangled whimper. His stubble rubs against the column of her neck, his tongue chasing the little scratches he’s left there, soothing them between his ragged breaths.

“That was…”

Nodding, Rey smiles. “Yeah.” Ben pulls out and rolls to his side, pulling Rey to face him. “I think now we’re both speechless.”

Ben chuckles. “A real professional hazard, huh?”

Rey presses her palm to the flat of his chest, feeling the thrum of his heartbeat beneath the smooth, warm skin of his sternum. She bites her lip around the hint of a smile and glances up at him from beneath her lashes, thinking about the idea they’d agreed upon earlier.

“This professional can’t wait to find out.”

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*Entertainment Weekly, May 2019*

‘Best Of TV’

*By Becca Best, Staff Writer*

*Cable TV’s overdone and uninspired political discourse has found its niche in a shining example of how to balance heated debate with respectful moderation. Over the last eight months since CLOSE ENCOUNTERS was re-imagined, the anchors of CBC’s daily political chat show have proven unique in their ability to disagree vehemently yet still endear both sides of the political spectrum to them.*

*Watching these two debate is like watching ancient sword-fighters guided by an elegant, unseen energy. Individually, they’re impressive. Together, they’re an unstoppable force of nature and, quite simply, the viewer’s eyes are locked on the screen every second they’re sharing it.*

*Possibly, it’s the creative take on the show’s formula that heightens the audience’s desire to watch: the segments shot behind the scenes, giving viewers a peek at how these two anchors balance their differing political takes, how they decide what topics to cover, agreeing on just how far to push one another without giving away all of their strategy, are just as potent as their official, heated debates on-set. Their chemistry is unmistakable in both settings.*
And as for that chemistry? Well maybe it’s the fact that the two hosts, award-winning journalists Rey Jackson and Ben Solo -- despite having long been viewed as antagonistic enemies -- actually got married two months ago.

CBC has a gem on their hands. America may be divided in its politics, but Jackson and Solo are its sweethearts.

And, apparently, each other’s.

Chapter End Notes

Bonus points to anyone who can name the inspiration for the mug scene. Hit me up in the comments and I'll love you extra a lot. <3

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