Ben Solo lives at his Uncle's temple where he's training to become a Jedi. However, it is not the path he wants. It is the path that was chosen for him. The path his mother thought was necessary when he wasn't able to control himself and although he's learned well, Ben is not sure he's any better off. If anything, he's only become more lost and alone.

Rey has been waiting her whole life for someone to come back for her. But after something rather alarming happens on Jakku, she flees the planet for the first time in her life, determined to never look back. As she leaves behind her hopes for belonging, she finds herself at Luke Skywalker's Jedi Academy. A place she's been told will help her with these new and frightening developments within herself. Still, she can't help but think of the belonging she never had.

But for both Ben and Rey, the belonging they seek is not as hopeless as they may have thought. Perhaps it still lies ahead.
Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
So I have like half a dozen new story ideas that are all fairly considerably big projects. I really shouldn't be devoting so much time to writing fanfiction but life is kind of strange at the moment and I guess that when in doubt, I just end up writing my favorite space dorks in different scenarios. This one has been on my mind for a while now and I hope I can stick with it.

These next eight months are going to take forever, boo. December 20th is literally my main reason for living.

Ben was in his hut, hunched over his desk in the dim lighting. It was long past lights out but what his uncle didn’t know wouldn’t do any harm.

Besides, he was too busy writing to really care about what the hour was.

It wasn’t uncommon at this point for him to be up this late, ignoring his master’s teachings and the severity of his training to just do as he pleases.

He’s been writing these little passages for a while now. It one of the very few things he enjoys, which is almost ironic because he writes seemingly only about everything he hates.

He writes these poems, passages, and recollections for his peace of mind, trying to let his thoughts flow somewhere when he is supposed to suppress emotion.

Ben cannot quite conform to the beliefs of the Jedi, but he supposes there isn’t much left for him. He supposes this is his life, and he will have to start to settle for the mediocrity. It's not like he has much else to live for.

So that is what he writes. He writes of his feelings. He writes of the days past. He writes of the emotions welling within him that he knows do not belong to a true Jedi. Feelings of fear and unsatisfaction.

He feels empty.

He feels like he’s just wandering through his days, but somehow he’s miserably stationary. It's exhausting really, but Ben is exhausted no matter how much sleep he gets, which isn't much.

And there is no one besides the paper he can tell it to.

Luke waits in the temple for all his students to arrive. He meditates as they come in, sensing their presence with his eyes closed. All of them finding their spot as they stand before him, waiting for the day’s lesson.

All except one it seemed.

Luke sighs as he eases out of meditation and turns to see the dozen or so faces looking to him. But,
yes, as he suspected, one is missing.

Ben. As always.

He should just leave it. His students should be responsible for getting to lessons on time. But this is hardly the first time and if Luke doesn’t go get him, he won’t come at all.

“Everyone meditate individually and prepare for the day’s lessons. I’ll be back in a moment,” he tells them.

As he leaves, he hears some whispers and Luke must refrain from rolling his eyes as he hears Armitage’s obnoxious voice. It was far too early to hear it but he does anyway. “Looks like the golden boy slept in again,” Luke hears him say to Azmo beside him.

“Quiet everyone. I said individually, did I not?” he says again and Armitage’s mouth welds shut.

Luke leaves the temple and makes his way down the hill towards his nephew’s hut. He enters to find Ben Solo dead asleep on his desk among his inks and papers. His form covers them mostly and Luke can’t quite make out what has been written. Ben is much larger than he was when he first arrived. He had arrived as the gangly, bony thirteen-year-old that stomped off his mother’s ship in defiance.

Now Ben was seventeen and Luke found himself having to crane his neck to look up at him or how Ben had to duck as he stepped through doorways. His arms were muscular from training and he no longer looked like a boy.

But he also wasn’t a man.

Suddenly, Ben jolts awake, likely sensing his presence and springing up to face him, his hands fumbling to cover his work from the night.

Luke sighs, “You were up late again.” It's not a question but a mere observation.

Ben turns away, screwing the caps on his inks and putting his pens back in the cup that he kept them in. He sounds flustered but puts everything away, remaining cautious of his things. “I was just working on some things. I haven’t been sleeping well anyway.”

Luke knew that was true. Ben has never had much luck when it came to rest. “Well, you’re late for the morning’s lesson so brush your teeth, get in order, and hurry along.”

“Yes, as he suspected, one is missing.

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Luke knew that was true. Ben has never had much luck when it came to rest. “Well, you’re late for the morning’s lesson so brush your teeth, get in order, and hurry along.”

“Alright, I’m coming,” Ben says with a tone Luke hears from him often. It is frustrated and conflicted energy he carries, as Ben often is. The same energy Luke has grown tired of. Another sigh escapes him as his patience wears thin.

If this were anyone besides his nephew, any other student, he would punish them and not tolerate this behavior. Perhaps it was better if he stopped treating him as Ben and started treating him more like a student.

True, Ben was no stranger to punishments and transcribing texts or cleaning the kitchen of the mess hall. But something else needed to change because none of that got through to him in the way it should.

“You can’t keep acting like this Ben. You need to start taking responsibility.”

scoffs. “Because becoming an all-powerful and amazing Jedi is all I ever wanted, right? You would know how important it’d be for me to become the spitting image of you and all your achievements.” Ben’s sarcasm is evident. He’s mocking Luke and it wouldn’t be the first time. Not by any means.

“Knock it off,” Luke warns him. “I’m not in the mood for this. I want you to come to today’s lesson but we’ll be discussing this later. Something definitely needs to change.”


Luke hated to admit that was true. Ben far surpassed all his other students when it came to the force. His abilities and powers were much stronger than all the other students and Luke was unsure where to go from here in terms of his training. Ben needed more experience, but Luke couldn't just send him out into the galaxy to make heavy decisions and deal with life-changing experiences. Luke knew Ben needed more responsibility, but Luke isn't sure if he could take responsibility for Ben's actions should he not perform as a Jedi should. He isn't sure he could trust him with such a bold task.

The Jedi still held an ancient fascination in the galaxy and if their new era was to begin with these students, Luke isn't sure he trusts Ben enough to lead this new beginning. Luke hates to admit that as much as he loves his nephew, trusting him is another matter.

Ben needed something else. Something that would help him mature in ways that he desperately needed. Luke just didn’t know what.

“Listen, this conversation isn't over but right now, you’re my student and I would like you to join the others in morning meditation before the lessons.”

Ben’s jaw goes tight and his eyes lock onto Luke’s with no shortage of irritation as he begrudgingly obeys. “Yes, Master,” Ben says through his teeth.

“Thank you,” Luke says but his words hold little gratitude.
Rey is dragging the day’s finds along through the net. The suns are lower than they usually are when she returns to the outpost, but she had stayed out longer than she normally does. Plutt had been giving her nothing for the pieces she brought lately and she’s been starving. Starving meant that a full day of scavenging was possibly lethal, at least that’s what her pounding headache made it feel like.

But she’s satisfied with the trove she’s bringing forth now, determined to leave with at least a full portion. It was worth at least half a dozen portions but with her encroaching hunger, she would settle for one if she could just make it through the night.

As she drags the parts through the sand of Niima outpost, her bag slides in front of her knees and she accidentally kicks it as it hits her in the face. She stands for a moment, huffing in frustration and exhaustion as she moves the bag behind her again. Out of the way of her working legs. She certainly won’t remove it from her person. Everything she valued and depended on for her survival was within the bag, just as nearly everything she valued in this galaxy remained on her person at all times.

Rey twists a bit, cracking her back and grunting in discomfort before she leans down again and pulls the scraps to Plutt’s tent where there was no line. She marches right up, not even bothering to spruce up the metal bits and make them more presentable. She needs to eat.

She dumps everything on the counter and waits dizzily while Plutt groans from the other side. She catches her breath leaning against the poles of the tent. She knows the crolute is speaking but doesn’t register his words.

“What?” Rey asks.

“You do realize this is all shit?”
Rey shakes her head. “No. That’s the compressor to a reactor from the Destroyers. I could have died to pull that out!” She lays her hands on the counter. Her knuckles got all bloodied from where she has wedged them to complete the task. One little slip and the reactor might have activated.

“Well, I don’t have a Destroyer on my hands that needs its reactor compressed so it’s of no use to me.”

“It’s worth something. Anything!” Rey insists, tears gathering in her eyes. “You haven’t given me anything in days! I’m starving!”

“Then maybe I should consider moving you to a career other than scavenging if you’re so hellbent on eating,” Plutt says rather bluntly. His eyes trail off over beyond Rey to a figure standing outside the tent. A man. A stranger.

She’s seen him here the past few days. Looming around, watching her. She’s darted away every time, looking down at her feet and feeling almost violated by the way he was looking at her.

As she looks back to Plutt, she realizes what he’s talking about. What he’s done and why he’s been rejecting her finds.

He was going to send her to this man, this creature that wanted her.

Rey goes rigid with fear and anger. “No. I’d rather starve. You cannot make me!”

Plutt laughs a little. “Perhaps you forgot, girl, but I own you. You will do what I say you do and I say you go to him because believe it or not, somebody wants you for once. This man paid me good money so I suggest that unless you want to keel over, you cooperate and maybe there will be some portions in it for you.” Plutt steps out away his side of the counter, his grubby hands snatching her arms and dragging her out of the tent to the man waiting outside.

Rey thrashes about, cursing and screaming as she refuses to be handed over and used as some object.

Her attempts to strike at Plutt seem useless. Her strength not enough and she knows this must have all been part of Plutt’s plan. She was just a pawn in his affairs and now she was faced with losing everything else she had to her name. Her measly name of three letters and her hope that her parents were coming back for her.

That all seemed so foolish now. This place was a hellish landscape where her slave owner treated her like scum and she fought daily for survival, including now. It took until this moment to realize that whoever her parents were, they truly did not care for her in the way she desperately imagined they would. She wanted so badly to believe it, she had disregarded the fact that they had sold her to this vile creature that was now forcing her to such a horrible task. All for portions. Hardly food but just bearable for her to not die from hunger.

How could she be so blind?

Betrayal, rage, fear, and her need for survival bundle into tremendous energy that riles within her. She’s never felt like this before and she continues her efforts to try and evade Plutt’s grasp. The other man approaches leering over her, his eyes making her shiver. “No!” Rey shouted again. “Never. Never!”

“Silence, girl,” the fowl man growled. His hand pulled at her hair. “You will do as your owner
Rey screams again, that same energy within her suddenly aflame and expelling from her as if it was a tidal wave. A surge of energy meant to protect herself when her limbs could not. She can’t hear anything, blood rushing past her ears as she imagines the two men pushed back, away from her and far out of reach.

But as she feels her arms free again and the clear sight of them thrown aside, she sees that she hadn’t imagined it.

As the blood settles in her ears, she realizes that both creatures were indeed a fair twenty feet away from her, both lying motionless in the sand. The outpost in shambles all around.

_What the kriff just happened?_

Rey steps ever so carefully towards the vile man’s body to discover his eyes wide open, not breathing, and most definitely dead. His neck was broken from the fall.

_Did I do this?_ Rey wonders, looking around for any other explanations. Her ragged breath is loud in her ears and she feels suddenly more exhausted than before. As if she’d just run for days.

That strange energy she felt stirring within her passes, though remains in her fingertips. It makes her feel almost electric in a way and a certain light of understanding dawns on her as she realizes, yes, she had done this.

She just killed this man.

She hears Plutt groan in pain from where he laid, apparently not dead. More of the others were emerging from their tents, wondering what had happened and she quickly sprints away, desperate to flee.

Rey doesn’t look behind her. Rey doesn’t pay any heed to the calls after her to stop. She only sprints ahead, charging for the closest ship sitting in Plutt’s junkyard. It was certain to be garbage and looked absolutely ghastly, but she rushes up anyway.

She doesn’t hesitate for a moment as she fires up the engines and flies away.

Her hands are shaking as she tries to ignore the weight of what she’s just done. She maneuvers around the cockpit, trembling as she skims the controls. Her tears begin to cloud her vision and she hardly sees the coordinates on the screen before she enters them, going into lightspeed. She thinks the words say "Maz’s Place" but she isn’t sure. She just falls back into the pilot’s chair and begins to cry.

Even the mystifying sight of hyperspace, something she’s never seen before, doesn’t give her cause to stop crying.

She’s just left Jakku, something she’s always dreamed about but hardly under the circumstances she wanted. Not only did she realize her parents were long gone, a truth she’s avoided for years, but she had also just killed somebody.

As her tears fall, she looks down at her hands. A strange tingling hum still making her fingertips tremble. An impossible thought strikes her then. Thoughts of old stories she heard as a child at the outpost.

The force.
The magical Jedi power from old whispered myths. The power that made things...float. At least as Rey understood it, that's what it did. But they were from stories. Even if it was real, surely no one as insignificant as she could be capable of something so profound, or so Rey thinks.

But her hands still tremble and her head feels strange in a way she knows is not from hunger. This was something else.

Chapter End Notes

***So, in case you decided to skip this chapter but would like some info on what happened, Plutt hasn't been giving Rey any portions for her finds lately and she's starving. He tells her that if she wants to eat she has to do some shady things which she refuses. When Plutt doesn't want to hear it and takes her to a sketchy guy anyway, something awakens within her and both men get forced away from her.

The sketchy fucker is killed but Plutt still breathes. Knowing she can't stay, she steals a ship from Plutt's junkyard and escapes, knowing that whoever her parents were, they didn't love her. If they did, they wouldn't have left her in such a horrible place where things like that might happen to her.

And she's further shaken because this strange power within her is scary and she doesn't know where it came from. She wonders if it's the force.

She also enters the ship's hyperspace coordinates to "Maz's Place" which is saved in the navigational computer. ***

I know I basically just rehashed the chapter but I'm trying to be sensitive to the subject even though Rey got away and nothing happened besides the fact that she killed the guy, lol. I know I kept it short but honestly, I wanted to get it over with quickly even though emotionally a lot happened for Rey. She's come to terms with her parents but hasn't moved past it. She still needs to mourn and grieve. She thinks she might be force sensitive, which must be scary when you're all alone. And she's left the only place she's ever known in a stolen ship.

Extra credit if you can guess which ship she stole from Plutt, heehee.

Sorry this got long but thank you for reading!
Maz's Place

Chapter Summary

Rey makes a friend and takes a proper shower for probably the first time in her life.

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

It’s another day in the castle for Maz Kanata. She is serving patrons left and right with the assistance of ME-809, her droid compatriot for last few hundred years. Always dependable. Sometimes annoying.

The bar was busy as always but everyone seemed to be behaving themselves but then there’s a loud crash just then, accompanied by shouting, “What the kriff do you think you’re doing?”

Maz sighs, knowing the calm was too good to be true before rushing to investigate. “You little shit!” she hears. The same voice from before. It sounded like a ruckus. The kind of ruckus that Maz didn’t allow in her bar. She rounds the corner to see a trandoshan man gripping a young girl by the throat, her legs dangling off the ground.

“What the hell is this?” Maz yells, the trandoshan’s eyes blowing wide. “You know the rule!”

“I’m ain’t fighting anyone. This little scum rat is trying to steal from me!” he grips the girl’s neck tighter and she wheezes a little. The talons of the creature digging further into her skin.

Maz steps closer. “Alright, let her go.”

The creature nearly growls in defiance, his talons sinking deeper. “But she tried-”

“And she failed. She hasn’t stolen from you. Leave her to me,” Maz instructs. She can tell the man is unsatisfied with this but releases her.

The girl falls to the floor gasping for breath. Marks are left behind on the skin of her throat and Maz holds back a wince looking at them.

“Come with me, child,” Maz encourages.

The girl looks like she wants to bolt. Her head spins around, looking for the door. The intent to sprint clear on her face.

But then something passes over her eyes that Maz recognizes. The look someone has when they have nowhere else to run. Hopeless, she seemed. And still, there was something else. Something almost familiar.

“It’s alright. Follow me,” Maz says again, trying to direct her away from the creature who had released her. The girl stands a moment later, her eyes glued to the floor and follows Maz out of the bar. Maz looks back every few steps to make sure the girl was following. She always was. Her head down in what looked to be shame and a hand running gently along her throat. Her other hand was clutched on the strap of a bag she had across her body. She clung to it for dear life and Maz
wonders if all she had in the world was on her person.

They enter her office. It’s a large room, scattered with various treasures and prizes that she’s accumulated over the years. The young girl walks in, eyes wide as she looks around at the ornate structure and possessions Maz has.

The pirate woman moves to her desk where there’s a plate of fruit and bread waiting. Of all the treasures in the room, the food seems to be the most beautiful to the girl who looked frightfully skinny. Maz slides the plate over. “Eat. You won’t be much use if you die from starvation.”

She doesn’t move, just stares at the plate, “I shouldn’t. I don’t have anything to offer in return.”

“You didn’t seem too opposed to the notion a few minutes ago when you tried to steal from that trandsoshan out there. Probably five times your size, he was.”

“I shouldn’t have done that. It was wrong.” she brings her hands to her lap and Maz gets another look at her throat. Red and already bruising.

“Well then, I guess you’re already aware that stealing is bad and those marks are enough reminder for you to remember not to do it again.” The girl looks up surprised as if she was expecting Maz to whip her or something. Whatever those hazel eyes had seen, it was far too much for a soul so young and instinctively good. That, Maz could already tell, was apparent.

She points to the plate once more and finally, the girl begins to eat, pulling apart the bread with her hands and stuffing her mouth. She hasn’t eaten in days by the looks of it.

“You got a name?” Maz asks her.

She looks up again, swallowing before speaking. “I’m Rey.”

“Rey,” Maz repeats. “Lovely name. How old are you, Rey?”

She’s quiet for a moment, looking down almost shamefully before she answers, “Sixteen?” Her answer sounds unsure. “Maybe seventeen,” she adds, looking back down at the food.

This surprises Maz. “You don’t know your birthday?” Rey stops eating, obviously not liking where the conversation was going and just shakes her head.

“No. I just know I’m over six thousand days old or so,” Rey tells her.

Maz sighs, “I would ask what kind of parents didn’t bother to tell their own kid when their birthday was, but by the looks of it you don’t have any.”

Rey looks up, those eyes so glassy now. So haunted and afraid. Desperate. She looks like she might want to challenge the statement made but must know what Maz says is true. She has no people. She is simply Rey. Only a name. Not even a birthday to call her own.

“Where do you come from, my dear?” Maz talks softer now, leaning forward as she waits to hear what the girl has to say.

“Jakku,” Rey looks down at her hands in her lap, the food all gone now.

Maz takes in the rags that cling to her body, her freckled complexion and blistered fingers. “You’re a scavenger,” Maz observes, not really a question.

Rey nods. “Among other things…” she says a little vaguely.
Realization hits Maz a moment later and she feels sick suddenly. “You were a slave?” Maz asks and Rey’s lip quivers. The word alone seems to make her shatter until tears stream down her cheeks. That was answer enough. How barbaric that there were still places in the galaxy that would enslave a girl such as this. Or maybe it is the thought that someone would sell a girl to a life of brutality, forced to search the endless sands for scraps until she died.

How disgusting.

Maz moves forward to hold the girl, her arms outstretched. Instantly, Rey leans back, confused by the gesture. Maz’s heart breaks further. She didn’t even realize that she was trying to hug her, assuming her movements to be in attack. Maz holds up her hands as if to ease a skittish animal, “It’s okay. I’m not going to hurt you, Rey.”

Rey takes a deep breath before allowing Maz to step closer. Maz wraps her arms around her as well as she can, but Rey is so skinny that her rather short arms encase her completely.

Rey is stiff at first. She’s never been held like this. Slowly, Rey brings her arms around Maz, returning the hug. Rey has never felt so safe around anyone before. Maz brushes through her hair with her fingers so gently and Rey finds herself slumping against the much smaller woman as the tears begin to flow.

Maz hears her sniffle at first but within moments she sobs, her body wracking with years of pain and fear. “Oh, my dear. You are safe here. In this castle, there is no such thing as slaves.”

Maz runs her hands gently past her back. Her hair disheveled but seemed to hold the form of three buns. She knows this girl must have been on Jakku all her life and she’s so proud that she got away. She rescued herself and achieved her freedom.

But it brings a new question to Maz’s mind and she pulls away to look at her face again. “Rey? How did you get off Jakku? By the looks of it, you didn’t buy your freedom.”

Rey pulls back, breath hitching. “I’m not going back!” she sobs.

“You won’t, my dear. I promise. But please, tell me how you found yourself in my castle. I want to help you, but I need to understand first.”

A few tears spill down her cheeks and she caves into herself. “It all happened so fast.”

“What did, Rey?”

She shakes her head before answering. “There was this man. I’ve evaded him for days thinking he was going to leave the outpost eventually. But then Plutt, the man who owns me, he wasn’t giving me anything for the finds I brought him and he told me that if I wanted to eat, I had to...to,” Rey can’t even manage the words.

Maz’s eyes widen as she senses where it was headed. “He was going to make you go to that other man? The one who wanted you?”

“Yes,” Rey sobs, “but if I tell you what happened you won’t believe me. It’s why I had to run. I knew if Plutt woke up he would kill me—”

“Rey, what happened? Did he hurt you?” Maz can hardly believe the atrocious beings in this galaxy. Rey shakes her head and Maz can’t help but feel relieved. But still, she listens closely, seeing the state it’s brought Rey to. She’s absolutely terrified.
“He tried to. But something within me just snapped and when he tried to grab me I screamed and he—he was dead. He flew back, away from me, as if he was pulled by a bantha or something and his neck snapped.”

Maz goes very still.

“Plutt was still breathing though so I stole a ship and left the planet as soon as I could. I came straight here. I saw it in the navcomp,” Rey rips into sobs again. Her emotions are in complete turmoil. It seems like she hasn’t had any time to reflect and process what happened and the understanding of the events crash over her.

Maz reaches out with her own abilities and finds a great surge of strength and power flood from the girl. The familiarity she felt earlier was Rey’s power. Of course, Maz thinks, she’s force sensitive. Her powers awakened in her desperate need to protect herself and killed the creature that tried to harm her.

“Rey. I believe you. You did what you had to do.”

Rey holds on to the small woman tighter. Maz knows well enough that she’s likely never been given the chance to be heard before and Maz will give her the comfort she needs. “Thank you. Thank you. Thank you,” she repeats endlessly.

How tragic that a small amount of decency solicits so much gratitude from this child. Such a small amount of kindness shown by Maz but more than Rey has ever seen.

She pulls away from Rey then, knowing she must be exhausted. “Rey, we have a lot to discuss, but for now you need to get cleaned up and rested. You look like you need it. We can talk later, alright?”

“Alright,” Rey answers.

Maz takes her upstairs and Rey is amazed at the architecture of the castle. The largest designs she had ever encountered was in the fallen Star Destroyers on Jakku. Those were fascinating from a mechanical point of view, but this castle was a work of art. Rey can hardly believe it. When she took off in that ship, she entered the coordinates that she found in the navigational computer. She was so eager to get far off from Jakku that she didn’t give it much thought. But she hadn’t been prepared for how breathtaking the planet was.

Takodana, the computer called it. And it was green and lush and more than Rey could have ever imagined in the dry deserts of Jakku.

Maz leads her into a room, the inside larger than her entire AT-AT. The ceilings are high and there’s a window at the back of the room with a balcony. The curtains blow softly in the breeze as the air from outside swirls through. There’s a bed against the wall, about four times the size of the hammock she rigged on Jakku. The sight of it makes her nearly tear up. “I get to sleep on that?”

“Of course. That’s what beds are for,” Maz tells her.

Rey has never slept on a mattress before. She had seen a few left behind in the quarters of Star Destroyers but she was never able to take them back home. They were too big to wedge out of whatever crevice she squeezed through to get there.

Maz leads her over to another room off to the side. A fresher, Rey recognizes. Maz pushes her to sit on the edge of a tub before she digs through the cabinets under the sink. “Here,” Maz pulls
something out. A medpac. “Why don’t you get cleaned up and tend those gnarly claw marks. I’ll leave some clothes out on the bed for you and you can get some rest.”

Rey nods. “Thank you, Maz. No one has ever been so kind to me.”

“I know, my dear. That’s why I want you to sleep well and know that you’re safe within these walls. No one will harm you.” Maz steps in the shower to show her how to work it, starting it so the water sprays. Actual water. “The castle is pretty old so it’ll take a minute for the water to heat up. I’ll leave you to it...Unless, of course, you need a tutorial on how to use the soap,” Maz jokes and Rey gives a slight smile.

“I think I can figure it out,” Rey tells her with a smile.

Maz chuckles as she sets out some towels. "Real quick, just so I can help you smooth things over, what ship did you take?"

"It was a freighter. Corellian make, I think. Wasn't much to look at but flew wonderfully. Really fast too."

Something passes over Maz's eyes as she nods. She looks intrigued and almost hopeful. “Alright then. I’m going to go settle some things and we can talk again in the morning. I'm going to have my finest droid stationed at the door standing guard. If there's anything you need, you tell her and I'll come running. Understood?”

"Okay." Rey has to refrain from crying again. This woman was being so kind. Rey has never been so open with another person but she knows she wasn’t supposed to be crying this much.

Maz steps out a moment later, bidding her goodnight and closing the door behind her. Rey stands up then, approaching the mirror before catching sight of her reflection.

She stills suddenly.

Of course, Rey has seen herself before. She knows vaguely what she looks like. But as she looks at herself now, it might as well be the first time.

The rags she had worn for years and the buns in her hair she did meticulously every morning were mocking her. They were the true chains that kept her so ignorant for so long. Her desperate attempt to remain a child so her parents would recognize her when they returned. But it was pointless. All for nothing.

Although Rey had been a slave, she knew how to fly ships. She knew how to take care of herself. She could have fled that horrible place several years ago. But she remained, holding out for the hope that her parents would return. But they were the ones that left her there. They sold her, she admits to herself finally.

Tears spill over onto her cheeks and she brings her hands up to her hair, pulling free the three buns and then discarding her clothes, letting them fall to the floor. A small cloud of dust and sand clouding a bit as they fall.

She looks at herself completely for what feels like the first time. She's never really thought about what she looks like before. She’s tried very hard to remain a child, but her body is no longer that of a kid. As she looks at herself, it also isn’t the body of a woman. Women were hairless, seamless, curvy, and beautiful creatures by the looks of it and it seems as if her body is trapped somewhere in the middle. Her body is malnourished and bony. She's covered in scrapes, bruises, scars, freckles, and callouses.
She feels utterly insignificant and confused and not for the first time, cursing her existence.

She runs her hands over arms, usually hidden beneath wrappings, and she’s almost nauseated by the dirt and scars that litter her skin. The grime that covered her flesh and forever embedded under her fingernails had become so familiar to her. She never thought too much about it, it was just the way it was. But now she hates it. It is only a reminder of that horrible place.

She needs to get it off. All of it needs to be scrubbed away.

Rey trembles, her hands shaking as she steps into the shower. The water burning but she welcomes the sensation, willing to ignore the sting if it means it will take all of Jakku with it.

Rey sobs under the fall of the water, almost frantically scrubbing her skin to get rid of it all. Any trace of Jakku had to go down the drain and never return.

Chapter End Notes

Maz knows a place where force kids go and in the next chapter, she makes a call to an old friend.
Maz leaves Rey’s room, waiting at the door until MX arrives to stand guard. Maz was hellbent on making sure that no matter what, that kid got a full night’s sleep and no one was to disturb her. Maz was heartbroken when Rey asked if she got to sleep on an actual mattress.

Maz wondered if she should even leave her alone, but knew that the kid had survived all these years looking after herself and she may need some alone time. Besides, Maz had a call to make. And when she made that call, she's already decided to omit certain details for Rey’s protection. She won’t let out Rey’s secrets or her crimes, even though Maz refuses to view them that way. Rey is no murderer. She is a survivor.

She is one with the force.

Now, Maz hasn’t discussed it with Rey yet, but she knows that the man that tried to attack her was killed through the force. It happened through Rey’s abilities that she must have never known about until now.

But first, Maz wanders outside to where the ships were, trying to see if she could find the one Rey had come in. She had mentioned she had to steal a ship to get here. A Corellian freighter and a fast one at that. Her mind can’t help but wonder if it’s Han’s beloved ship. It’s been a few years now that he’s lost it.

He claims it was stolen but Maz has reasons to think he may have gambled it off in a drunken haze. As much as she admires the man, he wasn’t any different than many human males when it came to drinking and making an ass of themselves.

Surely it couldn’t be the Falcon. Surely Rey really just stumbled upon a lucky piece of garbage.

But as she makes her way through the trees, she realizes it wasn’t as far fetched as she thought. The Millenium fucking Falcon sits before her in all its grimy and wondrous glory.

“Holy shit!” she exclaims to herself, looking all around to make sure no one else was near before she rushes up and marvels at the sight of it. “Wait until Solo gets a load of this.”

Luke hears a knock at his door and he knows it’s Ben. He asked him to visit his quarters after
dinner and they would finish their discussion from the morning.

Luke has been dreading it all day. Probably just as much as Ben had been dreading it too. But it needed to be done.

Ben enters quietly, his eyes looking at his feet, avoiding Luke completely.

Luke just shakes his head, knowing Ben won’t see him and can likely already sense his irritation. Their shared discomfort is not a secret in the force, which of course makes it all the more uncomfortable.

“Ben, I know you feel frustrated and I don’t blame you for that. This is new territory for both of us and I’m not entirely sure where to go in terms of your training.” Ben looks up from his feet but still avoids looking at him. “But you don’t know everything. There is always more to learn.”

“Yeah, but-” Ben starts but suddenly Luke’s holopad rings with an incoming message.

“One moment,” Luke sighs, stepping over to see who was calling and nearly shrieking when he saw the incoming transmission code. It was one he was extremely familiar with but hadn’t seen in a long time. Not trusting his eyes, he looks to his nephew. “Ben, come here.” The boy steps over rolling his eyes at first but as they settle on the monitor.

“Th-That’s dad’s, isn’t it? I mean, the Falcon.” He is quick to correct himself.

“Uh-huh. That’s what I thought.”

“Did he find it? Did he tell you anything?” Ben tries to sound uninterested but Luke can hear how badly he wants to know. When it came to his father, Ben has always sought out more but got little in return.

It makes the speech he intended to give him seem less reasonable. There was a lot going on in this kid’s head. But that had to be pushed aside for now anyway. They were receiving a call from the previously missing Millenium Falcon.

Luke accepts the transmission and instantly they are faced with the image of Maz Kanata with a big grin on her face.

“Maz?”

“Hey, Skywalker,” she laughs proudly. “I was going to start with, ‘you’ll never guess where I’m sitting right now,’ but judging by your face I’d say you already know.”

Luke just laughs. “Where in the galaxy did you find that thing? Han swore it was lost forever.”

She acts oblivious but her voice sounds extremely amused as she pretends to inspect her fingernails. “It was about a quarter mile from my castle.”

“So you know who stole it, then?” Ben asks her.

Maz’s face lights up a little more when she recognizes Ben’s voice. “Why if it isn’t little Solo. Only you aren’t so little anymore,” Maz teases him and Luke can hear Ben quietly groan beside him. Maz must pick up on his irritation because she moves on, not expecting an answer. Still, the smile persists on her face. “I don’t know who stole it, only who found it. A lot’s happened today.”

“I mean regardless of what ship I found today, I’d be calling you anyway. I think I found you a new student.”

Students were hard to find. If this was legitimate, Luke is very excited. “Really? A force sensitive?”

“Indeed. I haven’t seen her in action but from what I could sense, she has great potential.”

“That’s amazing, Maz,” Luke beams. “And she was the one who found the Falcon?” Maz nods. “Where was it? Where does she come from?”

Maz’s smile falters a bit but she keeps spinning in the chair. “Jakku. She bought it off a man named Plutt, she told me. She was a scavenger. She said she’s been saving up for a ship for a while now.”

A scavenger. That was odd, but Luke knows it is not unheard of. Perhaps he is more surprised to hear that Han’s beloved Falcon was on Jakku. Essentially nowhere. “How old is she?” Luke asks.

“Sixteen, seventeen,” Maz shrugs, unsure of the definite answer. “I haven’t told her about you or the Academy yet. I’m letting her rest for now. She’s had a long journey. I was hoping to give her some good news in the morning, as long as it’s okay with you.”

“Yes, we would be honored to have her,” Luke tells her honestly. New students were few and far between. This was a rare and exciting opportunity. And a student from a desert planet, a little older and probably eager to learn reminds him of himself and the young boy he once was on Tatooine.

“Great. I’ll tell her in the morning. Why don’t I bring her and the Falcon to the Academy and you can give Han a ring, tell him his beloved has been recovered.”

“I certainly will. He won’t know what to think.”

“Well, as long as he gives me a ride back to Takodana before going on a victory road trip then I don’t care what he does.”

“I think he owes you at least that,” Luke laughs, hoping Han has the clarity of mind to oblige her of a ride back to her castle.

Maz shakes her head. “Not me so much as Rey.”

“Rey?” Ben asks this time.

Maz nods. “Rey,” she confirms. “That’s her name.”

“All of it?” Luke asks, wondering if she had a surname.

Maz looks down, “That’s all of it. The only name she has.”

Luke’s brow furrows in concern. “Was she a slave?”

Maz’s wrist communicator makes a noise and her focus of attention shifts a bit. “Listen, I got to get going. Possible brawl in the bar. Why don’t we talk about it more when I see you. We’ll be on our way tomorrow after I’ve spoken to her in the morning. I think she’ll be very excited.”

Luke would have preferred an answer then but Maz was right. Perhaps it was best to discuss more private matters in person. “Alright then. We’ll get things ready and see you both then.”

“Alright. Sleep tight Skywalker and young Solo. See you soon!” And with that, the transmission
ends and Luke and Ben are alone again. But this time the heaviness in the air from before isn’t as noticeable as before. Not with the distraction of their possible new arrival.

“You really think she’s force sensitive?” Ben asks him.

Luke doesn’t doubt it, chuckling a little. “Maz isn’t one to be mistaken. If she says the girl has power then she must have power. The degree of it though is yet to be determined. That might be why she was reluctant to discuss further. She probably needs to learn more herself.” Luke has to reason to doubt Maz. She’s helped them out of scrapes who knows how many times, and now she has the Falcon in the safety of her custody.

“I should call your father right away. He’s going to be so excited!” Luke says with a smirk but Ben looks away.

“Can you wait until I leave, please,” Ben asks him.

“You don’t want to talk to him?”

“Well if he’s coming tomorrow I don’t have a choice, do I?”

“Ben, I’m sure he’s been trying to-”

“Can’t you just lecture me on whatever it was you wanted to talk about and we can deal with whatever this is tomorrow?” Ben asks, running a hand past his forehead as if he had a headache.

Luke sighs but finds himself almost relieved that he didn’t have to lie to him. He knows that Han loves his son, but he’s never quite known how to be a father. It’s part of the reason Ben feels the way he does, or so Luke thinks. Because despite those who care for him and want to be there for him, Ben feels alone. It doesn’t matter how many people Luke surrounds him with, Ben can’t make friends. He can’t just be at peace or find amusement or satisfaction in the things that others do.

Luke has long tried to ignore how these were warning signs, but he’s been determined to see past them and focus on the light that exists within Ben. The light Leia first spoke of when she felt him in her womb.

He is so much more than just another Vader. Luke knows that.

Luke looks to his nephew who is waiting to be reprimanded for staying up after hours and for being late to class. A speech he’s given to him before and will have little weight if he gives it again.

*Something needed to change,* that’s what he thought this morning when he was so irritated with him. But speaking with Maz, recalling Ben’s inner strife he held with his father and his mind reminds him that Ben’s biggest obstacle is himself. If he can learn to overcome his fears and personal conflict, he will reach the potential Luke knows he’s capable of.

Perhaps it’s just a matter of how and whether or not he can handle the responsibility of such a task.

In terms of the Jedi trials, the process of a padawan becoming a knight, they must face hardships and personal decisions that might upset them and challenge them. Ben has had to deal with rejection and fear for a long time. Perhaps this is all part of becoming the man Luke knows he can be.

It gives Luke, what he believes to be, a brilliant idea.
“Okay. Let’s talk,” he finally responds to Ben. “I think I finally have a solution to the problem.”

“I know, I know. You said it this morning. ‘Responsibility.’” Ben rests his chin in his hand, looking almost bored and he’s preparing himself to tune Luke’s voice out.

“Exactly. Which is why when our new student arrives here tomorrow, you will be her primary teacher.” Luke says this, successfully repressing a smile so he can watch his nephew’s reaction. It doesn’t disappoint.

He stares at him blankly at first, as if he didn’t hear him before his eyes start to get wider and his hand falls from his face into his lap with a loud smack. “I-I’m...Wait! What?” He exclaims, totally lost. “Her teacher? Are you kidding? Who do I look like? You? I thought I had to be many decades older and sporting a beard to be a teacher.”

“Watch it, kid. I like the beard,” Luke says, stroking his flesh hand over his graying beard. He doesn’t take offense. He knows one can’t take offense when Ben gets defensive and confused. He doesn’t like to feel at a disadvantage of information and when he’s confused he throws out minor insults to distract from it.

“Well, I’m not going to be some random girl’s teacher just because you don’t want to be.”

“Make no mistake, young padawan,” Luke says clearly because he knows it irks him. “I have no objection to welcoming this girl into our Academy or being her teacher. In fact, by title, I will indefinitely be her teacher.”

“Then why did you just say-?” Ben starts but Luke waves him off so he can finish.

“Because she has much to learn, and at the age of seventeen and no training, she needs to catch up a bit. She’ll require more in-depth and personal lessons, specific to her strengths and weaknesses. Surely not all of the students will require such attention so this means it will come in the form of private lessons from you. Now, since you seem to not be getting anything out of your own lessons anymore, as you told me this morning, you can perhaps learn more when you teach someone else.”

Ben groans and his head falls back. “So this is my punishment? Babysitting?”

Luke can’t help but scoff. Maz said the girl was around his age. Probably only a few months behind Ben. “Babysitting” was hardly the proper term but Ben likely knows that so there was no point in correcting him.

“Punishment or opportunity. That’s for you to decide,” Luke says.

Ben scoffs this time. “If I don’t have a choice then it’s definitely punishment.”

“Well, whatever you want to call it, punishment, babysitting, whatever, go get some rest and get ready for it. We’ve all got a big day tomorrow and I’ve got a call to make.”

Ben stands, realizing that Luke meant he was going to call Han and he didn’t want to be a part of it. He bites his cheek as he always does when he’s holding something back but Luke seldom knows what. He walks back over to the door and quickly Luke calls after him, attempting to leave it on a good note, despite the probable odds.

“Goodnight, Ben.”

“Whatever,” is all that is grumbled back at him before the door shuts and the boy is retreating back
to his hut.

Luke brushes it off as he enters his brother-in-law’s contact code into the holopad, thinking of the best way to break the news. But the minute Han’s face appears, Luke realizes his face betrays him already.

“What’s with that bantha shit-eating grin on your face, old man?”

“Old man? You’re one to talk. If you’re going to be like that then maybe I’ll just call you later,” Luke teases.

Han grumbles but gives in to curiosity, finally laughing. “Easy, Luke. You know I’m just messing with you. Now, what’s going on? It’s not-uh...it’s not the kid, is it?” he asks and Luke tries to ignore how the smile on his face drops. It's as if Han is dreading the possibility that this call is in regards to his son. Luke is quick to spare him, deciding it was best to move past the discomfort although the shared malaise of both father and son is disheartening, to say the least.

“What would you say if I told you that blasted ship you thought you lost wasn’t so lost anymore?” Luke asks with a coy smile.

Han’s reaction reminds him too much of Ben’s from just moments earlier when he was surprised to hear Luke’s proposition of teaching the new girl. Except Han's expression is laced with joy rather than the frustration his son's countenance held.

“You found her?” Han asks eagerly.

“Maz is bringing the Falcon to the Academy tomorrow, along with the possible padawan that found it from some junkyard on Jakku.”

“Jakku?” Han exclaims before he shouts over his shoulder. “Chewie, I told you we should have double checked the Western Reaches!”

Luke nearly barrels over laughing when he hears the insult the wookiee threw back at him.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading!
Chapter Summary

Ben sounds angry all the time but is really just sad and he feels doubtful of his teaching abilities.
Rey tries to have a good time but is feeling really sad and mournful of people she never knew and a place she didn't like.
Maz gives her 'the talk' but not that kind. The 'so you just found out you're forcesensitive' kind.

Chapter Notes

Essentially, Maz is Rey's Hagrid at this point and is about to give her the ol' "Yer a Wizard" bit.

Rey got out of the shower. Her skin is pink and stinging from the heat, especially around her neck from where the trandoshan’s claws had held her. She grabs the towel and walks back up to the mirror. She takes her hand and wipes across the mirror so she could see her reflection again, the steam from the shower cloaking it completely.

She gets closer, her fingers brushing past the marks on her neck as she looks to the medpac Maz left on the counter. There are patches and things to aid wounds but Rey isn’t sure what could really be done for them. Bruises healed with time. True there were small indentations from where his claws sank in a bit, but they weren’t very large and would go away soon enough. A trandoshan only had three fingers anyway and she’s had much worse before.

Deciding to leave it, she steps out of the fresher, walking back into the grand room and finding the clothes Maz left on the bed.

Rey can’t help but smile. They don’t look too different from the clothes Maz was wearing. They were soft and dark and clean and everything Rey wasn’t used to. Rey’s tan rags were still on the floor of the fresher. Save for maybe some of the belts, she thinks she would like to leave them there. She doesn’t want to put them back on when they still hold so much of Jakku.

No longer noticing the sting of her skin, she gets dressed, cautious not to disturb her throat.

Ben goes back to his hut, cursing under his breath.

He was just told he was going to have to be the primary tutor for this new girl that was coming tomorrow. Some scavenger girl that found his father’s ship and made her way to Maz’s castle.

That just sounded like some kind of scam. This girl probably wasn’t even force sensitive, she was just looking for something. Maybe Han had some kind of finder’s reward on the Falcon and this
girl was trying to claim it.

And now Ben had to deal with her. Luke was mocking him.

Even if this girl was force sensitive, Ben’s social skills and ways of communicating are...well, he just doesn’t communicate. He isn’t sure his ways of teaching would be much better. He was a disappointment in all too many aspects of the word and didn’t really want to invite any more.

He knows he’s a pain in the ass. Ben wishes he wasn’t. He wishes some days that he was one of Luke’s mindless students that seemed to be ignorant of everything that made Ben stay up at night. But he isn't like these other students that seemed excited to be here and enjoy each other’s company and friendship. They would sometimes even have meetups at different huts some nights and gossip or more likely do things that Jedi in training shouldn’t be doing.

Strangely enough, that aspect of the Jedi lifestyle never bothered Ben. He was never particularly interested in others in the way a teenage boy probably should be but again, Ben supposes he isn’t a normal teenage boy.

He was a mess.

So he didn’t feel like he was missing out when everyone else was playing around and he was hiding away in his hut like some old hermit. Besides, it’s not like he was invited along anyway. He scared everyone.

Ben sighs, suddenly the energy to be angry seems so exhausting. The anger roiling within him as he marched down the hill slumps into sadness and Ben falls at his desk, his hands running through his hair.

He was planning to open his journals and write as late as he pleased. He didn’t care if he was late for whatever tomorrow brought when he left Luke’s quarters but as he sits here now, Ben doesn’t think he has the energy. He ends up just staring at the blank page, unsure of how to feel and how to express it.

This happened sometimes. As emotional as he gets and regardless if he wants it on paper or not, he can’t seem to conjure up the motivation to do it.

It’s these moments that scare him most because when everything gets too quiet, he can almost hear whispers of voices he’s tried so hard to forget. Voices from his childhood nightmares, telling him of his potential. Of his darkness. Of what he must do if he is to achieve it.

If he lets the quiet get to him now, those voices might come back. He hasn’t heard them in a while, but no amount of time is enough to let him forget how they made him feel.

So, he picks up his pen and rubs his eyes, trying to keep them open as he begins to write anyway.

Surely being tired the next day is better than whatever waited for him in the silence.

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Rey admired everything about the room. Old paintings were safe within intricate and beautiful frames. Some looked ancient, along with some of the furniture in the room. Rey never realized the amount of color artwork could have. It left her embarrassed by the rather gray and drab renderings of her own.

She very much liked to draw, but was limited to her resources on Jakku will a small old sketchbook and some struggling sticks of charcoal. They were all broken little stubs at this point, and the ones
that were in better shape were still stowed away in her AT-AT.

Rey sighs, stepping away from the walls and heading toward the balcony. She comes to the railing, leaning on it with her elbows and looking out to the wooded forest before her.

Rey never thought a place as beautiful as Takodana could exist.

Perhaps she could make some sort of arrangement with Maz where she could assist her in the castle. Then maybe she could stay here and-

No. How could she forget? She was a girl who killed a man with imaginary ancient monk powers that she, for all reasons, shouldn’t have.

Part of her wants to argue that she will control it, whatever it turns out to be, but that was delusional. In fact, Rey feared that if Maz had not intercepted with the trandoshan in the bar, his fate might have been the same as the man from Jakku. She could have fallen apart again and taken Maz’s beautiful castle with it.

She was dangerous. Surely Maz knew that. Rey couldn’t be such a burden and liability to not only Maz's business but also her home.

*Someone like me probably deserves to be on Jakku for all my days,* she thinks.

She gives a heavy sigh as she turns away from the Takodana scenery. Rey wishes she could focus on it better. She wishes she could enjoy this place but her thoughts find ways to fill her with so much doubt. Ever since Plutt grabbed her, intending to drag her to that man, she hasn’t felt like the same person she was before. She feels like she’s aged all the years a person can age and it’s left her thinking of all the things that make her feel empty.

Even now, surrounded by all the beauty she’s never known, she has to think of that place and the few things she’s left behind.

Despite keeping everything essential in her satchel, it was down to the bare minimum. There were still things she cared for in that AT-AT that she’ll never see again. Things she’s collected and sworn to never scavenge.

The charcoal was just one of many things she’s come to appreciate. A scavenger comes to appreciate or loathe the characteristics and features of an item when it came to how it was designed or how it functioned. She was always fascinated by the way things worked or how they could come together to make something new, even if it was all junk.

Fixing things. Making things. Drawing things to keep her hands busy when she had nothing left to do but needed to keep herself occupied or her thoughts of doubt would come trickling back in.

She’s never slept well, which was just part of life on Jakku. But she wonders if she could sleep now. She looks back at the bed.

The massive bed with a thick mattress and soft blankets.

Rey steps towards it, locking the balcony door behind her, too paranoid to leave it open all night. Not when she had locks at her disposal although she trusted Maz and the safety of her castle.

She approaches the bed and pulls back the covers. Her hair is still a little wet but as she lays her head on the pillow, she knows the moisture that hits the fabric is from her tears.
She was comfortable and warm but hopelessly confused as to what the hell is going on with her.

She should be happy that she’s here, but she’s only thinking of how she left. She’s only thinking of how she lived her whole life in ignorance so that she might one day see the people who were coming back for her but they weren’t real.

All that seemed real was that horrible man’s face and the matter of how he died...how he was killed. How *she* had killed him.

That shouldn’t be real but it is.

Rey doesn’t fall asleep as fast as she should.

Maz knocks on Rey’s door. It’s just about morning now and she had sent MX to go power down and get some rest, praising her for her work in keeping the room safe and sound. She could still hear her whirring down the hall by the time Rey opens the door.

“Rey, my dear, did you sleep well?” Maz looks at her with a smile but notices how she doesn’t look as rested as she hoped she would.

But still, Rey smiles back at her anyway. “I slept great. I woke up a little while ago. Force of habit I guess.”

Maz sighs. “Rey, you don’t have to lie. If you didn’t sleep well, I won’t be offended. I just want you to be rested.”

Rey’s eyes get a little bigger, realizing she’s been caught before looking down again. “I’m sorry. I guess I didn’t sleep as well as I wanted. But it had nothing to do with the bed or the room or you, I promise.”

Maz takes her by the hand and guides her to the foot of the bed so they can both sit down. The task is a little bit harder for Maz than it was for Rey but with enough momentum, she lands triumphantly on the comforter without needing to ask Rey for assistance.

“I know what troubles you, my dear. You’re thinking about what happened right before you left? You’re frightened by how that man was killed and wondering if it was because of you?”

Rey looks to her with guilty eyes. Tears fill them an instant later. “I know it was me. I felt it. Like it all fled from me at once. I killed that guy, Maz.”

“I know,” Maz says, moving her hands to remove her goggles. When she looks back up at Rey, the girl’s face looks horribly confused.

“What do you mean you know?”

Maz can’t help but give a small chuckle. She knows this must all be sound strange to someone who has likely only heard of these things in passing. Through rumors or half-assed storytellings. But they were real, and she deserved to know. “My dear, I am an old woman. I’ve seen many things in my lifetime and I’ve met enough people to know when a bright one comes along. Although I am no Jedi, I know a few things of my own,” Maz says with a smirk as she watches Rey’s eyes gradually get bigger and bigger.

“Yes, I know. A lot to process. But you’ve had your suspicions, haven’t you? If you were to name it, what would it be?”
“Y-you mean the force?” Rey asks on a whispered breath. She sounded afraid to speak it any louder, in case anyone may hear how crazy she sounded but it wasn’t crazy at all.

“Wow. On your first try. I knew you were good,” Maz gently nudges her shoulder in praise but Rey seems a little too distracted to notice.

“But-I mean-How?” she stammers. “I admit it had crossed my mind, but I’m just…” Rey covers her face with her hands. “Maz, I’m nothing. I never even should have left Jakku. I’m so stupid!” she cries into her hands and Maz thinks her heart breaks a little.

“Rey, you are certainly not ‘nothing.’ You are someone who got dealt a very unfortunate fate but against all odds, you beat them. You have great power in you. Power that, with proper instruction, will bring you to great things.”

Rey remains with her face in her hands and Maz doesn’t know what to say.

“Rey you’re not stupid, you know that. And you don’t belong in a place like Jakku so don’t think that for one more moment.”

Rey finally looks to her then. “I was waiting for my parents to come back…” she starts to sob. “But they...they were the ones who sold me. I was so blind. It took me this long to face that.”

Maz wishes she could track down the bastards herself and kick them from the Tua-Lu herself. Those filthy, selfish creatures who sold their daughter to further cruelty.

“But you have faced it, don’t you see? You may feel lost right now. You may feel scared. I know that the thing you wished for isn’t real and it leaves little hope behind, but remember it was your strength and your power that set you free. If you lost hope, you would not be here now, I don’t think.”

Rey listens quietly, sniffling a little as she speaks a moment later. “Really? You think so?”

Maz nods, feeling her own tears blur her vision. “This is not where your story ends, but where it begins.” Maz reaches up to brush away a tear on her face, noticing it was much cleaner than yesterday. No dirt travels with her tears. “Dear child, the belonging you seek is not behind you...it is ahead.”

Rey rocks forward then, wrapping her arms tight around Maz. The girl is not sobbing as much anymore but Maz cannot imagine how much this must be for her to digest, so to speak. Within a very short amount of time, she had to flee the only place she’s ever known, shortly after coming to terms with the fact that her family was not who she thought they were in the midst of discovering she has rather significant power. Not to mention the circumstances of demonstrating those said powers were traumatic in their own right.

Maz pulls back from Rey then, knowing they had much to discuss. “Rey, listen to me. If I were capable of training a student such as you, believe me, I would. But with your talents, there are places better equipped for what you need. I hope this doesn’t upset you, but last night, I called an old friend of mine who has an Academy for young students like you that need guidance in the ways of the force. It’s a Jedi Academy.”

Maz didn’t agree with everything the Jedi believe in or do but she trusted Luke and regardless if this girl accepted those beliefs as well, at least learning some methods of control and expanding her knowledge will help her.

“Jedi Academy,” Rey repeats. There is no opinion in her tone, just merely testing out the words,
seeing how they sound.

“My friend would like you to stay and learn with them. There is a place for you there.” Maz’s
words make Rey smile a bit and perhaps it is because she knows she will be welcome in a new
place. She will have a place to stay. “You won’t have to scavenge for things or trade and barter for
food and water. Those things, along with sleeping accommodations will be given to you. Your
main concern will be your studies.”


“Yep. School. And Luke Skywalker will be your Master.”

Rey’s mouth hangs open. “He’s real?”

Maz laughs. “Oh, he’s very real, along with all his other band of merry misfits that saved the
galaxy. One of which was Han Solo who’s beloved ship you just happened to find and recover for
him.”

“That was the Millenium Falcon?” she asks startled, realizing she’s actually flown in it. “The ship
that made the Kessel Run in fourteen parsecs?”

Maz laughs even harder now as she nods. “Twelve, actually. But knowing him he rounded down so
for all I know it could be fourteen.”

Rey laughs and Maz is glad to see a smile on her face.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry, another sad and boring one. But Rey arrives at the Academy next and Ben and
Rey will be introduced.
Ben wakes up on his own accord that morning, glad he actually had the coherency to fall into his bed at some point last night. His neck doesn’t ache as much as it does when he falls asleep at his desk.

He rises, getting to his feet and preparing for the day as he recalls his frustration from last night. He grumbles to himself as he thinks again of how he suddenly would much rather remain in bed. Not only was he meeting the girl from Jakku that needed to learn basically everything, but his father was probably coming to get his beloved ship back.

There was a time when Ben couldn’t wait to see his father again. There were times when he would stay up late, waiting for him to call and say goodnight. But Han rarely called and when he did, he sounded distant. Ben remembers how he would say “I love you, Dad!” to which Han never quite reciprocated.

If anything he got a “Goodnight, kid” and that was it. And it was long before Ben arrived at the Academy so it’s not like he had a reason to be embarrassed. Hell, Ben must have been four years old with some of those earliest memories.

Leia always told him not to read too much into it. She told him that no matter how he showed it, his father loved him.

But then again everyone in his family seemed to show affection in rather backward ways. Leia’s calls were becoming sparse these days. He knows her face better from the holonet than from his own memories.

One could argue it was due to the Jedi lifestyle that he is subjected to so much silence, but no matter what path he is on, they would have ignored him anyway. His parents had bigger lives beyond their son and he was of little interest to them when there was a whole galaxy they decided to serve.

The same galaxy he was supposed to serve one day. The very thought makes him want to go back to bed.

It only intensifies further when the holopad on his nightstand rings with a message from his uncle.

Please clean out the hut closest to yours. It’s the only empty one left. If you could get some clean sheets from BX and start sprucing it up for our new student it would be much appreciated.

She should be here soon. When you’re done, come meet me at the temple. Be prepared to introduce yourself.
Ben can only groan as he slumps his head back to look at the ceiling, wishing he never woke up.

Rey is sitting in the pilot’s seat of the Millenium Falcon, mid-hyperspace en route to Luke Skywalker’s Jedi Academy.

That sounded like the thoughts of a lunatic but it was true.

Maz is in the co-pilot’s seat. When they boarded, Rey imagined Maz would fly but the smaller woman insisted that she pilot the ship, claiming she wanted to see her in action. Rey thought it was a little embarrassing but indulged her anyway.

They ate breakfast before leaving Takodana and gathering themselves before loading up in this ship and making straight for the Academy. It was on a planet called Oquinn which Rey had never heard of before but she’s never heard of lots of things so it doesn’t quite phase her.

“There are some things we need to talk about, Rey. Logistics and matters that aren’t as pleasant.”

“Okay...like what?”

Maz gives a heavy sigh. She doesn't sound enthusiastic at all. “I totally stand by your actions and how you managed to escape from Jakku, but I’m afraid that in the most blatant of terms, you killed somebody and although that is not totally foreign to the Jedi or even Luke particularly, I don't think it would be wise to start with that.”

“Oh.”

“It would just be better, I think, if you came up with a more innocent yet believable circumstance of when these powers first awoke in you.”

Rey understands, knowing the suggestion is wise. “Okay. I will.”

“And I’m sorry to say that I’ve already kind of lied on your account, to begin with, Rey. I told Luke you saved up for this ship and left Jakku on your own accord and not because of...well you know.”

“You mean he doesn’t know I’m a slave?”

“He knew you were a scavenger and I know he has his suspicions. Hell, he even asked me flat out if you were but luckily someone from the castle commed me and I left him hanging.”

“Oh.”

“He will ask further questions though and I think it would be best if you only answered about your accounts as a scavenger who worked her life away to pay for a ship and get off that rock. Everything else would only complicate things and I don’t want to see you get turned away.”

Rey’s heart skips a beat. “Is he known to do that? Turn people away?”

“Of course not. In fact, he’s only got a dozen or so students, not all of which are notoriously gifted in the force but potent enough to take lessons in such matters. The Jedi are very...virtuous people and even if they do not agree with slavery, your escape would be a bit of a gray area I think. But I
don’t want you to worry about Luke. He’s already inclined to like you. You come from a desert planet just like him and you found his best friend’s ship.”

Rey forces a laugh even though she’s riddled with even more nerves now that she knows she can’t be honest with her possible teacher. How would that even work? Could Jedi tell when you were lying?

Fuck, I’m going to be so bad at this.

“Relax, my dear, everything is going to be fine,” Maz reaches over to place a hand on her arm. She must notice how nervous she is.

“I’m sorry. I’ve just never belonged anywhere. If this is the first place that’s going to welcome me I feel strange lying, even if I know I have to.”

Maz nods in understanding. “I know.”

“I just don’t want to mess it up. Not like everything else.”

“You won’t, Rey. Get past these hurdles and everything will be fine.”

Everything will be fine, Rey repeated in her mind. She’s always just wanted things to be “fine” but things seldom were. If she lied and she said these things, could everything start to be okay or was she just kidding herself all over again? She didn’t want to live in denial of something any longer.

The ship signals the end of hyperspace and Rey turns away to fall out smoothly. Maz chuckles from the co-pilot’ seat. “Look at all your long arms can get done without my help.”

Rey laughs, sitting back down as the swirls of lightspeed end and the planet of Oquinn comes into sight. “Your arms aren’t even that short, Maz.”

“No need to try and flatter me, I already got you breakfast.”

Luke had decided it would be best if he canceled morning lessons. He didn’t want to overwhelm this new girl, Rey, by bringing her out in front of everyone. Although it was a small audience, she was from Jakku and has probably never had anyone really pay much attention to her. There was no sense in scaring her right out of the gate.

Suddenly, he feels something familiar and he smiles as slowly he begins to hear those old and crazy engines enter the atmosphere and make their way to the temple. Luke smiles as he sees it for the first time in years, the Millenium Falcon.

It descends, landing on the empty fields before the school and Luke rushes over, anxious to greet them.

The ramp lowers and the first one off is Maz. She’s got a beaming smile and her short legs scurry down to crash into him. “Luke Skywalker, it’s been too long. Teaching has made you an old man.”

Luke just laughs. “Maz, you should know that a lot of things have made me an old man, not just teaching.”

“Right you are,” she laughs too.

Luke can’t help but look to the top of the ramp where he can see a young face peeking around the corner, unsure if she should interrupt their reunion but Maz turns around, waving her down.
“It’s alright, come on down,” Maz tells her and the girl obeys. She steps around the corner and makes her way down the ramp. She’s skinny, almost frightfully so and she has some interesting bruises around her throat. But her eyes are bright as she steps before him and she gives a kind smile.

“You must be Rey,” Luke asks.

“I am.”

“I’d like to welcome you to the Jedi Academy. I hope you will be very comfortable here.”

“Thank you, sir.”

Maz laughs then, inching closer to Rey to nudge her playfully. “This one has manners to rival Threepio’s but a lot more tolerable. She’s going to do great, I already know it, Luke.”

Luke can’t help but smile. Maz was an excellent judge of character although much remained to be seen. “I can’t wait to get you started, Rey. Why don’t we all head up to the temple and discuss some things and then we can get you settled.”

Rey follows them inside to the temple. It’s not as grand or as ornate as Maz’s castle but it’s still amazing and Rey can hardly believe it’s a real place or that she’s even allowed in. All of this treatment seemed to be for somebody else besides herself but if she said anything, Maz would just roll her eyes and insist she was supposed to be here.

So she just lets it happen as they walk through a great big hallway leading to a very nice room where there’s a droid whistling in greeting.

“Rey this is Artoo-Deetoo. He’s a very loyal droid and much more than your average astromech. He’s a great help here at the Academy so you’ll be seeing a lot of him. Say hi, Artoo.”

The droid beeps and chirps his introduction and Rey giggles a little. “It’s nice to meet you as well, Artoo, I’m Rey.”

Another droid brings in a tray then and pours them tea while the three of them sit down on the furniture. Rey has never had tea before but she takes it, noticing the cloud of steam swirling above it, deciding to wait a minute before trying it.

But then Luke addresses her again. “Rey, I can’t tell you how desperately my brother in law has been searching for that ship. As much as Han will claim he isn’t a sentimental man, his attachment to the Falcon would say otherwise. Not that I could blame him after all the trouble that hunk of garbage got us out of.”

“Is he coming?” Maz asks Luke before Rey could reply.

Luke hums as he takes a sip of his tea. “Mmm. Of course. He should be here in a few hours if you’re okay to wait that long. I can always lend you another ship if you need to be back on Takodana before then.”

Maz swats her hand. “Hell no, I’m fine. I want to make sure you’re going to take care of this girl before I leave her in your care. If everything’s not to my liking she’s going back with me,” Maz teases.

Luke just laughs but Rey feels strangely grateful, wondering if Maz really meant that. She seemed to genuinely care about Rey and what became of her. No one has ever been like that with her
“I understand.” Luke sets down his cup and moving forward a bit to rest his elbows on his legs as he looks to Rey again. “But I do have a few questions for you, Rey. I hope you don’t find them too intrusive. I just want to understand a little better of what you’ve been going through.”

Rey keeps her eyes away from Maz. She knows if she is going to lie, she needed to do it seamlessly and eyeing Maz wasn’t going to make her sound convincing. “I understand.”

“Maz told me you were a scavenger and you bought this ship to make your way off Jakku. Did you have any reason to believe you held any possible power before Maz suggested it?”

In a flash, she sees that man’s face and she can feel Plutt’s hands on her arms as he drags her through the sand. All of it comes in quick visions before it all slows down the moment she snaps and they both go flying back. One of them dead. “There was just one incident, yes. It happened not long before I was able to leave Jakku.”

“Do you mind telling me what it was?” Luke asks.

Rey swallows, before nodding. She knows what she has to do. “Well, I was scavenging one day. I was in a fallen Star Destroyer, hoisted high up on cables as I was trying to pry my way into one of the ventilation shafts. My cables snapped though and before I could grab hold of anything I was falling. It was such a great distance and I could only think of how I was about to die as I came crashing to the surface.”

Rey looks to Maz who is almost wincing. She was certainly helping to make it sound more believable. She even turns to Luke then, her knuckles tight. “Sorry, this part makes me nervous.”

Luke’s attention is on Rey though so she continues. “As I came closer though, something in me felt like it had...switched. Something woke up and before I could crash against the metal, I halted midair and hovered there before I floated slowly to the ground, not a scratch on me.”

“And you suspected the force?”

“Well, I tried not to. I thought the force was just a legend and if anyone would have it, it would be someone like...well you know, like you. A Luke Skywalker. Not a Rey.”

Luke chuckles a little. “The force appears usually in the least likely of people, Rey. I used to be a farmer and I was the last person who would have expected to be where I am today.” He takes another sip of his tea. “So, you had this experience and then what? You decide it’s time to leave Jakku?”

“Well, I had been saving up some nice pieces to trade. I offered Plutt near everything I had to get that ship once I realized Jakku had nothing left to offer me.”

“So you already knew how to fly?” Luke asked.

“Yes. I have been training in flight simulators from the fallen Star Destroyers for years,” Rey answers.

“So, if you had the means to, why didn’t you leave until now? Regardless if you didn’t have a force awakening or not, then why were you there for so long? What was Jakku ‘offering you’ as you just put it?”

“I umm…” Rey can’t help but look to Maz then and she feels ashamed suddenly. She knows why.
She doesn’t have to lie for this question but it feels harder than all the others for some reason. “I was waiting for my family to come back for me. I had believed they would return.”

“But they didn’t,” Luke finishes for her, obviously seeing where it was going. It was so plain for everyone else to see. A truth that took her over sixteen years to face.

Her face turns red and she denies the ache at the back of her throat for the encroaching sobs that they are. “But they didn’t,” she repeats and to this Luke can only nod.

“I’m sorry to hear that, Rey. I know this feels like a loss, but I would say that with the trajectory of which you’ve found yourself, it is a victory. Perhaps with time, it will start to feel like one.”

Rey appreciates his words, nodding gratefully.

“I must admit, Rey. I do sense something profound with you. I can’t say I’m surprised though. Maz’s ways of observation and truly seeing people is the most advanced of anyone I’ve ever met.”

“Don’t try to feed my ego, Luke,” Maz laughs. “I won’t be sticking around for classes, no offense.” Luke feigns defeat and Rey has never been around people that remotely like each other. To see friends just speak with one another is fascinating.

“I must tell you though, Rey. Although I will be your teacher, as I am to everyone, I will not be your only instructor. For your lessons, I’ve decided a more individualized approach would suit the situation best.”

“Individualized?” Rey asks.

“Private lessons. Sessions focused entirely on you and your strengths and struggles. Whatever you need to help progress your skills.”

That actually made a lot of sense. Everyone else here has been learning for years and she’s only just arrived. “That sounds amazing. But you won’t be teaching these sessions?” Rey asks.

“No. For that, I had entrusted my most talented padawan. He’s at a pivotal point in his training as well and I think this will be beneficial for both of you. There is still much one can learn by teaching another.”

“Who is it?” Rey asks but Luke starts to smile as he looks to the doorway. He waves through the air with his hand and the door slides open, revealing the face of a boy around her age who had been listening to their conversation. It leaves Rey feeling a little uncomfortable and exposed. She had revealed one of her deepest traumas, regarding her parents and this boy had just listened in because he felt like it.

Maz takes one look at him before giving a mock gasp. “Ben Solo, you little sneak!”

The boy stutters for a moment, “I-I wasn’t-”

Maz just laughs. “Relax. I had a feeling it would be you.”

The boy doesn’t say anything. Perhaps he doesn’t know what to say. He steps forward into the room. He’s quite tall, taller than Luke by at least half a head. His hair is dark and fairly long, but she can still see where his ears peek out a little bit. It’s then that he turns to look at her completely.

Rey doesn’t quite know what to make of the look on his face so she glances away, focusing on on the cup in her hands and finally feeling desperate enough to take a sip. When Luke stands up
though, Rey looks up again, not wanting to be obvious of how inexperienced she was with having tea in the company of Jedi.

“Rey, this is Ben. He’s a very determined young man when he wants to be and I believe he will be a most efficient teacher.”

Rey looks more closely to the boy now. The boy that would be instructing her it seemed. Rationally, she knows he must have brown eyes, but all she can think is that they’re impossibly dark. They’re dark and staring at her so emphatically that something catches in her chest.

“It’s nice to meet you, Rey,” he says finally. Rey can tell his enthusiasm is not matched to Luke’s or Maz’s, but still, he seems to manage a smile and Rey tries to return with one of her own.

“Nice to meet you too, Ben.”

“Ben, why don’t you show Rey where she’ll be staying and maybe introduce her to more of the others?” Luke asks before he looks back to Rey. “Today I just want you to settle in and get comfortable. Ben can show you some things of more use tomorrow, in regards to your training.”

“Thank you,” Rey tells him. As Ben moves for the doors, she begins to step after him, but Maz catches her hand as she goes.

“No, I can read between the lines and I don’t blame you. Ben has always been emotional. He’s always been alienated. I had hoped that with time, he would come to make friends with the others and become a little less...well, you know.”

Maz nods. “Yeah, I know. Ben has always been his own worst enemy, but things haven’t been very easy for him.”

Luke grumbles a bit. “I know what you’re going to say, but I’ve thought a lot about this.”

“I wasn’t going to say anything. I was just stating the facts.”

“No, I can read between the lines and I don’t blame you. Ben has always been emotional. He’s always been alienated. I had hoped that with time, he would come to make friends with the others and become a little less...well, you know.”

Maz nods. “Yeah, I know. Ben has always been his own worst enemy, but things haven’t been very easy for him.”

Luke thinks of Han and Leia. They loved their son, but being parents was hard and they were never quite sure how to navigate it. Especially together. Agreeing with each other was never their strongest area. When it came to Ben, that was as true as ever.

“He’s getting a lot stronger but I can’t just send him out on missions or something. I need to know I can trust him.”

“So you’ll just trust him with a whole other person and hope he doesn’t scare the daylights out of
her."

“He can do it. I will be overseeing their progress. And besides, by the looks of it, I think Rey can handle herself.”

“I know she can, Luke. I just want her to have some happy experiences. Things have been so hard for her, too. She’s never been able to be a kid before.”

“Well, in a way, neither has Ben. He’s never had a friend. Maybe this will be good for them.”

Maz smirks. “I thought the Jedi weren’t supposed to make attachments or connections or whatever.”

Luke shrugs. “Friendships are still important though, regardless of who we are. And maybe it’s the uncle part of my brain but I would really just like to see that kid happy for once. Maybe trusting him and giving him some space to make some choices of his own while he helps someone else will give him that.”

He hears Maz give a sigh. “Well, in that case, I think Uncle Luke might be a better teacher than Master Skywalker.”

Luke just shakes his head. “I don’t think Ben even thinks of me as his uncle anymore. I’m just the bearded stranger that tells him everything he doesn’t want to hear.”

“At least you’re telling him something. Seems like he doesn’t hear from too many other people,” Maz says putting her hands on her hips. Luke can tell who she’s referring to but doesn’t address it further. For that he's glad. He isn't sure that's a conversation he wants to have with anyone. Even his thoughts feel traitorous to his sister when he thinks about Ben's upbringing. So he changes the subject.

"Where did she get those bruises?" Luke asks her, pointing to his own neck, referring to the purple marks on Rey's throat.

Maz groans in anger. "Big ugly trandoshan in the bar. That's how I found her...With a massive hand around her throat and her feet dangling above the floor."


"She probably didn't have any more credits after buying that ship so I imagine she was hungry and tried to steal some food from the wrong person. But if you're going to hold that against her then I think you should reevaluate the situation. She felt a lot of guilt for it."

Luke understands. Especially because that girl looked way too skinny. If she was going to steal anything, he's glad it was food. "Well, she won't need to worry about that here. Three meals a day and no trandoshans."

"Yeah. Every human girl's dream," Maz jokes.

Chapter End Notes

They meet at last but the chapter was probably still boring. From now on, the chapters will be pretty centered around their interactions...so yay.
This chapter kind of reminds me of that one scene in Anastasia where they go to meet Sophie and she asks Anya a bunch of questions that they've rehearsed enough so they can go meet the duchess.

I think Ben might be the Duchess, lol.

Also, I can't find the name of the planet that the Academy was on. I don't think they gave it a name so I just made one up.

Thanks for sticking around and reading! Hopefully, things can start to get more interesting.
Introductions and Reunions

Chapter Notes

How awkward can I make this thing?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The walk from the temple to the hut was awkward.

At least it felt awkward for Ben. Rey was quiet and he knows that technically, he was the one supposed to be talking but he’s unsure what he should say.

He shouldn’t have stood outside that door. The look on her face when Luke opened that door and she realized he had been listening proved that much.

He hadn’t even spoken to her yet before her opinion of him was already ruined. Not that his words would have offered much else.

Still, Ben wishes he didn't feel such a tremendous pressure as he walks beside her. He never bothered making conversation with others because he didn’t see the point. But if he was to teach this girl, this would be only the beginning of whatever was to come, and it’s already uncomfortable.

He’s never felt comfortable around people, and Ben supposes now is no different, but he wishes at least things could have started differently. Now it seems, the cursed lessons were doomed most indefinitely.

While the war wages within himself as he thinks or how to move forward, he realizes she’s said something.

“Hmm?” he looks to her, noticing how her eyes are determined to stay on the ground as well.

“Is every day like this here?”

“Like what?”

“Is it...nice like this? Not too hot with lots of shade?”

She means the weather and climate. Of course. People talked about the weather when there was nothing else. “It’s usually like this, I guess. It rains pretty hard some days though. We’re expecting some showers later in the week.”

“Rain?” She stops in her tracks and Ben has to halt, looking behind him to see her face lit up with intrigue. Naturally, she was from a desert planet so rain must sound rather fascinating to her. He nods, trying to offer a kind smile.

“Wow,” she breathes. “I can’t wait to see it.” She starts walking again, this time looking up and with a smile on her face, as if she was trying to imagine what it would look like.

It gives him some breathing room as the silence that follows is not as awkward as it was before.
She notices the other huts as they walk further down the hill, some of the other students peering through the curtains to look at her but not approaching. They probably wouldn’t as long as he was around.

“So, everyone stays in these?” she motions to one of the huts.

“Yes. Everybody gets one. Yours is at the bottom of the hill beside mine. It’s the only available one we had left.”

“I get one all to myself?” she sounds a little too enthusiastic about something that’s honestly pretty horrible.

“Well, they’re not that big. You get a cot and a desk. The door is a curtain and it’s honestly, it’s kind of depressing but you probably won’t spend much time in there anyway,” Ben tells her but Rey doesn’t say anything. The look on her face has him wondering if he’s said something he shouldn’t have but he doesn’t dwell on it too much as they arrive to the hut.

Besides, he was only trying to be honest.

Ben pulls the curtain aside for her. “I can wait out here while you unpack,” he nods to her satchel that looks like it’s older than him.

She waits before stepping through. “I don’t have anything to unpack,” she tells him as if it’s obvious.

He points to her bag. “Well, you can at least put that down.”

Her grip around the strap seems to tighten. “I never go anywhere without it. If I leave it here, someone could steal it,” she tells him, gesturing to the curtain of false security.

“No one is going to steal from you. If they did, the investigation would be pretty short. It would be someone among thirteen other people. None of them would risk doing something that stupid.”

“So, you just leave your things in your hut all day?”

“Usually. Sometimes I take things with me if I’ll use them but for the most part, everything stays put all day.”

“It’s just...I never go anywhere without my things. These are the only things I own now and I don’t want to lose them.”

Ben sees her hands grip the strap of her bag a little tighter and he decides perhaps it is best to just drop the subject. She seems unwavering in her resolve and he finds that he doesn’t really care. Whether or not she unpacked her things or not held little consequence to him. “You can keep it on if you want. As long as you don’t let it get in the way, Luke won’t mind.”

“You don’t mind either?” Rey steps inside, running her hands along the desk and admiring the space.

“Why would I mind?” He steps in slightly but still standing in the doorway.

“Well, you’re my teacher too, aren’t you?” she turns back to him.

“Well, yeah, but it doesn’t matter to me. If it makes you comfortable, keep it. It’s not like there’s comfort in much else here.”
“Oh,” she says quietly, looking back at the ground again.

_Fuck. Why did I say that? Why am I like this?_

He’s about to move past it. He’s about to tell her to settle in anyways and just relax because after the others find her, she won’t have a moment to herself.

But then they’re interrupted when a detestable voice strikes up behind him. “So, Solo, I see you’re making excellent conversation as always with our newest edition.”

“Go away, Hux,” Ben grumbles without even turning to look at him.

“Calm down,” he says, walking around him to step closer to Rey. “I just wanted to introduce myself. Nice to meet you, I’m Armitage Hux,” he says with his usual sneer. Rey doesn’t step closer to him. Instead, she seems a little taken aback by Hux’s forward advance.

“Well, it’s uh…nice to meet you, too. I’m Rey.”

“Rey…” Hux starts but waits with his hand in the air, expecting her to give him more. A last name.

Recalling what he heard through the door of Luke’s study, Ben wants to throw him out. But then again it’s not like he’s made her feel any better since she arrived either. He was no better than Hux. In fact, he was worse, so far. He had violated her privacy and basically told her she shouldn’t expect much from this place.

But he’s Ben Solo, he reminds himself. He only knows how to fuck things up, he supposes.

“It’s just Rey,” she tells Hux and his hand falls from the air.

“I see,” he says. “Well, Rey, I came to give you a proper welcome because when it comes to the golden nephew here, I doubt you’ll even find where the freshers are.”

“Ben was just-” she starts but Hux interrupts her.

“Ben is the brightest of us all, as I’m sure he told you. He’s always making a show out of his abilities. Perks of the bloodline, I guess.”

“Hux-”

“Oh, relax. She was going to find out anyway.”

Rey’s face is a jumble of emotions. But mostly, she looks confused. “So, Luke is your uncle, then?” she states, looking back at Ben.

He just nods, wishing, not for the first time, that he was anyone else but himself. He wishes he was someone of no significance and no bloodline. He wishes he was nobody. There were no strings attached and no pedestal reserved for disappointment when you come from nothing.

Kind of like this girl. She had no parents, no legacy, no name even. She didn’t have to worry about those pressures and he feels envious suddenly.

“Rey, the others are anxious to meet you. I would be delighted to introduce you. Then we could all go to lunch together.”

Ben wants to push Hux aside, but he can’t bring himself to care enough to stop him. But Rey seems reluctant as she starts to shake her head. “Well, I was planning to stay with Ben because-”
Hux waves her off and interrupts her before she could finish. “Oh, Ben doesn’t care. He prefers his own company anyway.”

Although that was true, Hux shouldn’t speak for him. As if Hux really understood anything about him.

But then again, if Rey wants to meet the others, he would prefer he didn’t have to get involved. Everyone else hated him for a plethora of reasons. Besides, if he was to train her, he was already going to be spending too much time with her anyway.

When he looks back to Rey, her countenance is confused and almost uncomfortable. “Why don’t you go with Armitage, Rey. I have some things I need to prepare for our lessons anyway.”

He doesn’t but he can pretend.

“Lessons?” Hux asks but gets no answer.

“Oh, okay. I guess I’ll see you later then. Thank you for showing me the hut, Ben.”

“You’re welcome, Rey.”

And with that, Hux guides her away, leaving Ben in the middle of a hut that isn’t his, wishing he was somebody else.

But this time, the reasons for his feelings confuse him more than ever. He thought he wanted time to himself, but seeing Rey leave with Hux makes something in his chest twist.

He decides it’s nothing but disdain for the other boy and leaves for his own hut. He doesn’t know how much more time he has to himself before his father shows up and he’s not ready to face that.

Azmo, Dono, Nourdi, Iella, Soldar, Xid, Pim, Hevaj, Osi, Un’i, Boris, and Armitage.

 Fuck, that was a lot of names . Everyone was talking about how small the school really was but Rey’s never been around so many people at once. She’s been isolated for so long and she doesn’t know how to live with twelve other people.

 Thirteen , she reminds herself, thinking back to Ben. Ben Solo.

What a strange boy. Of course, Rey just met a handful of other admittedly strange and fairly kind people but something about Ben felt different. Perhaps it’s because she knew she was going to be spending so much time with him. Not to mention, he seemed like he already hated her.

And Luke was his uncle. Which meant if his name was Ben Solo, that could only mean that the man whose ship she stole from Jakku belonged to his father, Han Solo.

The Millenium fucking Falcon.

Even if she’s been on a desert planet all her life, she’s heard the tales of these people and the things they’ve done but now she was actually amongst them.

How did everything get so weird so fast? Even just since she woke up this morning so much had changed. But Maz seemed to trust this place and believe she would be safe. Not to mention that if this place really could help her with the power within her, she was willing to stay open-minded. But not too open-minded. No one could know of her true circumstances of finding herself here.
“So, Rey. Where do you come from?” Dono asks her. Or maybe it was Uni. She’s already lost track.

She smiles anyway, pretending she is more comfortable than she is. “Jakku. I was a scavenger.”

“Is that how you found the Millenium Falcon?” Boris asks her. He was...distinctive enough that she could recall his name. Most of the others were human but Boris was one among the handful that was not. She thinks he might be a Chadra-Fan but she’s not entirely sure.

“Yeah,” she nods, wishing everyone wasn’t looking at her. “I bought it right before I left.”

“And you went to Takodana?” another girl asks her. Iella, Rey thinks, and her tone sounds judgemental. Like she’s mocking her. “I would have gone straight to someplace cool, like Canto Bight.”

Rey just shrugs. “I’ve never been anywhere so I just kind of picked random coordinates and left.” Besides, Takodana was the best place she could have gone. She found Maz.

“Well, at least you ended up here,” Xid says but his tone is mocking too. It sends several of the others into laughter.

“Yeah, that was really lucky,” Iella speaks up again.

Rey feels very alone suddenly, despite being surrounded by people. But the way they’re talking, as if she isn’t there, as if she isn’t terrified to be in a totally new place, make her feel totally wrong.

*I don’t belong here.*

Why is she surprised? She’s never belonged anywhere but perhaps she got her hopes up in thinking this could be a more fitting place to be.

But she’s already here. It’s only been one morning. She thinks of all the other places she could be right now, shivering as she recalls Jakku.

That’s all the motivation she needs to force a smile and follow the others to the mess hall, trying to distract herself with the promise of free food.

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Ben had a horrible day, and it wasn’t even over yet.

He had spent most of it from a safe distance from his fellow students and admittedly observing the girl whom he would soon be instructing. He never cared about what they did just as they didn’t care about him. But he actually found himself feeling excluded today as he watched the new girl, Rey, talking with all of them.

He could tell she was uncomfortable. Despite how well natured these students were supposed to be, he knows how condescending they come across, especially to someone who has probably never spent that much time around people.

Not that he made it any better for her.

But it wasn’t like he cared either, at least he didn’t think so. He was only keeping an eye on her because he was in need of some sort of distraction. His father wasn’t here yet and Ben was trying to deny the anxiety he’s felt for too long that wells within him when he thinks about Han.

Soon enough, it’s past dinner and everyone is winding down for the day when he hears the sound
of engines entering the atmosphere.

He sits up from his bunk, knowing it was him. It was Han. He could sense him, even if it’s been years since he’s felt his father’s energy in such close proximity.

Fuck.

He wonders if he didn’t budge, perhaps the old man wouldn’t even bother and would just leave again. He could just stay here and within a few minutes, Han will be on his way again, enjoying his existence in complete ignorance of having a son.

But there’s a strange urgency in his mind that admits he does want to see him. He hates it and how weak it makes him feel.

Determined to torture himself, he remains motionless. If his father wanted to see him, he could march down her and speak to him on his own terms.

But what if he didn’t come? Could Ben handle that rejection?

Before he could think too much about it, he sees a pair of boots standing on the other side of the doorway. His heart speeds up, trying to get a better look in the darkness but the illusion is shattered once he hears a voice.

“Ben? It’s Rey, can I come in?”

Ben sighs, groaning. “Yeah.”

She pushes the curtain aside, stepping in. “Oh, Maz commed me from the temple. She said to grab you and tell you that your father’s arrived.”

“Yeah, I heard,” he grumbles. “I’m coming,” he says moving to his feet and walking out of his hut. He hears the girl start to walk beside him though and he slows down to look at her confused.

“What are you doing?”

“I’m going to say goodbye to Maz. She’s leaving now.”

Ben nods but finds himself in a reverse situation from that morning. They’re taking the same path and are stuck in the same silence that plagued them earlier.

Ben figures the silence must be better than whatever would come out of his mouth if they were to talk, so he decides to bear the discomfort and prepare himself for whatever awaited him at the temple.

But then Rey speaks up again and he can’t ignore it. “So, you kind of keep to yourself then, I’m guessing.”

He shrugs, unsure what else he could say. It didn’t take much observation to come to that conclusion. “I like my own company, I suppose.”

“I think I can understand that.”

Ben turns to look at her, almost amused. “You didn’t enjoy gossiping with everyone while they asked you nosy questions about yourself.”

She shrugs herself, “I don’t know. I mean, they seem really nice, but I’m used to be being by myself. It was strange being asked so many questions and to have so many people looking at me.
They probably think I’m crazy though, especially after they saw me eat.”

Ben doesn’t know what she means by that but she seems embarrassed. He doesn’t say anything, even if he wishes he could tell her not to care what the others think.

They were assholes anyway.

It falls into silence for a moment as they get closer to the top of the hill where the temple was. Ben watches her from the corner of his eye, slowing his usual pace so she remains in his sight. There was something different about this girl, he just didn’t know what.

When she turns to look at him, he quickly turns away, staring at his feet most intently as she speaks again. “How long has it been since your father visited?”

Ben tenses. “He came only once, about three years ago. Everything else has been through holos and messages.”

Rey seems confused. “Are parents not allowed to visit the Temple?”

“Luke encourages family relations more so than the ancient Jedi did. A few times a year he invites the parents and close relatives to visit,” Ben explains briefly. Given what he heard that morning, he knows she doesn’t have any parents.

Rey hums, probably picking up on his energy and his previous answers about his father. His father who Ben could sense more and more as they got closer to the Temple and his own anxiety floods himself.

He hates that this man makes him feel like this. He wishes he felt nothing for him. It would be easier since it seems like most of the time Han feels nothing for him.

“Ben?”

“Hmm?”

“Are you alright?” she asks him carefully.

Ben isn’t sure what to say. She’s only been here a day and already she’s picking up on surrounding energies. His energy. Admittedly, he probably wasn’t hiding it very well, but she had spent a grand total of ten minutes with him and already she was reading him. She could tell something was off.

Which meant to Luke it would be extremely obvious and he really didn’t want to get scolded for being too emotional again.

Rey stares at him, waiting for his answer, so he clears his throat and nods. “I’m fine.” He strides inside the temple, overcompensating to appear collected and judicious as they make their way to Luke’s quarters where they can hear the voices echoing through the halls.

As they round the corner, they find the door is open and they enter, all eyes on the room looking right to them.

He finds his father’s eyes for the first time in over three years and all he gets from him is a casual nod and smirk followed. He finishes saying something to Maz first before he steps forward.

“Hey, kid.”

Ben wanted to spin around and leave just then, already pissed off at the greeting but Han reaches
out and grips his shoulder. “Wow, you’ve really grown. You’re getting taller than me.”

Ben doesn’t know what to say to that so he just shrugs and Han’s hand falls.

Ben can already see the irritation in his face. Han is irritated because Ben isn’t pretending like everything is fine or as if they have some playful camaraderie.

So, likely looking for a distraction, Han’s eyes move to look over Ben’s shoulder, a smirk appearing back on his face. “You must be Rey.”

He holds out his hand and Ben sees Rey accept it with a nervous smile on her face. “I am.”

“Maz and Luke tell me that you’re the one who found the Falcon on Jakku.”

“Uh, I did. I didn’t realize what ship it was until Maz told me though.”

Han gives a smug laugh. “Maz says you bought it off some junk trader. Real asshole by the sounds of it. How much was he selling it for?”

“Han!” Maz snaps at him from the other side of the room. “Who cares what the kriff for brains sold it for?” Luke chuckles from his spot on the couch, settling on observation than actually getting involved it seemed.

Han gives a smug grin and holds up his hands. “Alright, you’re right, Maz. Sorry, I guess I’ve just missed her quite a bit. All that matters is that you found her and you’re both safe,” he says to Rey.

Ben has to refrain from shaking his head. Han hasn’t seen him in years either, but of course, he’s only concerned with the fucking ship and what’s happened to it since he lost it. None of his concerns are for his actual son, despite how long it’s been.

Rey clears her throat, finally having the space to speak. “Well, thank you. I am quite glad that I was able to get ahold of it and find my way to Takodana. Maz has certainly been a great help.”

Maz laughs, obviously enjoying the compliment. The small woman steps forward, grabbing Rey’s hand, guiding her out of the room. “Again with the flattery, my dear. I almost want to take you back with me.”

Rey laughs a little but Ben wonders if she would prefer that as well. Given what he’s observed, she didn’t like it here anyway. Maz then says something about wanting to give them space to talk so she and Rey step out and it leaves Ben only more tense. Now he’s alone with his father and uncle and he doesn’t even want to know whatever awful conversation awaits him.

Han hasn’t seen his son in a long time. Three or so years at least. They’ve spoken sparsely through the holonet but not much else. Han, although he trusted Luke and his teaching abilities, didn’t think that this was the best option for Ben when they first sent him away.

But he’s never known what was good for him. He’s only ever seemed to make things worse for him. That seemed as relevant as ever given Ben’s reaction upon seeing him again.

It’s quiet for a moment as the door closes and Maz’s voice fades as they walk further down the hall. Han moves to the couch where Luke was, but the man was standing up. “I’m going to check over a few things before I head to bed. Ben, if I don’t see you until the morning, I hope your first day of lessons goes well.” Ben nods but doesn’t look at Luke as he leaves.
Well that was just as tense as ever it seemed, or so Han thinks. Leia had revealed to him that in her regular calls with her brother, Ben was a constant topic of discussion. What he presented in his abilities was greatly diluted by his behavior.

Han pats a spot on the couch beside him. “Ben, come sit down.”

“Why?” he rolls his eyes.

“Because I want to catch up with you. I miss you.”

“I thought you were just here to pick up your ship and be on your way again.”

Han sighs, knowing he probably deserved that. “Ben, I can’t exactly stop by whenever I want. You’re here to train.”

Ben sighs. “I know.”

“Believe me, I would like to see you more often but your mother and I think that this is the best for you. We just want you to feel at peace.”

Ben sighs again, seeming to concede a bit and Han takes it as a small victory as he sits on the couch, although it is with a fair amount of distance.

“Have you talked to mom recently?”

“Of course I have. I spoke to her today.” Han keeps to himself the span of time that exists between their calls. He reached out to her early this morning to tell her he was swinging by the temple to pick up the Falcon. Of course, she had been relieved to hear it had been found but asked him a handful of questions of what he was going to say once he saw Ben.

Naturally, Han seemed to be forgetting all of them. For some reason, he could never relax around Ben. He was always so nervous of screwing him up the way his father did to him, but judging by nearly everything he’s exhibited so far, he already has.

“The girl seems nice. Very well mannered to have come from that backwater planet.”

Ben rolls his eyes. “Dad-”

“I just mean that Jakku is not a forgiving place by any means. I wonder what she really had to do to get the Falcon off planet because that ship is not something you can get by trading some common speeder.”

“Dad, just drop it, please. She found your ship and I seriously doubt that whatever circumstances she obtained it were any worse than what happens on that planet on a daily basis. Besides, both Maz and Rey said she bought it. If anything you should pay her back or something.”

Han nods, realizing that Ben was right. Maz trusted the girl and Luke had welcomed her into his school among people with abilities like hers. He shouldn’t stop to think of what a coincidence it all was.

Memories of Corelia and how he escaped back when he was a young man were beyond the realm of law and what he should have done, but he saw a chance that he believed would better his life and he took it.

If Rey had to take her own chance, perhaps that was her own business.
“Well, still, she seems very nice. Luke mentioned that he wants you to train her.”

“Yeah,” Ben grumbles.

“That sounds like a big responsibility. Are you up to it?”

“I don’t know. I start tomorrow.”

“Sounds like a big deal. Are you not going to regular lessons anymore?”

“Luke thinks I will learn more in teaching than constantly going over things I already know.”

Han hums in understanding but looks to his son as if he was a stranger. He knew he was powerful like his uncle and his mother, but he actually didn’t know much about the logistics of the force. Apparently though, Ben was good at it. Good enough to teach a new student pretty much everything from the ground up.

Hopefully, Luke knew what he was doing when he put that decree in place.

“Good. That’s good. He’s probably right. Not that I would know but he seems to be a pretty good Jedi. I think he’s got you on the right track.”

“Right. To be a Jedi you mean,” Ben says in an accusatory tone and Han is lost once again.

“What’s wrong with that? A Jedi is probably one of the most legendary careers I’ve ever heard of.”

“It doesn’t mean I want to be one. Just because I have the requirements to become one doesn’t mean that’s what I want to do with my life.”

Han sits up a little straighter, seeing what Ben was saying. “Ben, I, uh...I’m sorry if this isn’t your first choice, but given everything, I think it’s safest you stay on this path.”

“Right. Because I’m problematic and embarrassing.”

“No! Because we don’t want you to hurt yourself!”

Instantly, Ben stands up, shaking his head. “You don’t trust me.”

“Ben, that’s not what I said.”

“But that’s what you’re thinking. You think a few incidents is enough to become the next Darth Vader and without this wholesome Jedi bullshit, I’m going to go ballistic just like he did.”

Han feels real uneasy. Admittedly, such thoughts have crossed his mind before but he would never want Ben to know that. Hopefully, he can’t read his mind just yet.

“Ben, I just think a little more time here to help you figure yourself out is what’s best. If you finish your training and find some peace within yourself, maybe there’s something else out there for you that you would be more comfortable with, but until then, you need to stay here. Besides, you made a commitment to Luke by training this new girl. If this is part of your training, maybe this will help progress things and you can have a little more breathing room.”

Ben doesn’t answer, doesn’t look at him. The only response he gets is another shrug. He looks tired and confused and so much different than he used to but still the same.

It’s exhausting and confusing for Han himself.
“Listen, it sounds like you’ve got a lot on your plate. You’ve got a big day tomorrow so I’m going to get out of your hair and be on my way.”

“Fine.”

“Do you want to walk me out? Say goodbye to Maz?”

“I should get to bed. It’s almost light’s out anyway.” Han knows that Luke wouldn’t mind but obviously Ben is looking for an out. Perhaps this is where Han is supposed to let him.

“Alright, well, good night kid.”

Ben just nods, again, not looking directly at him, before he turns and walks out, leaving Han alone in Luke’s quarters and dying for a drink.

He lets out a heavy breath, closing his eyes and searching for some kind of relief.

“Fuck.”

“So, my dear, how was the first day?” Maz asks her as they walk back outside. She looks hopeful but like she might already know what’s on her mind.

Rey gives a small chuckle. “I don’t know. Compared to the daily scavenging on Jakku, it was great. But I actually know how to scavenge whereas talking to people is something else entirely.” Rey gives a sigh. “I don’t think I’m very good at it.”

Maz gives a small sigh of her own. “Between you and me, kids can be real assholes. Don’t let them walk all over you. But don’t doubt yourself either Rey. You are a kind and smart person that shouldn’t judge what makes a good day by how it compares to scavenging on that dirty rock.”

“Well, I don’t have anything else to compare it to.”

“But you will. Things will change for the better,” Maz assures her and just her encouragement alone makes Rey relax a little bit. “So it seems that Luke has chosen little Ben Solo to train you only he isn’t so little anymore.”

“Yeah.”

“Did you talk to him anymore today?”

“A little bit. He seems nice but a little...nevermind. I shouldn’t-”

Maz scoffs, “Oh please, Rey. I’m an old woman who knows when someone wants to say something. Just let it out. I won't tell anyone.”

“No, really. He seems nice, he just seems a little...intense, I guess. That and I was a little peeved that he was lurking outside the door this morning.”

Maz hums and nods in agreement. “Well, just between you and me, the distance you feel between everyone now, I’m fairly certain Ben has felt that his entire life.”

“Why?” Rey asks, confused how the son of two war heroes could become so cold.

Maz shrugs a bit. “Well, he’s always been reminded of who he is. He’s constantly reminded of the legacy he comes from and it’s probably been difficult for him to understand who he is. A lot has
been decided for him and I don’t think he’s happy with it.”

“Including training me?”

“Probably, but that doesn’t mean he can just boss you around. If he steps out of line, send him my way. I have a way with idiotic teenage boys when they are too stupid for their own good.”

“Okay.”

“But he’s also going through his own things too. None of that is your fault but I would say just try to be open to where he’s coming from. You two are probably more alike than you realize.”

Rey gives another nod, taking in her words. Rey kneels down to give her a hug.

“Maz, do you think we’ll see each other again?”

Maz just laughs. “Don’t be so dramatic. Of course we will. I’m counting on it.”

Rey sniffs. “Okay.”

Maz pulls back a little and holds her shoulders gently. “Rey, I know this is scary and new and a little strange. I know it’s not perfect, but I truly believe you’re going to find a bright future here. You don’t have to live in the past any longer. The belonging we spoke of still lies ahead and I think it all starts here.”

Rey starts crying now and pulls her into another hug. “Thank you so much, Maz. I’ll miss you.”

“I’ll miss you too, my dear.” Rey thinks she hears her snuffle but can’t hear over her own. She pulls back then, a smile on her face. “Now, why don’t you head to bed. Big day tomorrow.”

“Alright. See you around, Maz.”

“See you around, Rey.”

Rey walks away, back down the path Ben took her on as she strolls back to her hut. She replays her farewell with Maz in her head, fixated on certain words.

>You two are probably more alike than you realize.<br><br>She has a hard time believing she and Ben were even remotely similar, but then again, Maz was right about everything.

She tries to ignore what that could possibly mean as she quickly walks past Ben’s hut and into her own.

Luke returned to his quarters when he heard Ben stomp out and back down to his hut, alone. Luke finds Han looking a little drained and sitting on his couch but his eyes light up a bit when he sees Luke has returned. “You got anything to drink around here?”

Luke scoffs at first. “As a master to these students, I am supposed to uphold the image of an exemplary Jedi.”

“Yeah, but <i>do</i> you have anything to drink?” he asks again, seeing that familiar glint in his eye.

Luke gives a wave of his hand and a cabinet flies open on the other side of the room. Han rushes
for it almost instantly.

“So I take it the discussion went well.” Han just groans as he peruses the bottles. “Yeah, that sounds about right.”

Han stills, turning to look at him. “I don’t know how to talk to him.”


“Maybe, but out of everyone, I’m the one he the most pissed off at. He wants nothing to do with me. Hell, he wants nothing to do with anything. I don’t even think he wants to be-” Han stops himself but Luke knew where it was headed.

“A Jedi?” Han nods, looking away. “I know. Despite his distaste for it though, he’s extremely gifted in the ways of the force and I believe there is something else within him that just needs a little more molding. That’s why I wanted him to train this new student, Rey.”

Han hums, taking a sip of his drink he prepared. “She seems lovely. You think Ben being a one on one teacher is going to change things though?”

“I’m willing to give it a shot.”

“Well, thank you. I know he’s not the easiest to deal with but I guess at this point, you’ve spent far more time with him than I have.”

Luke doesn’t know what to say to that, even if it is true.

Just then Maz walks back in, her eyes going wide. “Han Solo! Are you drinking?”

“I just wanted a sip and-Oww!” Han holds a hand to the back of his head where Maz had thrown something at him. “Did you just throw your shoe at me?”

“Don’t try to flip this onto me. You come to see your son for the first time in years and not even after ten minutes is he long gone and you’re drinking!”

“Well, what am I supposed to do? The boy stormed off.”

“Oh for fuck’s sake, Solo. You know what, fine. Finish your drinks, but just remember I’m the one flying back then.”

“Maz,” Han whines. “I haven’t flown her in forever.”

“And you haven’t spoken to Ben in forever either. So, unless you want to finish that conversation then I’m kriffing flying.”

Honestly, even Luke knew that was a longshot. Ben was far from talking again. What’s said is said. So, Han, understanding that as well concedes, grabbing the neck of a bottle and grabbing Maz’s tiny shoe off the floor. “Fine, then let’s go.”

Luke wishes, no matter what the reasons, Han might have answered differently, not for the sake of his student, but for the stability of his nephew.

Chapter End Notes
This is a mess.
Too Soon to Tell

Chapter Summary

Ben is still flustered and moody after his father left and it makes him a bit of a dingus.

Chapter Notes

This chapter is short and angsty, much like my sister.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ben got up from his bed in the early morning after a long night of very little sleep. After he finished speaking to his father, he came back to his hut and just wrote in his journal for a while. He was so infuriated by Han and his uncle and just kriffing everything.

But now it was morning and today was the first day of Rey’s training. Yet another prominent topic from last night’s passages. Apparently, this girl was his responsibility and it made him want to scream.

“Fucking hell,” Ben groans to himself instead of screaming as he prefers and he leans over to put his boots on. He was by no means in the mood to start whatever this was. Luke’s punishment for him to be her private tutor was not just punishing him, but this girl as well.

By the end of the day, Luke would probably be realizing his mistake and Rey would be integrated with the rest of the students. Because Ben already knows this is all just another thing he’s going to fail miserably at.

He prepares for the day as sluggishly as he can, trying to delay the inevitable hours ahead of him. He steps outside, planning to go to Rey’s hut and tell her to wake up.

But she’s already waiting outside, sitting on a rock and writing something in a book of some kind. He watches for a moment before she turns to look at him. He pretends like he just walked up and looks all around so it was less obvious he was staring at her.

“Hi,” she says, closing the book in her hands quickly and stuffing it back in her bag.

“Uh...hi.”

“Sorry, I didn’t know when lessons started so I just waited out here.” She stands up, coming closer to him.

“No, it’s fine,” he says, chancing a look at her and instantly finding her eyes. They both look away almost instantly and Ben doesn’t know if it’s because it’s awkward or something else. He’s never been good with people and that was as true as ever. It gets quiet again and Ben knows even if it wasn’t awkward before, it’s gradually getting more awkward now. So Ben clears his throat. “Well, um...we should get started then.”
“Okay.”

“Okay,” he repeats but he marches ahead, resolving not to look at her as they step forward. If Luke wanted him to teach her then fine, he would teach her. Then maybe he could finish this kriiffing training and get the hell out of this place.

Rey rolls her eyes when Ben isn’t looking. They’ve been “meditating” all day but she obviously is missing something crucial because he’s flaring his nostrils every time she asks a question.

She’s entitled to questions. She’s never done this before and he was being ridiculously impatient. Especially with his limited instructions and vague descriptions of what the hell meditation even was.

Their shared frustration and building tension seemed to only intensify after lunch. They didn’t even sit next to each other in the mess hall and Rey found herself bombarded with questions from other students, asking her if she had done anything yet and she just pretended like everything was going fine.

But everything wasn’t fine. Ben Solo was absolutely infuriating.

He walks around her now as she sits with her legs crossed on a rock on the edge of the forest.

“Meditation is meant to for you to feel the energies around you. You’re trying to be in tune with the force, not pushing it away.”

“I’m not pushing it away,” Rey insists for the twentieth time that day.

“You are,” he says again, his teeth nearly gritted.

Rey huffs, opening her eyes and finding him standing before her with his arms crossed. “Well, then what do you suggest I do?” He was her teacher, after all, he shouldn’t be so short with her.

“I suggest you stop trying to stow away whatever it is you’re resisting.”

“Resisting?” Rey asks.

“Yeah, you’re pushing it away when you should be accepting it.”

“I am!”

“No, you’re not.” Ben starts pacing while he holds a hand to his forehead like he’s got a headache. Like he’s more irritated than she is. “Rey, have you had any other incidents with the force since your first awakening?”

Rey goes still, stammering a bit. “I-uh, well...no. Just the once.”

“Alright, and what was it? What made your powers present themselves?” he asks impatiently.

Suddenly, Rey thinks of that foul man and the strange angle of his neck when she looked upon his dead body. It’s an unpleasant thought and she absolutely hates it. Stewing under Ben’s judgemental gaze, she thinks only to deflect herself and hide further from the truth she knew needed to remain secret. “Well, you should know what that is considering you were listening right outside the door,” she accuses.

His hands fall from his face and he looks at her like she slapped him. “I-I didn’t mean-”
“But you did!” Rey throws back at him.

Ben steps closer to her, “Rey, that’s not the problem right now. What matters is the circumstances of which the powers were presented to you. If we understand that, we can understand why you’re so afraid and why you’re making this way harder than it needs to be.”

Rey fumes and she stands up from her perch on the rock. “I’m not afraid.” Ben doesn’t waver from where he’s standing and their faces are not even a foot apart. “I’m pissed off that you are completely ignoring the fact that you invaded my privacy.”

Ben scoffs, throwing up his hands. “Fine, let me tell you what I heard. You were scavenging in the filthy recesses of some old ship and you slipped and you nearly fell to your death. Oh, but luckily, something just switched and all of a sudden you’ve got the force.” He says it all like it’s a joke and she seethes with anger. “That sounds a little too convenient and if you ask me, I don’t think it happened at all. If that was true, you wouldn’t be holding back whatever it is you’re so afraid of. We wouldn’t have spent all goddamn day working on meditating. It’s kriffing meditation! It shouldn’t be this hard! You shouldn’t be this afraid to access it again!”

“I don’t have to explain anything to you,” Rey says under her breath. She’s fraught with uncertainty as she feels her defenses faltering. If Ben saw through this lie then surely Luke would too. That could mean she might be back on Jakku by the end of the week. The thought makes her eyes sting. Tears run down her cheeks and she hates how vulnerable she feels.

Because he knows she’s lying and he knows she’s afraid.

She knew she didn’t belong here.

“You don’t know anything about it,” she says quietly and marches off through the trees, leaving Ben Solo standing aimlessly in front of a rock with a bewildered and shocked expression on his face.

Ben fucked up.

He makes his way back on the path through the trees as night begins to cloak the sky, but he just stares at his feet, feeling like the biggest asshole in the galaxy. He can’t get the image of Rey’s face out of his head. The look in her eyes that she had right before she started crying and walked off.

He fucked up.

He wasn’t meant to teach her. He was a just someone who was too confused and lost in his own head to even pay anyone else any mind. But as usual, he didn’t come to realize this until he’s hurt someone else.

And he’s hurt Rey. Rey who has probably been afraid her whole life and lost and alone but was trying to do her best. Instead of teaching her as he was supposed to do, he just snapped at her.

He took out all his anger and frustration out on her, the one person who hadn’t done anything to him but somehow he turned all his fury on to her.

Why am I like this?

He hears the familiar signal come from the temple and he groans as he realizes it’s dinner time. He sulks back up the small slump of the hill knowing he’s going to confront Rey again and probably
the other students. "Fucking hell," he grumbles to himself, not for the first time that day.

Ben tries to force a passive look on his face as he enters the mess hall. He grabs a tray and some food, despite not really being hungry. He turns around and scans the room, looking for Rey but she isn’t there. He sees plenty of other faces looking at him out of the corner of his eye though. Some of them were whispering and others were snickering as they watched him look all around for the missing student. He decides to ignore it and wait at one of the empty tables for Rey to arrive. He pushes his food around with the fork, unable to eat. His eyes are glued to the doorway, hoping Rey will walk in and he might be able to apologize in some way for his behavior.

But as time goes by, Ben realizes she isn't coming at all.

He really fucked up.

All the other students leave and he sits there, alone, staring into his miserable food that grows cold. Alone with his thoughts and the repercussions of his actions. Admittedly, he is used to feeling like shit, but it was usually more akin to self-loathing and brooding. This was guilt, and even if Ben knew how to fix it, he knew he would mess that up somehow too.

BX-778 whirs as he cleans the tables all around him but seems to slow down when he realizes Ben hasn’t left yet. “Master Ben, you haven’t eaten your food. Is it not to your liking?”

“No, the food is fine, Beex. I’m just not that hungry, I guess.”

“Is something bothering you then?”

BX-778 has known Ben for as long as he can remember. He was the culinary droid his parents kept in their Chandrila home when he was a child but Leia sent him along to help Luke out with the temple. BX never forgot the time they spent when he was young though and frankly, Ben thinks in moment’s like these, he was far too sentimental for a droid.

“I’m fine, Beex. Just tired again.”

“I’m sorry to hear that Master Solo,” the droid says, scrubbing at the tabletops with a cloth. He slows down though when he speaks again. "I'm concerned that Madam Rey hasn’t arrived. As you know, I keep track of all the students and their nourishment needs and frankly, Madam Rey is frightfully too skinny to be skipping meals. Why do you think she would do such a thing?”

Ben gives a quick glance around to make sure everyone was gone before he even considers revealing the details to the droid. But his emotions were churning within him and he feels the rare and sudden urge to actually voice the issue.

He should be grateful to BX since he won’t hold his feelings against him or spread rumors or anything. After all, this wasn’t the first time he’s spoken to him in confidence. However, haring his feelings in such an open way to make him feel weaker.

But he already feels weak and at a loss, so he pushes away his doubts and opens up to the droid he’s known since he was a child. “Rey didn’t come to dinner because of me. I uh...I really messed up.”

“Is this pertaining to your lessons?” BX asks.

“Yeah. I said some things I shouldn’t have, all because I was angry about something else entirely but I put it on her.” He shakes his head, ashamed of himself. “I don’t think I’m a good teacher.”
“Despite your doubts on teaching, you are still a good person, Ben Solo.”

Ben rolls his eyes a bit. Apparently, the droid was still biased and viewing him as a child. “I don’t think I am, Beex.”

“Well, do you think Madam Rey is a good person?”

Ben looks up from messing with his food, chewing on his lip. He doesn’t even really have to think about it. Despite all of today’s missteps, Ben knew well enough the kind of person Rey was. “Yes. She’s a good person. That’s why I think she should be taught by someone else and I should just go back to getting out of the way.”

The droid whirs for a moment before speaking again. “May I be blunt, Master Ben?”

“Yes, fine, whatever,” Ben grumbles, at a total loss to consider anything else.

“I’m no protocol droid. I am not properly versed in the communication between sentient beings but I’ve been activated long enough to know the basic nature of behavior and when humans and other creatures need help. I recall a lot from our time on Chandrila, along with the exchanges you had with your father when he was home. I know the great disappointment you would feel when he left as I’m sure you felt it again yesterday when he was here.”

Ben looks to the droid, feeling slightly irritated that the truth was so obvious, but BX was right. It wasn’t that hard to miss. Of course, it’s the droid out of everyone that picked up on it.

Fucking typical, Ben thinks to himself.

“You were so disappointed when he would leave. I think it would disappoint Madam Rey if you were to turn away now.”

Ben nods slowly. “You’re right. I was disappointed. But I doubt Rey even wants to be around me now. I think she’d be relieved if I didn’t teach her, not disappointed.”

“It’s only been one day of training, Master Solo. How bad could it be?”

Ben doesn’t know how bad it is, but he knows it’s bad. He puts his elbows on the table and buries his face in his hands.

He was rude and impatient with her. He even accused her of lying about her experiences. Even if he doubted the story about falling in the Star Destroyer, perhaps she told it for a reason. He shouldn’t have been so insensitive but he was overthinking the comments his father made last night.

I wonder what she really had to do to get the Falcon off planet because that ship is not something you can get by trading some common speeder, Han had said. He brushed it off at the time, but after a day of total frustration and little sleep and displaced anger, he had given it too much thought and just threw it back at her in, probably, the least sensitive way possible. Because Rey was right, he didn’t know anything about it. He’s never fallen from unfathomable heights to his certain death and who is he to say what was credible or not.

Besides, Rey has just arrived and is probably still uneasy. After all, if he came to a new place, he probably wouldn’t trust anybody. Hell, he’s been in the same place for years and he’s never trusted anybody.

He shouldn’t be so difficult on Rey for protecting herself. That’s what you have to do in a galaxy
like this.

“I made it pretty bad. She has every right to be mad at me and to hate me and never want to see me again and—” the droid holds up his hand, stopping Ben’s words.

“Perhaps a good step forward then will help. A peace offering, for instance.”

“Peace offering?” Ben asks, open to suggestions.

“Something in good nature that shows you feel remorseful and that you want her to feel better.”

“Like what?” Ben wasn’t exactly well versed in how to do good things for people.

_I must be really fucking desperate if I’m getting advice on how to deal with other people from the culinary droid_, Ben thinks to himself.

“Well, for instance, she didn’t come to dinner but she’s probably hungry. Perhaps if I were to whip something up and you brought it to her, I would consider that something resembling a good step forward.”

The thought of approaching her again makes Ben’s stomach turn over but he has no other solutions. He certainly didn’t want to go running to Luke. He wasn’t going to go asking advice from the other assholes his age. Perhaps it was best to take BX’s advice.

"Okay, Beex. That’d actually be nice."

"My thought exactly," the droid cheers, whirring his way to the kitchen and calling for Ben to follow.

Chapter End Notes

Ben got advice from his former babysitter, how cute and kinda sad. Next chapter is in the works now so the wait shouldn’t be long.
Rey had resorted to her hut after she left Ben. She didn’t know where else to be alone and she’s fairly certain that if she wandered off, Master Luke wouldn’t like that very much and then she’d be edging closer to being returned to Jakku.

So, she steps into her hut, collapsing in her bed that was softer than anything she’s ever slept on (besides the bed from Maz’s castle) in the very cozy yet practical hut. She should be content. She shouldn’t have any reason to feel the way she does. She’s always been good at pushing away her feelings and trying to think positively.

But ever since she left Jakku, ever since she’s come to truly understand what her parents really did, she’s had a hard time denying the emotions within her.

Which apparently was very inconvenient when you were training to be a Jedi.

And Ben…

Ben has been a pain in the ass, yes. But what made her the most upset was that it hadn’t even been a day and he saw right through her. He was suspicious of her story in the Destroyer and she certainly didn’t try to defend it as she should have. If anything, Ben is probably totally convinced she’s a liar and telling his uncle all about it.

She got up from the bed, desperate for a distraction in her near frantic state and settled on the sketchbook in her bag.

She flips through the pages, ignoring the ones from Jakku and admiring the ones she completed while she was on Takodana. She runs her fingers along the parchment, away from the marks themselves, not wanting to smear them.

This was all she had of Takodana now and she had to preserve it.

She doesn’t know how long she sits there, sniffling with red eyes and flipping through the pages before she feels something familiar approach.

She doesn’t quite understand this force within her yet but the strange sensations that came with it nearly had her on edge all the time.

And now, that same force was alarming her enough to know someone is coming close. Perhaps it was Luke, coming to tell her she had to leave or to confess to the truth of the incident and how she really came to discover these powers.
Rey stands up, placing the sketchbook to the side and cautiously approaching the curtain.

She hears footsteps stop on the other side and from the heavy sigh she can hear from her side, she can tell instantly that it was Ben. She doesn’t know what he could possibly want unless he was coming to scold her for excusing herself from the lesson. Crossing her arms and impatient with his ongoing silence she calls out to him, “Ben?”

She hears him gasp a little and she wonders if he was embarrassed that his arrival was evident to her. Since she knows how long he stood there not saying anything.

“Yeah...it’s me.” He sounds a little sluggish.

Rey pulls the curtain to the side, expecting to see a scowl in his face but instead she finds very nervous eyes and big hands holding a tray with a sandwich on it. A very large sandwich.

Ignoring it for now or how her stomach peaks interest, she focuses on his face.

“You, uh...didn’t come to dinner. I thought you might be hungry,” he says, his voice much quieter than she had heard from him before.

She was hungry, but when she heard the dinner call, she ignored it not wanting to be around anyone but herself. Besides, she had plenty of nights with no dinner so she was ready to make the sacrifice. But even just a few days of having more regular meals had her stomach growling for the sandwich she was trying to ignore.

If only she wasn’t so pissed at him.

But then he clears his throat again and steps closer. “I also wanted to talk to you about what happened today, if that’s alright.”

Rey looks at him curiously. This seemed very different from the boy she spent the day with and she’s cautious to hear what he has to say.

Deciding to hear him out, she moves to the side, holding open the curtain so he can enter. “Okay.”

He gives a relieved sigh before he steps forward into her space. He waits until she steps further back into the room before he holds the tray out a little more.

“Beex made this for you specifically. You’ll find he’s really doting when it comes to nutrition.”

Rey gives a small smile and takes the tray in her own hands. “That was kind of him.”

“We weren’t sure what you liked but we figured it was best to keep it simple. Sandwiches are pretty straightforward, I guess.”

Rey’s stomach grumbles again. “I’m not picky by any means. It looks lovely.”

Ben gives a nervous chuckle. He seemed so different than he had been all day. Earlier, he seemed so agitated but now he was back to the nervous and strange boy she met yesterday.

She moves to eat at her desk but he stands in the middle of the room, unsure of what to do with himself and she can tell he’s dying to say something but doesn’t know how.

“You can sit if you want.” She points to the foot of her bed and he sits on it and she represses a snort when the springs squeak at his weight. He was a lot bigger than she was.
“Listen, Rey, I wanted to apologize for how I acted today. I had no right to talk to you the way I did or accuse you of lying.” He looks down at his hands, fidgeting a little as he speaks. “I shouldn’t have eavesdropped outside the door either. I was supposed to step in but then I heard you telling Luke about Jakku and your parents and I didn’t think I should have just barged in so I ...froze.”

Rey looks to him a little surprised. She nods a little bit and he keeps talking. He seems encouraged by the fact that she hasn’t thrown him out by now.

“I’m sorry, Rey. I totally understand if you don’t want to train with me anymore. I sure as hell wouldn’t want to spend time with me after today but if you want to try one more day, I promise I won’t be like I was today.”

She thought Ben would have gone to his uncle and exposed her as the liar she was but instead he was here, apologizing and bringing her food. But she was still frustrated from earlier and she chances a question. “Why were you so mad today?” Ben’s breath hitches and she wonders if she’s crossed a line. “Sorry, nevermind. I just-”

“No, I owe you an explanation.” He straightens up a little bit, taking a deep breath. “When I spoke to my father last night, it didn’t go very well and it put me on edge.”

Rey leans forward in her seat, hearing the mention of Han. The man had been very nice to her, but she had to admit the short exchange she had witnessed between Ben and his father seemed a little strained. Even if Rey didn’t have a lot of frame of reference when it came to how children communicate with their parents, she could tell how uncomfortable Ben was.

“We’ve never exactly been on the best terms but I just got so frustrated and I couldn’t sleep and then today, it made me really impatient and insensitive and then I directed my turmoil of shitty emotions onto you and that isn’t your fault. I’m really sorry, Rey. I’ve felt out of place for a long time and I didn’t realize I was doing that to you until it was too late.”

Rey watches him, hearing the remorse in his voice and even seeing it in his dark eyes.

His eyes were so compelling. She found herself looking into them even when he wasn’t looking at her.

“It isn’t too late,” she says rather quietly. She almost thinks he doesn’t hear her but then those dark eyes find her own once again and this time, they look almost shocked.

Ben looks like he’s trying to say something when she hears the rumbling of a hungry stomach. And it isn’t hers.

Ben’s cheeks go pink though and she gives him a knowing smirk. “You didn’t eat dinner either?”

“I didn’t really have an appetite but I guess the hunger caught up with me.”

Rey stands up with the tray, stepping over to him. “Well, let’s share this.”

“No, Rey. I brought that for you. I can have something else later.”

“Ben, please. This is more food than I would get in a week on Jakku. I don’t mind sharing. Unless, you mind sharing,” she asks him, trying to read his expression. She sits on the bed too, setting the tray between them.

Ben looks at her and she can almost see the beginnings of a smile as the corners of his mouth quir
Rey digs into her side of the sandwich. Her face is quickly covered in a mix of things that BX piled onto the sandwich. When Rey looks up at him Ben looks away as he grabs his own side, deciding it was best not to stare at her.

She gives a slight chuckle then. “Sorry. I guess I kind of eat like a cavewoman.” Rey grabs a napkin and wipes at her face, looking slightly embarrassed. “At least that’s what I’ve gathered when we eat in the mess hall. All the others must think I’m a wild animal.”

“No,” Ben tells her, quick to assure her that the opinions of the other students didn’t matter. “Believe me. It’s the rest of them that are vicious, not you.”

Rey snorts. “Well, now you’re just being nice.”

“No, really. If anyone is giving you shit for how you eat then fuck ‘em. Who cares?”

Rey laughs and it sets him further at ease. He hadn’t heard her laugh like that before. He had only heard her make the kind but likely forced chuckle she gave through her series of introductions. “‘Fuck ‘em,’” she repeats and it makes Ben give a laugh of his own, not expecting that from her. She smiles at him, looking so much better than she did a few hours ago. “I like that,” she hums. “Words to live by.”

“Yeah. It applies to so many things,” Ben says, chewing his own food. He really likes this, just talking. The pressure of training wasn’t there and it made things feels more casual.

It makes him relax a little easier while they continue to eat.

Eventually, both sides of the sandwich are gone and then they are just talking with the empty tray between them. It’s more comfortable than Ben has been in a while but he knows it’s light’s out soon and if Luke caught him in Rey’s hut on her bed, that would probably send the wrong signal.

“I should probably get going,” he says, standing once again.

“Right,” Rey says, nodding in understanding but looking up at him as he stands. The light in the hut gives her eyes a shine that Ben focuses on for a little too long.

“Listen, Rey, I, um...I really am sorry for how I treated you today. I’m sorry what I said about you making things up. That was-That was really shitty. That was a line I shouldn’t have crossed.”

Rey nods. “Thank you, Ben.” Her voice is so quiet suddenly. “I understand. Let’s just move on.”

Ben agrees, nodding with a slight smile. He grabs the empty tray and slowly making his way out of the hut. “Well, then. Good night, Rey.”

“Goodnight, Ben.”

Ben goes back to his hut, setting the empty tray on his desk as he sits down, reaching for his journal. He tries to recount what had happened, realizing there was more content than usual for him to unpack.

He thinks about all the horrible things he said earlier that day, but then transitioning to the exchange with Rey in her hut. He writes how discussing his strife with BX felt surprisingly helpful and then how speaking to Rey, apologizing and telling the truth of his behavior, made him
feel lighter than he's felt in a while. How just talking with her made him feel like he wasn't so hopeless after all.

He writes for a while until he starts to yawn and he closes the book, shuffling over to his bed and lying down.

Usually, when he lies in bed, his thoughts before sleep were not comforting. His loneliness and despair would eventually numb him into fitful rest. That or he would lie awake, frightened that the voices might return.

But tonight, he seems to only focus on how Rey's voice sounded when she said goodnight or how her laugh sounded.

Were he not totally emotionally exhausted, he might have considered how strange it was that he was thinking about someone in so friendly a manner, possibly for the first time in his life.

Were he not falling to sleep just a few minutes later, he might have been alarmed at the fleeting thought that passes through his mind.

The one where he thinks of how beautiful she is.

Chapter End Notes

I'm probably speeding through things too quickly here but seriously....omg, these fucking kids. I'VE GOT PLACES TO BE!!!
Laughing and Not Being Normal

Chapter Summary

We cover a lot of ground in this one and I'm tired...

And whoops, Grimes ref in the title. I'm a dork.

Chapter Notes

We are introducing some of our Moonrise Kingdom feels this chapter.

Hence the cute beach.

Luke watches as his students eat breakfast.

Actually, he was mainly watching only two of his students but he had to act carefully. He couldn’t give any indication that he was looking or it would likely ruin everything.

Only because his nephew was not only finally sitting with someone during meal times, but he was actually talking too. Hell, when Luke glanced long enough to observe his face, he could swear he saw the slightest hints of a smile. Nothing extreme, but there are enough subtle changes that Luke can tell the difference from his usual scowl.

He doesn’t remember the last time he saw the kid smile.

He looks to Rey sitting across from Ben. She had been at the temple for several days now. He’s spoken to her on more occasions since then. He asked her about her lessons to which she expresses that Ben has been a very helpful teacher.

He was glad to hear it, so he called Ben in as well, asking for something of a progress report. Ben had mentioned how she has yet to display her abilities in the force, but she’s working hard to learn more. Luke is honestly surprised that Ben has opened up to the experience as much as he already has. Luke was expecting Ben to put up a little bit more of a fight. But Rey was starting to ease into the life at the temple whereas Ben was making some tremendous progress with himself as well. He seemed to care.
Ben has always been so insistent that he didn’t care about anything but Luke knew that deep down, that boy cared about a lot of things. He recognizes it in Ben just as he recognizes the same behavior in Han.

Luke refrains from rolling his eyes as he considers Han.

Luke loved Han like a brother, and in a way he really was. But Han was also extremely frustrating and Luke was running out of excuses to give him. He had secretly cheered when he saw Maz hurl her shoe at him the other night.

Luke knows he can’t do things like that though. He was a Jedi. He had to remain smart and dignified. Which is why it makes the situation with Ben all that much harder.

Ben was his student who needed to learn about the Jedi ways. He had to understand that there is peace, not emotion. That attachments were dangerous.

But Ben was also his nephew, which meant Luke wanted him to have a good relationship with his parents.

And if Luke wanted those things for Ben, then he supposes that his own emotions would make him a rather weak Jedi after all. He is, after all, someone with his own attachments. He knows that would technically make him a poor Jedi but he has yet to learn of a single Jedi from the old days that didn’t struggle with their own attachments.

But Luke was trying to integrate some new ideas into the Jedi ways and beliefs. He wanted these kids to be connected with their families and not shut away from them. He didn't think it needed to be such an extreme cut off which is why he hosted a family's night at the temple about once a year. It gave the students a chance to catch up with their parents somewhere besides a holoprojector and he thought it was going pretty good.

If only so many of the students and parents weren't are tiresome as they actually were. Last year's horrid conversation with Brendol Hux flashing back through his mind.

Luke sighs to himself, deciding it would be best to think of something else. He looks up again, scanning the tables for Rey and Ben but they were excused themselves.

They must have gone to start their lessons.

*Good,* he thinks to himself. *At least some of us are getting shit done.*

He looks around the rest of the mess hall, filled with the other twelve ravenous teenagers he was tasked with training.

He felt too old for his job sometimes but then he remembers Yoda and he realizes he's just complaining.

“What are we doing today?” Rey asks him.

“Well, I thought we could start out reading up about the Jedi themselves. I think if you have a clearer idea of what the religion is then it will make more sense when you need to apply the actual technique.”

“So, where do we go for that?” she asks, looking curiously through the halls as Ben guides her through them. His path is defined. He’s taken it many times.
“We go to the library,” he says plainly.

“The-You have a library here?” Rey stops in her tracks, sounding shocked. "Like a real one?"

Ben stops as well, turning to look at her. “Yeah. Of course.” Her expression then changes to one of what seems to be bewilderment. She’s excited. He gives a slight chuckle, amused by her reaction and turning back around, making his way down the hall. “Come on, then.”

He pushes through the doors of the library. It was not the largest one he’s ever been in. Hell, it was only slightly larger than the one his mother had situated in their Chandrila home.

Ben wonders for a moment if the collection of holos and books he cherished so much were still safely tucked on a shelf.

But those thoughts are quickly pushed away as he watches Rey rush past him into the library. She’s totally silent at first but then turns back to him. “This is insane.”

“You like it?”

“Do I like it? I’ve never seen anything like this. It’s amazing.”

“Well, we’ll be in here for a while so I’m glad you think so.”

He shows her what the Jedi Academy used to look like, when the Jedi temple was based on Coruscant many years ago. He told her about some of the famous Jedi, though not all good. Of course, it eventually leads to the discussion of Anakin Skywalker.

Rey looks to him with an unsure expression. “So, he was your grandfather then?”

“Yeah. But he didn’t raise my mom or my uncle.”

“Why not? Did he die during the turn of the war?”

Ben never talks about his grandfather. In fact, he was advised by his parents to not exploit it because his mother’s position in the Republic was crucial to keep stable. Not that he ever admired the political realm but he understood that the truth of his family, as exploited as it already is, must remain secret.

But Rey wasn’t going to tell anyone. Besides, he wanted to tell someone. He felt like it wasn’t real when he pretended it didn’t happen. “No. Actually, he was one of the major catalysts of the war and the rise of the Empire. He was deceived by the Emperor and became Darth Vader. Only in the final moments of his life did he turn to save Luke. Or so my uncle tells me.”

Rey just nods and she seems unsure of what to say. He doesn’t blame her. His family history is extremely complicated. After a moment, she gives a big sigh and looks back to him. “That sounds heavy. I had no idea.”

“Despite if he turned or not and the Jedi Order didn’t crash, I doubt he would have been able to raise them much anyway.”

“Why?”

“Well, part of the Jedi code and devotion is to abstain from attachment. The Jedi devote themselves to a life of celibacy and denounce close relations. They always must act selflessly.”

Rey is quiet for a moment, leaning back from the desk and the open holos and books. “So, the Jedi
aren’t allowed to...I mean, they can’t be with…” she doesn’t actually say it, but her implication makes Ben cheeks heat up.

He coughs a little bit. “Uh, yeah, no. Complete celibate lifestyle.”

Rey gives a slight hum and he isn’t sure what that means exactly. Before he could inquire further though, she seems to move on, grabbing another holobook and asking him a new strand of questions.

Admittedly, he’s glad they glazed over that subject, relieved he got that over with. It was an awkward discussion but it seems like they got past it now.

They continue to pour over the books and holos he’s laid out. He and Rey continue discussing the Jedi history and their teachings for a while. He realizes that he knows more about it than he thought he did.

He must have been paying attention in his own lessons after all.

Eventually, Rey opens a book where it shows an illustration of a sacred Jedi island, Ach-To. It’s a lost planet now. Its coordinates unknown but it is claimed to be the home of the original Jedi temple.

Luke was kind of obsessed with it.

Ben watches as she seems to linger on the image more than the words. “I’ve never seen an ocean before, but this is beautiful. I’ve dreamed of places like this. I’ve always wondered what this much water would really look like though.”

Ben sees how she gets lost in the illustration. It’s a nice picture but it certainly doesn’t have the actual weight of what water looks like.

*She’s never seen water, Ben realizes. She’s never seen a lot of things.*

Ben can see that longing look in her eyes that show a mix of reverence and despair.

It’s strange how he can sense things from Rey. He can sense things from a lot of people, but there was something different about the signature within Rey. It was powerful and expressive, but it also felt dormant. Diluted.

He is slightly discouraged that he hadn’t made her feel comfortable enough to trust him. She was still holding back and Ben wished they could move past it but decided it was best if she confronted it in her own time. He wouldn’t push her the way he did the other day. That was a mistake.

Ben thinks her life on Oquinn should be a significant improvement from her experiences on Jakku. Rey didn’t have to just learn how to be a Jedi, but she should learn what other things are like too.

“Okay. New idea. Close the holo.”

“What? Why?” Rey asks, her eyes lingering on the drawing of the ocean before she slowly puts the holo down.

Ben starts to pack away the things they’ve pulled out and sent them back to the shelves with a wave of his hand. Rey watches with big eyes. Ben chews his cheek, repressing a smirk and heading back for the door. “We’re going to the mess hall.”
“It isn’t lunch time yet, though.”

“No, but we’ll need things for when it is lunch time,” Ben explains. “We’re going on a field trip.”

“A field trip?” Rey asks curiously.

“Uh-huh.”

“Will you tell me where?”

“Nope,” he says bluntly but again, repressing a smirk.


Ben laughs at her. “Trust me. I think you’ll like it. Better than the library.”

Rey scoffs at him. “Nothing is better than the library.”

They walked through the trees for a while. Ben has a backpack on his shoulders with their lunch in it. BX-778 had packed them sandwiches and plenty of water which Rey still couldn’t fathom. There was literally no limit to the amount of water she was allowed to drink here. And it was free!

She doesn’t know where they are headed but every time she asks Ben he just gets a smug look on his face and pretends to ignore her to which she mocks him.

She honestly doesn’t even mind though. She quite liked spending time with Ben. He was so different from the boy she knew on their first day of lessons. Ever since he came to her hut the other night though, she’s come to see that her first impression of him was probably a little presumptuous.

She had only known him a few days now, but she thought of him as a friend. That was strange in itself because she’s never really had a friend before but Ben was a surprising person.

Ben slows down then and Rey stills when she hears a strange, new sound. “Ben, what is that?”

Ben gives a small smile as he pulls on a long branch so the source of the sound is exposed to her. “It’s the water. Waves,” he explains softly.

Rey gasps quietly and she steps forward, ignoring the scrape of the branches and leaves at her arms as she passes through. She looks all around at the scene. This seems to be a cove of some kind, making the waves calm and softly crashing on the shore. Her boots sink a little in the sand as she steps closer to the water, mesmerized by the sight of it.

It was beautiful.

She doesn’t know how long she stands there, totally awestruck before she notices Ben is standing beside her. He clears his throat. “I thought you might like to see real water for yourself.”

“It’s amazing, Ben. I don’t even know what to say. I never thought I would see anything like this. Thank you,” she says looking at him now.

He notices the tears gathering in her eyes and he looks a little concerned. She gives him a smile though and his shoulders seem to relax a little. “I’m glad you like it,” he breathes out. “Better than the library?”
Rey laughs, giving him an eager nod. “Better than the library,” she assures him.

Ben takes his boots off, dumping the sand out and throwing them down with a huff. She realizes that her own boots are loaded with sand and she takes hers off too. Her feet touch the sand but it isn’t scalding in the way that Jakku’s sands had been. It’s cool and there’s more grain to it than the fine powdery sand that she had been more familiar with.

Ben shrugs off his backpack and lowers down, sitting in the sand. Rey sits down next to him, drinking from her canteen.

“Hungry?” Ben asks her casually, pulling out the bag of food BX prepared.

Rey gives him a smile, sitting closer. “Always.”

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Ben and Rey ate their sandwiches, hungry from their hike to the shore. Rey dazes every so often and just watches the small waves, totally transfixed by them. It makes him think of it in a new way. He never really paid attention to the natural beauty of the place before. He just came here sometimes when he wanted to be alone. But seeing how Rey looks at it with awe makes him feel like he’s looking at it for the first time.

It really was a beautiful place.

“Is this an ocean?” she asks him, looking out at the horizon in the infinite distance.

“Yeah. It covers about half of the planet.”

“Half of the planet?” Rey asks, intrigued.

“Yeah. And that’s actually pretty small compared to a lot of other places. There’s this one planet called Mon Cala that is made up of only water. There’s no significant land masses anywhere.”

“Wow,” she breathes out, looking at him again. “That’s insane,” she says at first, but then her brow furrows. She looks upset.

Ben is unsure if he should ask at first. His first instinct when dealing with people was to not get involved, but he didn’t feel that impulse around Rey. “What’s wrong.”

Rey groans, realizing he was looking at her. “Eh, I don’t know. I guess I’m just angry that of all the places I got stuck on it had to be a fucking desert planet with an overabundance of assholes.”

Ben hadn’t heard her speak of any other people on Jakku before but he can only imagine how horrible they must have been. “Were there a lot of people on Jakku?” He realizes he doesn’t know anything about the planet besides that it was covered in sand and old pieces of fallen Imperial warfare.

She looks away then and he sees her jaw tighten. She looks uncomfortable suddenly and he wonders if he said something wrong.

“There weren’t that many, but in a way, there were too many. If that makes sense,” she says quietly.

He doesn’t exactly understand but he nods anyway. He’s about to ask her more about Jakku, wondering if she discussed it more, perhaps her training would be easier to navigate. She still had yet to display any outward force abilities, despite what he could feel stirring within her.
And even still, he could feel how she seemed to barricade herself, at least mentally. He hadn’t tried to pry, but there were times when he could tell how she was still trying to protect herself. Maybe she didn’t even realize she was doing it and it was just a reflex.

Maybe she’s been doing it all her life, she just didn’t recognize it as the force.

Eventually, Rey pulls out a book from her bag. He recognizes it as the book she had been working in the other morning. It’s about the size of his own journal and he wonders if she’s going to write something.

But then she opens it and he realizes it wasn’t a journal. It was a sketchbook.

She pulls out a small stub of charcoal from her bag as well and looks for an open page. Ben sees the pages fly past him. He can’t quite see anything, she’s tossing the pages too quickly, but then she stops at a fairly open spot and Ben sees a rendering of none other than Maz Kanata’s castle. Ben gives a smile as he realizes just how talented she was. “You’re really good, Rey. I didn’t know you drew.”

Rey gives him a modest chuckle. “Thanks. I started when I was trying to make something of a survival guide on Jakku. There’s far too many creatures trying to kill you in the sands and I had to keep track of everything. But then I started drawing things I saw throughout the day or in my AT-AT and I realized how much I liked it.”

“Your AT-AT?”

“Oh, I used to live in a fallen AT-AT. It was a pretty good shelter, especially during sandstorms.”

Ben doesn’t know what to say to that. She seemed to think an abandoned piece of Imperial war machine was fairly adequate living accommodations and that was devastating to hear. But he knows she doesn’t want his pity, so he moves past it. Instead, he watches as she begins to make the first marks on a blank page.

She’s drawing the scape before them and he’s amazed at how quickly she can make it look so much like it really is. “You work so fast.”

“Well, it doesn’t matter. I can only do so much with this miserable charcoal. It will do nothing for these colors. That never bothered me on Jakku. Everything was orange or dead. I wish I could do this in color.”

“Maybe you could. There’s a lot of supplies that different artists use that are available.”

Rey just snorts. “I’m not an artist, Ben. I just don’t want to forget some things.”

Ben likes that. She views things and wants to remember them so she tries to keep track of them in her own way. “Well, whatever you want to call yourself, that charcoal is looking a little tired, you might want to upgrade. I actually have a few different colored inks in my hut if you want to try them out.”

Rey stops looking at him. “Do you draw too?”

Ben shakes his head, realizing what he’s said. “Uh, no. Not really. I actually just...well it’s kind of stupid.”

Rey stops drawing altogether, totally focused on him. “Ben, I’m sure it’s not stupid.”
He doesn’t know what it is about this girl, but he feels safe around her in a way he’s never been around the others. He already knows she wouldn’t make fun of him in the way the others would.

“I like to write sometimes.” All the time, he thinks to himself. “It’s nothing amazing. It’s just me complaining most of the time. I guess it helps me sort things out a little.”

“Ben that isn’t stupid. That’s amazing.”

Encouraged by her comment, he continues. “I actually do some calligraphy but I guess I’ve been slacking off a little lately.”

“What’s calligraphy?” She asks him, her curiosity peaked.

“It’s like a more expressive way of writing, but like a really ancient one. You need brushes and inks and different kinds of pens to get it right. My mother actually got me a kit when I was a kid and I always kind of liked it, even if it’s like the most impractical skill I could have.” Han always made a point to tell him how pointless it was.

“Well, there isn’t anything particularly practical about what I’m doing either, but if you enjoy doing it then who cares if it’s practical or not?” She looks up at him again and gives him a kind smile.

He is unable to fight back the urge to smile back.

They wander around to the surrounding rocks of the cove throughout the afternoon, finding all new angles of the amazing scenery.

“This place is amazing,” Rey tells him, sitting on the top of the massive rock with her sketchbook on her lap.

“Yeah, it is. I come here sometimes when I want to get some space to myself,” Ben reveals.

“You’re hut isn’t enough sometimes?”

“Only when Hux is out to tattle on me or Luke wants to lecture me,” Ben tells her, plucking at the flowers he’s been playing with in his hands.

“Do those things happen a lot?” Rey asks him, not looking up from her sketchbook.

Ben nods. “Hux isn’t the most compelling student when it comes to the force so he likes to catch me with my guard down as much as he can. Anything to try and be teacher’s pet.”

Rey gives a small chuckle. “I know I don’t know him too well but he seems like a bit of a prick.”

Ben laughs, “That’s a generous way to put it, but yeah. He likes to boss around the others. They kind of have their own cliques going.”

Rey gives him a smug grin. “Does that make us a ’clique’ now? Are we the people that never talk to anybody but each other?”

Ben looks at her curiously. Maybe she didn’t quite understand what the term meant and he realizes again that she’s never been to a school before. Given the way she carried herself and the abundance of knowledge she already possesses makes it difficult to believe she grew up on a frightful backwater planet. “I guess it does...but we aren’t really a clique. We’ll just call ourselves friends.”
Rey looks to him, almost cautiously. “So, we are friends then?”

Ben freezes suddenly, wondering if he had gotten ahead of himself. “Well...I mean I thought we were. I haven’t exactly had any so I guess I’m not the best judge-“

Rey is quick to shoot down his doubts. “No. I want to be friends. I haven’t had any either and I wasn’t sure if we were allowed to be. I mean, just since you’re kind of my teacher.”

Ben considers this for a moment. He was technically supposed to be training her, even if they have done nothing but talk and wander since they arrived at the shore, but he would like to think that him having a friend and giving Rey a friend when they had both been deprived of one, might be relieving to Luke. Especially because they were going to be spending so much time together.

“I think…” Ben starts and Rey looks to him, almost anxious of his answer it seems. “...we should be friends. I don’t think there's anything wrong with that.”

Rey smiles again and it makes something in his chest flutter. “Well, as your friend, can I tell you something really creepy?” she asks him.

Ben frowns in confusion. “Uh...what?”

She picks up the book in her lap and turns it around so the pages are facing him. “I’ve been drawing you for like the past twenty minutes.”


“Well, I’ve been wanting to get better at drawing people and you were right there so I went for it.”

Ben didn’t know she had been looking at him for so long. He must have looked so stupid and foolish and ugly. He huffs a breath in discomfort, preparing himself for the brutal honesty of his face and how awkward his features are.

But as he leans closer, seeing what she had drawn, he finds himself surprised.

It actually looked good. Really good. He wasn’t really happy with his own features, forever part of himself, but the way she has depicted them doesn’t seem awkward. It seems natural and he doesn’t know how she managed to do it. It was a mystery that she hadn’t drawn him as the gangly, uncomfortable mess he was.

He looked at ease. His head was facing down, looking at his hands as he braided a small collection of flowers together.

“Is it terrible?” Rey asks him.

Ben hopes he’s not blushing but can feel how hot his ears were. “No, it’s not terrible. It’s actually...it’s really nice.”

“But actually?” Well, how kind of you,” Rey says dryly. Ben stands up so he can sit closer to her on the rock a little higher up. “I know they're probably garbage. I’ve never shown these drawings to anyone.”

But she shared them with me, Ben thinks with a sudden rush.

“I’m serious, Rey. You’re really good. I’m just being an ass because I’ve never really liked my face.”
Rey looks to him, confused. “Why not?”

“Because I look like this,” he gestures to his face.

Rey chuckles, further lost if her face is any indication. “Like what?”

“Weird! I look weird.”

Rey snorts. “Oh please. Do you know how many humans on Jakku had their faces burned so bad it was just boils and sores. Some of them had been in accidents and would be missing the cartilage of their nose. Your face is far from weird, Ben Solo and I don’t know what would make you think so.”

Ben gives a big sigh. “I've always looked a little strange.” He recalls a particular memory where it first was made highlighted to him. "When I was about eleven, my mom hired this famous artist to paint a portrait of me. The guy was an old Ardennian. He could paint with all six of his limbs. He was really stuffy and pretentious and he insisted I wear this stupid suit and pose for two hours in the library. Even then, he kept muttering under his breath about how 'unfortunate' I looked."

Rey gasps in shock, covering her mouth with her hand. "What an asshole," she says.

Ben chuckles a little. "He was so old, I don't think he knew he was saying it out loud. Anyway, when he was done, my mom had it hung up in the house and I realized that there was no escaping just how unfortunate I really looked. Of course, though, it was a priority for my mom to have some bullshit painting of me trying to look like a sensible kid when I knew she couldn’t stand me."

Rey closes her sketchbook. “Do you not get along with your mother?” she asks him carefully.

Ben considers the question for a moment. “She calls more than my dad does and I do think she genuinely cares for me, but she's a politician. Her duties for the galaxy always come first and to her, at least from a more political standpoint, I’m just some embarrassment that she didn’t know how to fix so she sent me here with Luke.”

“I’m sorry,” Rey says quietly. She closes her sketchbook and stuffs it in her bag. Her full attention on him now. She’s actually listening to him.

“It’s fine. I was really upset when she sent me here. I didn’t exactly want to be a Jedi but they didn’t know what else to do with me.”

Rey hums, nodding again before she speaks. “I guess my parents didn’t know what to do with me either.”

She had mentioned her parents before, with Luke. She said she had been waiting for them to come back for her but they never did. That sounded so heartbreaking. But perhaps it was that heartbreak and years of waiting that made her as strong as she is today.

She could make something of herself and not have to live up to some bullshit lineage. She could be herself. That’s something he’s always wanted the freedom to feel. But before he could wrangle himself in and think of a better way to explain that, he starts to tell her that in, very possibly, the worst way possible.

“I had always wished I was an orphan. I think your lives are more special,” he says, thinking of it as a compliment but when she doesn’t answer, he chances a look at her. Regret fills him as he sees how devastated she seems and the nature of his words become clear. It didn’t sound complimentary at all.
He shouldn’t have said that.

He realizes just how horrible it actually sounded and he sits up straighter, his heart beating a little faster when she scoots away from him.

“I never thought of it like that,” she says briskly, obviously finding it insensitive and totally rude. Ben knows he’s messed up massively when she stands up and swiftly makes her way back down to the shore. “You know, I think I’m going to head back. It’ll be dinner soon anyway.” She doesn’t even look at him and he really hopes she isn’t crying. He hated himself so much the other day, knowing he made her cry.

Ben curses himself. His initial instinct would be to just remain where he is and let it pass him by. He’s used to feeling out of control and always disappointing people. But as she gets further from him, Ben knows he can’t let Rey walk away. He doesn’t want to lose the only friend he’s ever had just ten minutes after they established they could be. So, he stands up as well, chasing after her.

“Wait, Rey. I shouldn’t have...I didn’t-” he calls out but she’s already putting her boots back on at the shore before rushing back into the forest. “Fuck. Why am I such an asshole?” Ben asks himself in his sudden solitude.

He grabs his backpack, throwing it over his shoulder while he awkwardly hops into his boots while he makes for the forest.

_Damn, she was fast._

He rushes forward, tripping in his haste and fumbling to the forest floor. He just catches himself on his hands before his face does. Ben rises. charging forward and ignoring the sting on his palms as he strides through the trees, looking for Rey as night starts to fall.

Chapter End Notes

Ben Solo is still learning how to word with other people but he's really trying. That's why we got Ben giving the ol' Suzy Bishop words to wisdom.

I paraphrased for the hell of it.

I would have loved for Rey to answer with Sam's line:
But we aren't quite there yet.

Anyways, as always...much stupid. But still, thanks for reading.
The Lonely Boy from Chandrila

Chapter Summary

1/2 of the visions one may see when touching hands with your betrothed for the first time.

Chapter Notes

I've read over this twenty times now but I'm just gonna post it because I know it won't be perfect. Might edit later.

Thanks for reading<3!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“I had always wished I was an orphan. I think your lives are more special."

Rey couldn’t stop hearing Ben’s words. It had been so insensitive and despite if he really understood what he had said, it still hurt.

She thought today had been so nice. He had been said they were friends and had shown her the place he thought of as his own. And it was beautiful. It was more amazing than she had ever expected water to be.

The whole day seemed very special but it all seemed to come to a halt when Ben said what he did. Part of it was that she wished it hadn’t upset her so much. She really just wanted to ignore it, but it made her so angry.

How could he say that her life of living in that hell and waiting for people who sold her into such a life is what made her life more special? She spent years on that planet thinking that people that loved her were coming back but they didn’t.

And it took her so long to realize it too. Flashes of that horrible day when Plutt tried to drag her to that horrible man flood to her mind once again.

It took the threat of something so absolutely devastating for her to understand that her parents never loved her and she was waiting there for no reason.

No fucking reason.

The memories of those endless days are surrounding her once again and she feels tears gather in her eyes

She couldn’t tell that to Ben. She couldn’t be honest with him about this. Not when the consequences were so dire.
Not when she was an actual murderer. Just that word makes her feel sick.

She slows down her pace, leaning against a tree, holding her head. She had a massive headache and her stomach turns. She really hopes she doesn’t vomit. “Fuck,” she breathes out, totally disoriented.

She really liked spending time with Ben. She didn’t feel like this when they were just working or talking. The past few days, especially today, she’s realized that he was much different than she thought. But then he went and said stuff like that and it had her feeling alone again. Because how could anyone really understand? There was Maz, but she wasn’t here anymore. She was alone now.

But then Rey hears footsteps behind her and she spins around. Ben approaches, breathing hard and rushing towards her. “Rey, wait. I’m sorry. That was really shitty of me to say.”

“It’s fine, Ben.” She keeps walking, not looking at him. “I really don’t want to talk about it, please.” Her tears were falling and she covers her face. She didn’t want him to see her crying again.

“Rey, please just listen. That was so ignorant of me. I really didn’t mean it like that.” He jogs ahead of her so that she stops in her tracks and she’s faced with his dark nervous eyes, suddenly filled with a desperation she had never seen from him. “What I meant by that is, I think your life means more than mine because you have fought for everything you are and you have had to do everything yourself. I think it has made you really strong and really brave and so much more than I’ve ever done or could ever be. I shouldn’t have said it like that because I just wish I was more like you, but I realize your life has been very hard and I didn’t mean to make it sound like it was something to be jealous of. I want you to have a better life here and I’m sorry I keep saying the wrong things. I told you, I’m not good with people.”

Rey shakes her head, surprised by his admission but knowing she wasn’t worthy of it. “But Ben, I’m not brave or strong. I’ve been afraid and alone my whole life and scared as shit and I never know what I’m doing!” Rey reveals, her tears falling. “I’ve been so stupid and I just don’t want to think about Jakku anymore. I don’t want to be the person I was when I left there.”

Because regardless of why she had to, all she can think of it was that she killed somebody.

She feels ill. All she can think about is that man’s face. The grimace he made in his final moment, as well as the one permanently stuck there after she had killed him.

The truth of it all is so suffocating.

“You don’t have to be, Rey. You’re not alone, anymore.” Ben speaks softer now and Rey looks up at him. His brow furrows a little bit, seeming to pick up on something else. “Rey, are you okay?”

She nods, wiping a hand past her forehead. “I’m fine.”

“No, you look sick.” He steps even closer to her.

Rey shudders, her defenses falling. “I’m just…I’m so tired of feeling like this.”

“Like what, Rey?”

Rey wishes she could say it. She wishes she could say why she is the way she is. She wishes she could be honest with her new friend the way he’s been honest about himself, but she couldn’t. She doubts he would be her friend if he knew what she had done and what she has seen.

And the thought of Luke finding out devastates her even further. She would probably be forced to leave.
Rey doesn’t answer Ben. Instead, she just looks at her feet. But he’s so close to her now that she’s looking at both of their boots. His hands sway a little at his side, catching her attention.

She frowns when she sees crimson red painting his fingers.

“Ben, you’re bleeding,” she says.

Ben holds up his hands, palms up. “Oh, yeah. I fell back there. I’m fine though.”

His right hand is worse than his left one. There’s a deep mark on the heel of his palm where he must have caught himself. She reaches forward with her own hand about to brush her fingers past the wound, hoping to help him, but then she feels a strange pulse that silences all else.

There’s something...magnetic. A charge drawing her closer and when she hears Ben’s breath hitch, she realizes he was feeling it too. She looks up at him, finding his own face riddled with a matching vulnerability.

“Rey?” he breathes out quietly.

All she can do is close the distance between their hands. Her fingers brush past his skin and a sudden rush flows through her, taking her breath away and in turn, showing her something else.

Suddenly she’s in a large room, a balcony window making the curtains stir softly in the early morning breeze. She is startled at first, stumbling almost, but she freezes when she realizes she isn’t alone. There was a young boy and a woman in the room as well but they didn’t seem to notice her.

"Hello?" she asks but they don't turn. Instead, the little boy speaks instead.

“Mommy, is daddy coming back today?” he asks the woman. His mother, it seems. She’s sitting at a vanity, braiding her hair into an elaborate style that Rey has never seen the likes of.

“No, Ben. I told you. He won’t be back for about another week.”

Ben, Rey realizes. It was Ben. Only he looked like he was five years old. That would make the woman his mother, Leia.

She’s beautiful, Rey thinks to herself.

“Why did he leave?” Ben walks up to the vanity, reaching for the assortment of things his mother has on the counter but she reminds him not to touch anything before she answers his question.

“Well, he’s got some work to do.”

“I don’t like work. It makes everyone go away,” little Ben mumbles with a frown.

“I know, Ben, but he’ll be back soon and everything will go back to the way it was when he was here,” Leia says this with a heavy sigh. She doesn’t seem too enthralled by the concept of her husband returning though.

“Mommy, can we go visit daddy? Could we help him finish his work so he can come home faster?” Ben asks with his eyes full of hope.

“No,” Leia says rather bluntly.

“But why?” Ben whines, stepping away from the vanity and stumbling around the bedroom.
“Because now it’s mommy’s time to work and I’m too busy to help your father.” Leia stands up
from the vanity, picking up a shawl from the foot of the bed and draping it across herself. “Now,
Beex is going to be watching you today so I want you to be on your best behavior, okay?”

“Can’t I just come to work with you?”

“No, Ben.”

“But why?” Ben whines again.

Leia huffs a little bit, seeming a little frustrated. “Because I said so, Ben. Okay?” Her tone is direct
and bordering on upset.

Ben goes quiet and Rey sees his lip tremble a little bit. As if he might cry. “Okay.” he croaks, his
eyes glassy.

Leia sighs, noticing her son’s reaction for what it was. “Ben, I’m sorry your father and I are
working so much. But we are trying to make the galaxy a better place so when you grow up, you
have a nice and happy place to live in. We only want what’s best for you. Can you try and
understand that?”

“Uh-huh.”

“Good.” Leia brushes his hair back behind his ear and Rey realizes just how big his ears are for the
first time. His mother kisses his forehead and makes for the door. “I’ll see you at bedtime, Ben. I’ll
be back to tuck you in. Be good for Beex.”

Ben just nods this time, not saying anything as his mother leaves. Ben stays there though. He sits
on his mother’s bed and quietly begins to cry.

He was all alone.

Rey resonates with the image of young Ben, waiting for his parents to come back and sniffling to
himself.

Before she could gather any further thoughts, the memory shifts rather suddenly but she remains
the same. All she knows is that she’s looking at another version of Ben. A little older than the last
but still much younger than the one she knows.

He is bouncing around a small room, upsetting a gold droid. “Master Solo, can you please calm
down? You’ll hurt yourself before we get to the top.”

“Sorry, Threepio. I’m just excited.”

“I know you are, Master Solo. But I must insist you keep your composure. Your father isn’t going
anywhere.”

“You don’t know that!” Ben shouts a little bit. “He could leave again before we even get up there.
I don’t want to miss him this time!”

“I see, Master Solo. I understand your desire to make haste. I’m sure your father will be very happy
to see you. It has been a while hasn’t it?”

Ben doesn’t answer the droid. Instead, he breaks into a sprint once the turbolift doors open. He
rushes for a ship lying ahead and Rey realizes it’s the Millenium Falcon. The ramp is already
lowered and there’s a crew of people scattered around. Ben runs all through them. “Dad? Dad?”

“Little Starfighter!” A voice calls out and Ben’s head spins around. A small smile on his face.

“Uncle Lando!” Ben says. He runs forward towards a man dressed in rather elaborate clothes, a cape flowing behind him. Ben collides into him and the older man wraps his arms around him. Ben’s legs lifting off the ground just barely.

“Since when are you getting so big?” the man grunts, only slightly straining at Ben’s weight.

Ben shrugs, trying to look casual and it makes Rey’s chuckle. “Since always,” he says.

“Ahh,” Lando gives a smug grin. “A smart ass answer if I ever heard one. You’re definitely your father’s son.”

Ben’s face lights up further. “Where is he?”

“Uh, I think he’s in the ship still but—”

“Thanks,” Ben says, turning away and headed for the ramp, but Lando calls after him.

“Whoa, uh, Ben? Why don’t you come with me? Your dad is just finishing up some stuff. He’ll be done in a minute.”

“It’ll be fine,” Ben insists, charging forward. He marches up to the ship and runs inside. He hears his father’s voice within the confines of the walls.

Rey knows because she can hear it too. It was like she was Ben in this strange place but everything moves so fast it doesn’t give her a lot of time to think.

“Listen, I’ll be out there in the next few days to help you with your cargo and we can take it from there. You can take up the details with Chewie. You can send him the coordinates and we’ll be doing business soon.”

Rey watches as young Ben’s face falls. He comes around the corner and sees the form of his father in the cockpit.

He looks much younger than the Han she had met but he spins in his seat, giving a similar grin he gave Ben the other night. “Hey, kid,” he says with a very low amount of excitement. Nowhere near the enthusiasm the other man, Lando, had when he greeted Ben.

Ben picks up on this, his own excitement quickly fading as he realizes what’s happening.

“You’re leaving again? Already?”

Han shrugs. “Oh, well, in a few days. There’s a job in the outer regions that needs an extra hand.”

Ben doesn’t say anything. The beaming grin that had been on his face has fallen and now Rey only picks up on a strange and familiar tension between father and son. One she has felt between them before.

“I thought you told mom you were going to stay longer this time. You said you were going to take me to Tatooine and we could practice flying more.”

“Ben, I know what I said. But we have plenty of time to do that kind of stuff. If I have to work I have to work.” Han gestures to the ship around him as if it could explain itself. “Besides, Tatooine
is a hot and miserable rock. We can always just practice around here some other time.”

“But I wanted to go somewhere with you. I didn't care where.”

Han sighs. “Ben, don’t start with me right now, okay?” Han stands up, grabbing his jacket and making his way through the ship and down the ramp. Ben follows, all his former joy crushed. “I just got home, I haven’t even spoken to your mother yet and given the time of day...” Han looks to a chrono and shakes his head, “...you’re supposed to be in school.”

“I wanted to meet you when you got here. Threepio escorted me here. He said it was okay.”

“Well,” Han sighs, turning to look down at his son. He sets a hand on his shoulder. “I’m happy to see you kid, but I’ve got a few things to finish up before we can chat and I want you back in school or wherever you were. Okay? I’ll see you at dinner.” He ruffles Ben's hair for a moment and walks away.

Han steps ahead to discuss further with his crew and Ben stands alone, watching from the bottom of the ramp, disappointment clear on his face.

As the cluster of people makes their way inside, Lando is the only one that seems to notice he’s still there and gives Ben a kind but sympathetic smile and wave before leaving.

Ben doesn’t bother waving back.

“Alone again, I see. Always alone, aren’t you?” Rey hears, but there is no one else around. Ben is by himself but seems just as startled to have heard such an unsettling voice. It makes her stomach turn and she looks all around but Ben is alone.

Young Ben's lip trembles and he shuts his eyes tight, tears falling down his cheeks. “Go away. You’re not real.”

Before the display could baffle Rey any further, the golden droid returns, insisting that he would have to return to school upon his father’s request.

Ben brushes his tears away and abides, making his way back to the turbolift.

The memory changes again.

Ben is sitting at a table with a plate of food in front of him. It’s strangely colored but Ben isn’t eating it. He’s just picking at it with his fork while he frowns at it.

“Ben, what’s wrong? You haven’t eaten your dessert. Beex spent all day on it.”

“I’m not really in the mood.” He says to his mother who is sitting at the end of the table. “I think I might just head back to my room.”

Luke appears then, leaning forward in his own seat at the table. He wears a kind smile but his eyes are concerned. Worried for his nephew. “No, Ben. You can’t leave. It’s your birthday. We can do whatever you want.”

Birthday. It’s Ben's birthday.

But he looks miserable. "I don't want to do anything. I'm kinda tired."

Han sits forward. “What about presents? Kids always like opening their birthday presents.” He pulls out something from under the table. It’s in a box and he slides it over. “Why don’t you crack
that open?” Han gives a smirk, ignoring the scowls his wife and brother-in-law threw at him.

Ben looks hesitantly at the box before he reaches forward and decides to open it.

Rey watches curiously as it creaks open, but is completely shocked when she sees what’s inside. Ben’s eyes go wide as he looks down at the very sleek and expensive looking blaster sitting in the box.

Before Ben could say anything, Leia stands from her side of the table, her face enraged. “Ben, go to your room, leave the box.”

Ben has no objections, leaving the blaster on the table and rushing to his room. The memory remains with Ben so Rey stays with him, but she can hear, as well as the younger Ben could, what was happening back in the dining room. Muffled yells and arguments making their ways through the walls.

Leia is shouting at Han, asking him what he could possibly be thinking, giving a dangerous weapon to a ten-year-old boy.

Rey looks to Ben who sits on his bed, all alone on his birthday, forced to listen to the shouting of his family through the walls.

“It’s not a big deal. It looks fancy but it only has a stun setting. It’s not like he can kill anybody with it!” Han says.

“I don’t care. Think of the kind of message that sends to him.”

“The message is that it’s his birthday and his father got him a present,” Han shouts back.

“If you knew Ben at all, you would know that’s not the kind of thing he would want.”

“If you knew Ben at all, then you wouldn’t be keeping him cooped up here. Every time I come back he looks more miserable than before.”

“Maybe he looks miserable because you’re never here. Did you ever think of that, Han?”

“Okay, fine. Everything is my fault. So, whatever, don’t give him the blaster. Get rid of it. I don’t care. I just don’t know what else to get the boy, okay? I sure as hell wasn’t going to get him what you suggested. The stupid pens and paper and shit that-”

“He asked for it, Han!” Leia snaps, cutting him off.

“It’s pointless!”

Ben bursts into tears just then and falls against his bed. His own sounds muffled by the pillows, shielding the sound of his sobs.

Rey cries along with him, wishing she could reach out and tell him she was there. That he wasn't alone. But she seems to be just an observer in this strange place and she is invisible it seems.

The memory doesn’t end then. Rey remains in the room with him but the shouting from the dining room has stopped and it seems as if some time has passed. A few hours at least.

But then a few knocks rap at the door and Ben’s head perks up. He wipes away at the dried tears of his face before sitting up and looking to the chrono at his bedside.
It’s late but he calls to whoever is there anyway, granting them entrance.

His mother walks in. She’s wearing different clothes now and her hair is down. Rey wonders if they are her pajamas, even though they still look quite elaborate. She holds something behind her back as she walks in. “Hi, Ben,” she starts softly.

Ben doesn’t say anything at first. Leia walks forward, coming to sit beside him on the bed. She rests a hand on his back and he seems to crumble, falling into her and his tears spilling over again.

“Oh, I’m so sorry, Ben. I didn’t mean for it to go like this. I just wanted you to have a nice birthday.”

“Did dad leave?” Ben asks but Rey isn’t sure what answer he was hoping for.

Leia swallows hard before answering. “Just for the night. He’s going to stay with Luke but I had him take the blaster away. I’m sorry, Ben, but I just don’t think that’s an appropriate thing for a boy your age to have. I don’t want you to hurt yourself or anybody else. It isn’t a toy.”

“I didn’t really want it anyway. I don’t really like blasters,” Ben admits.

Leia nods, not saying anything but glad to hear he wasn’t interested. But she doesn’t bring it up again. Instead, she reveals what she had been holding behind her back. It’s another box, but this one is wrapped in beautiful blue and silver paper. There are thick white ribbons wrapped around it, completing a bow at the top.

A present.

Ben looks to it, a small smile on his lips. Leia looks to him with a smile as well, but Rey can see the tears welling in her eyes. “Happy birthday, Ben,” she says, her voice just above a whisper, maybe to keep herself from crying. Ben takes the box and unwraps it.

It’s the calligraphy set he had told her about earlier.

Ben’s face lights up, chuckling a little. “You like it?” Leia asks.

Ben nods, “Uh-huh. Where did you find it?”

“Oh, please. Your mother has friends everywhere. I was able to track one down somewhere. Especially when it was the only thing you’ve ever asked me for specifically. I would have made one if that’s what it took.”

“Thanks, mom. I love it. I’m going to start right away.” Ben states, about to get up and head for his desk.

Leia laughs a little. “Oh no you don’t. You’ll start tomorrow. For now, you need to go to bed and get some rest. It’s late.”

“Fine,” Ben grumbles, but situates the kit on his desk very carefully, smiling at it.

“‘Fine,’” Leia pretends to mock him, helping him pull back the covers so he can get beneath them. She sits on the edge of the bed, running a hand past his hair, combing through it with her fingers. “I really am sorry, Ben. I know you probably heard some of that, but I want you to know that everything is fine. Parents fight all the time and everything works out.”

Ben looks away, uncomfortable by the looks of it. Leia must notice because she quickly changes
the subject. “I’ll have Beex make those pancakes you like in the morning. Then after that, you can spend all day with your new inks and make me something nice.”

Ben smiles a little bit. “Okay.”

Leia brushes a hand past his cheek. “I love you, Ben.”

“I love you, mom.”

It’s a beautiful moment yet it is still shrouded in sadness.

Rey had always imagined what her mother might look like and how she might have said goodnight to her. Rey had always wondered what it would be like to have a birthday. Even if she really didn't know what the point of a birthday was. She thought it could make her more of a real person.

But by the looks of it, at least from Ben’s life, it wasn’t all she thought it would be.

Suddenly, the scene of mother and son is ripped away from her as another one begins.

And from the stomping alone, she can tell it won’t be a good one.

Ben storms into his room, slamming the door behind him. He has tears in his eyes again. This time he looks like a young teenager. Younger than he is in the present but only by a few years it seems.

He starts pacing. He walks back and forth in front of his bed, clenching his fists and muttering to himself. “Every fucking time.”

Just then, there’s a knock at the door and Ben scoffs, rolling his eyes. “What?” he roars out loudly so it reaches the other side.

“Can I come in?” Rey hears Leia ask from the other side.

Ben’s knuckles are white but he gives a heavy sigh and with a nod of his head, the door slides open, revealing his mother in the doorway.

Tears run down his face now and he doesn’t bother to hide them.

“He loves you, you know. He’ll come back. He always does,” Leia tells him but he just glares at her.

“He only comes back to remind himself he doesn’t want to be here!” Ben says, his face red.

“Ben!” Leia scolded him.

“And I don’t want him to be here anyway. There’s no reason for him to come back and pretend he missed us just to jump back in that kriffing ship!” He screams and instantaneously, the inkwells on his desk shatter and spill everywhere. Rey realizes it was Ben’s outburst that caused the phenomenon.

“Ben Solo!” Leia starts to shout at him, her eyes going very wide as she looks to the shattered glass on the desk. She actually looks afraid of her son, beginning to distance herself from him. Stepping out of his room and back into the hallway, crossing her arms.

Ben notices this, shaking his head. “It’s true! He hates it here!”

Leia seems to ignore his latest statement, distracted by the ink that has spilled and splattered everywhere. “Listen, Ben. If you can’t keep yourself under control, I may have no choice but to
take up that suggestion from Luke. I can’t have you behaving like this every time you get upset!” she yells at him this time.

Ben’s tears flow quickly as he holds back sobs. He looks to his mother as if she were a stranger and Rey finds her own tears falling in a similar fashion. It was so heartbreaking to see them like this. Especially after the previous memory that seemed so loving.

Eventually, Ben speaks. His voice is shaking as he says, “Well, I’m sorry if I’m such an embarrassment to you but if you think sending me to Luke’s stupid school will ‘fix’ me you’re fucking delusional!” And with that he swings his hand in the air, slamming the door and ending the conversation. He runs his hands through his hair and falls to his bed. He takes deep breaths but he seems to panic rather suddenly, going rigid with fear.

“You are weak,” a strange voice says. It was the same one from earlier and it makes Rey shiver. It was so cold. “But you could be stronger,” it says.

“Leave me alone!” Ben says, covering his ears, refusing to listen.

“You could be so much more powerful. So much more than what you are, you spineless coward. Just like your father.”

“I said ‘leave me alone!’” Ben screams this time and the voice fades away, leaving Ben completely alone as he sobs in his room.

As the memory ends, Rey is pulled out of it all just as soon as she was pulled in. She’s back in the forest standing in front of Ben. She’s still holding his hand and she pulls away, reaching up to her face, finding an abundance of tear tracks.

She hears Ben give a shuddering breath and she looks up to see he has tears spilling down his face too. She has seen tears run down his face many times now, but those were all younger versions of him. Those were all parts of the past that had nothing to do with her.

But now she’s looking up at him and she sees in him the faintest hints of the young boy whose life has been very difficult. More difficult than she ever could have expected. Only now he’s towering in height and looking right at her.

“Rey?” he croaks out and more tears come. “I-I just...Did you-”

“Oi, you two!” a new voice screams out suddenly and they both jolt apart, hands falling from their shared touch. They turn to see Hux is making his way towards them with Soldar at his side. “We’ve been looking everywhere for you assholes. It’s dinner time. Did you not hear the fucking bell?”

Rey gulps, trying to gather herself and pretend as if nothing happened as the two other boys approach them.

Chapter End Notes

What did Ben see then?

If any of you read Lorelei, the last memory where Leia and Ben are arguing after Han left is derived by the dialogue from a flashback in chapter one of Lorelei. Obviously,
this isn't the same timeline or plot of Lorelei, I just kind of like how that scene played out and revealed more about the tension that exists between Ben and his parents.

I know I make Han seem like a major asshole but it's all part of the storyline here. Han doesn't really know how to dad.

BTW I'm writing (spoilers but not really) what Ben saw in Rey's past for the next chapter. Was the way I transitioned between memories awkward or difficult to follow? Any suggestions or should I just stick to this formula?

Thank you for reading!!
Ben didn’t understand why, but when Rey reaches for his hand, there’s something almost electric throbbing through him. Her proximity feels like a charge and his breath hitches as he realizes she feels something too. She looks at him with her teary hazel eyes and something in him melts.

He leans his palm closer to hers, now desperate to feel more of whatever this was.

When they touch though, drawn together by whatever force was driving it, he finds himself no longer in the forests of Oquinn.

He’s standing in a desert, the unbearable heat sinking into his clothes. “What the-”

“Wait!” he hears a tiny voice scream and he turns to see a young girl running after a ship in the distance. “Wait! Wait for me!” she cries.

As Ben comes closer, he squints his eyes in confusion. He could swear it was…

“Rey?” he breathes out, starting to chase after her. She doesn’t seem to hear him though.

Someone else appears just then and grabs the little Rey by the arm. A filthy looking creature. A crolute by the looks of him. Rey cries, trying to push him off but his hand engulfs her whole arm. It makes Rey shriek and Ben charges forward to knock him away from her.
“Get off of her!” he shouts, but he just walks right through him. He stumbles, leaving him to watch the scene unfold from the sand.

“Where you going girl?” the Crolute grumbles.

Rey tries to pull away, her tears falling with a vengeance. “They’re going to forget me. I have to hurry.”

“That’s the idea, girly. They just sold you to me. You’re not going anywhere.”

“No!” the little Rey cries. “No! I don’t want to stay!”

“Too bad!” The crolute spits at her.

And just then, the ship Rey had been chasing after rises in the sky, leaving her there and ignoring her frantic sobs as she screams to the sky. “Come back. Come back, please.”

The crolute just laughs at her, releasing her arm and throwing her into the sand. “If you want to live, I suggest you follow the rules. I own you now and you will work for me. Now follow me back to the outpost. You have a lot of learning to do.”

Rey’s lip trembles as she rises from the sand, following after him with a heavy head. Ben wants to shout and tell her to run, his heart shattering as he realizes this was all in the past. It had already happened and he was helplessly watching it pass him by.

Her parents sold her. They sold her into slavery to this vile man and left her on Jakku. It makes Ben feel sick it was so despicable.

He rises back to his feet trying to gather himself so he can follow after Rey but the scene suddenly changes and he’s standing in front of a giant hunk of scrap lying in the sand.

What was happening?

Suddenly, a young girl emerges and he realizes it’s Rey again. This time though she’s a little bit older though. She skips closer to the object and Ben realizes that it’s the AT-AT she spoke of.

This was where she lived.

She’s humming and cheering to herself while spinning a long staff around her head.

Dazed only for a moment, Ben chases after her. He tries calling again but he realizes that whatever this was, Ben wasn’t meant to be heard.

He finds the place that Rey crawled through and squeezes inside, finding her still talking to the doll as she moves all around. She steps over to a wall on the other side of the AT-AT, picking something up and making a scratch against the wall. He steps closer, realizing that the entire wall was riddled with hundreds of tallies.

Rey is so familiar with the space and does everything so fluidly. Ben suspects this must be what she does every day, just to keep herself alive. She somehow manages to stay positive though.

She couldn’t be more than nine years old.

The little Rey moves back over to a small bowl where bread was waiting for her and she picks it up, bringing it over to a makeshift table, sitting down and situating a doll across from her. It’s dirty and raggedy but she seems to cherish it as if it were a real person.
“Are you hungry, Pilot?” she asks, breaking apart a small piece of the portion and placing it right before the doll. “I got a whole half portion today. Plenty for both of us. Plutt liked that reactor core I brought in. He said it could have been a full portion if I didn’t ‘kriff’ it up by dragging it in but it was so heavy.”

Plutt? Was that the name of the crolute that...owned her? Had Rey really been a slave? He couldn’t believe there were still places in the galaxy that actually resorted to such cruel methods.

But Rey had mentioned she was a scavenger. She said she bought the Falcon and made her way off the planet. If she was really a slave, that wouldn’t have been possible.

Perhaps he misunderstood something.

Ben crouches down so he’s closer to the makeshift table, sitting between Rey and her doll, Pilot. Rey eats with a similar ferocity that he first noticed when she ate her dinner the other night.

She finishes it quickly enough, eyeing the piece she put in front of the doll. She reaches across and grabs it, shoving it in her mouth. “Sorry, Pilot,” she says with a full mouth but with little actual guilt.

Rey finishes her dinner and rubs her eyes, looking tired. She yawns, rising back to her feet and looking to the hammock across from her but then there’s a noise outside that seems to shake the whole structure and Rey gasps a little bit. “Oh no.”

Ben panics, afraid of what was going to happen, feeling helpless. She rushes to the door and Ben realizes that the sands were getting aggravated, swirling around and a vicious storm was beginning. “Oh, not again,” Rey whines. She quickly shuts the door, beginning to barricade all the vulnerable places within her shelter.

She does it all quickly but the enclosure becomes so dark so quickly that Rey just grabs her doll, running to her hammock and curling into herself.

And she’s crying.

“It’ll be over soon. It’ll be over soon, Pilot,” Ben can hear her cry to the doll, but he knows she says it for herself.

So quickly had things turned south so fast. She tried so hard to make her life better than it really was. She had so much hope, but Jakku was constantly trying to beat her down.

It’s so hard to watch.

But then everything changes once again and Ben is swept up into a new scene. He catches on a little faster this time, beginning to recognize a pattern here, noting how she looked a little older than the last time.

She’s sitting in the tiny doorway, looking outside. Fortunately, it seems like the sand is docile. No storms to be seen.

As he looks closer he sees that she's drawing something. He looks up to see a speeder out in front of her and she was trying to duplicate it on the paper while also making an inventory of everything it was made of and how much it could carry.

He almost scoffs, remembering that Rey had said that her drawing wasn’t exactly practical. But he was watching as Rey was not only practicing an amazing skill but organizing her limited resources.
When he crouches beside her though, he sees how her eyes are red and she’s crying. She seems to be ignoring it though, trying to focus on the sight ahead of her.

He wishes he could ask what was wrong, knowing she doesn’t have anyone else to talk to, not even the doll.

But turns out he doesn’t have to. Her stomach grumbles then. Louder than Ben has ever thought a stomach possible of growling. Rey drops her sketchbook, bringing her hands to her head and releasing a few quiet sobs.

She’s starving.

She remains there for a while, watching the suns set before heading inside. Ben looks around at the space, noticing the subtle changes from the last vision. Her doll is sitting on a shelf now, no longer serving as the friend across the table.

Rey crawls over the wall of tallies again but now there were even more. She makes a new one but doesn’t move away this time. Instead, she just stares at it before pressing her hand to the durasteel. She brushes past the indentations she has made and another heartbreaking sob shudders out of her. “Where are you?” she whispers to the tallies.

She presses her forehead against the wall now, thudding against it in frustration and Ben’s eyes begin to sting.

The reason for the marks beginning to explain themselves.

They were tallies for everyday Rey has been here. Every single day that she hoped her parents would return but never did. Ben saw for himself how they left, never looking back to the daughter calling to them. But Rey seemed to think they were coming back for her.

Just like the others, the memory falls as another one appears.

Rey is someplace new. There are a plethora of tents, but Rey just keeps her head down as she steps forward. She doesn’t look that different from the version of Rey he knows in the present and he wonders if he’ll soon see her awakening in the force and depart from Jakku on his father’s ship.

But then there’s the distinct sound of arguing just then and Rey stops in her tracks. Ben can hear that crolute’s voice in the distance again.

Rey crouches down, looking all around before sneaking through a tent. Rey sees him speaking to some woman. She looks like she’s in her twenties but she isn’t dressed like a scavenger.

She’s got on some flowy fabric, fashioned like a dress, exposing more of her skin. She isn’t burned from the suns though. She looked a little unweathered for what Ben would expect from people of Jakku.

And whatever she had told the crolute just made him bellow in offensive laughter. “What is that supposed to do with me?”

“Because it happened on the job that I do for you and if you want me to keep doing the job you assigned to me, I suggest you help me.”

Plutt scoffs, “This outpost does not revolve around you! The creatures that have the credits to pay for your company on this rock are probably desperate enough to ignore your issue so I suggest you just figure it out because you aren’t my problem.” The crolute turns away leaving the woman
standing in the sand and she bursts into tears.

Rey leans forward, looking all around again, her eyes looking to the woman sobbing outside of her tent. Hesitantly, she steps towards her and Ben wishes he could reach out to Rey, maybe beg her not to chance it.

But he is reminded once again that what he does has no significance as his hand floats right through her arm.

Rey approaches the other woman slowly, “Excuse me?” she asks softly and the woman’s head snaps over to her.

“What do you want? Get out of here!” She rushes into her tent but Rey chases after her, ducking inside.

“I just...I couldn’t help but hear what happened. Are you alright?”

The other woman sobs harder, irritated that Rey let herself in. “Do I fucking look alright, kid? I’m kriffing pregnant and stuck on the most miserable planet in the kriffing galaxy.”

Rey’s eyes go wide as understanding crashes over her. Much like it does to Ben.

“You-You’re...?”

“Yes,” the woman groans, holding her head in frustration. “And apparently it’s going to stay that way. Plutt won’t help. He says it’s my problem.”

Rey chances another step forward. “Is there anything I can do?”

The woman scoffs, “You can get as far away from here as possible.”

Rey’s eyes are glassy as she steps closer. “But I could try to help y-”

“No, go away. I don’t need your help. Okay? You’re just a kid and you don’t belong in a place like this. If you stay here, you’re going to end up in one of these tents, understand?”

Rey shakes her head. “But...I have to stay. My parents are coming back. I can’t just leave. Besides, Plutt owns me,” Rey explains.

Ben’s stomach turns at her words. It had been made clear from the earlier memories but this is coming directly from Rey and she seems to believe that she is owned by that vile man. That, and she also seemed convinced her parents were returning for her.

The woman gives a humorless laugh. “Plutt says a lot of things but you cannot own a person. Everything he has here, this bullshit outpost, it means nothing. I wish I realized that a little bit sooner. Might have saved me a bit of trouble.” The woman looks down to her stomach before crossing her arms. Ben realizes then that there’s a small bulge there hidden beneath the fabric. “Maybe you should realize that before things get worse for you too. You won’t be a kid forever.”

Ben shudders at the thought. Little Rey seems to as well.

The exchange ends rather abruptly but the next memory begins in the outpost as well. The suns are positioned a little higher in the sky, showing it was a new day.

Rey is speaking to the crolute as he stands behind a counter, judging the pieces she had scavenged with a scowl on his faces.
“One-quarter portion,” he grumbles and Rey looks dissatisfied with his decision but doesn’t argue. She takes the portion pack and walks out, gripping her staff as she makes her way through the outpost to the speeder he recognized from earlier. The one she had been drawing. But she passes right by it and Ben frowns in confusion, expecting her to mount it but she ignores it, ducking down a chute of tents, searching for something it seems.

But after a few minutes of nothing, Rey sighs in frustration, halting her quest. For what though, Ben is unsure.

Just then, a shadow appears and Rey spins around, gripping her staff at the ready.

“Whoa, kid. Relax,” the figure says, holding their hands up a little, showing they were unarmed.

Rey still doesn’t relax much. “Do you live in one of these tents?” she asks the figure and they step closer, pulling down a bandana, revealing their face.

It reveals the face of an older woman. She’s badly sunburned and her face is covered in wrinkles but her eyes and hair give Ben the implication that she’s not as old as she looks. Rather she’s aged prematurely from the harsh elements of the planet.

“No, but I know them well enough. What are you doing here?”

“I umm...I’m looking for a woman who lives here. I have to speak to her. She’s pregnant.” Rey explains and Ben is surprised to hear her intentions. She had come back to see her again.

The older woman’s face falls and Rey lowers her staff, noticing this as well.

“Her name was Katarina,” the woman sighs. “She died last night.”

“What?” Rey asks shocked. “What happened to her?”

“She had a bad miscarriage. Bled out. I was there but there wasn’t much I could do. No one else bothered to help.”

Rey falls silent, the devastation clear on her face. “She’s gone then.”

“Yeah. I’m cleaning things up. Everyone else just went on, pretended it didn’t happen. I buried her this morning.” It’s quiet while they both look down, filled with sorrow at the truth. Ben feels affected as well, his head falling into his chest.

The silence is broken when the older woman speaks up again. “What did you want to talk to her about?”

Rey shrugs her staff over one of her shoulders so she can dig into her bag. She pulls out the doll Ben had seen from the earlier memories.

Pilot.

“I spoke to her only once. She said Plutt wasn’t going to help her and she sounded really scared. I wanted to give her this so she knew someone else cared.” Rey runs a hand past the doll, holding it tenderly. “She was really frustrated but I still thought I could help.”

“This is Jakku, kid. If this incident has taught me anything, it proves that keeping to yourself is the best you can do.”

“But-” Rey starts but the older woman cuts her off.
“That means you should get out of here. Get going and don’t lurk around these tents again. It’s dangerous and I don’t know if Plutt is just going to snag someone else to take her place,” she says with a gesturing hand to Rey’s figure.

Rey gives a firm nod, stuffing her doll back in her bag and stepping away. She gives a final nod to the other woman before rushing back to her speeder and Ben is unsettled by the implication the woman had made.

Rey’s tears blur her eyes again, mourning the loss of the woman she wanted to help.

But it had been too late.

Ben is starting to feel exhausted from the emotional trauma Rey has been through. He never thought it would be this devastating. He knew things would be difficult from a survival sense but there was a whole different myriad of filth that existed on that planet and Ben can’t imagine it getting any worse.

But then the scene changes again. Rey’s face is sweaty and there are smudges of grease on her cheek and forehead. She’s waiting at the counter again, waiting for Plutt to hand over the portions he had deemed her work worthy of.

Only it doesn’t go that way.

“You do realize this is all shit?”

Rey shakes her head. “No. That’s the compressor to a reactor from the Destroyers. I could have died to pull that out!” She lays her hands on the counter. Her knuckles were covered in blood and grease.

Was she referring to the incident she revealed to Luke? Had she already had her awakening? It had been in a fallen Destroyer and she claimed that she could have died. But Plutt wasn’t buying the things she had scavenged.

“Well, I don’t have a Destroyer on my hands that needs its reactor compressed so it’s of no use to me.”

“It’s worth something. Anything!” Rey insists, tears gathering in her eyes. “You haven’t given me anything in days! I’m starving!”

“Then maybe I should consider moving you to a career other than scavenging if you’re so hellbent on eating,” Plutt says rather bluntly. His eyes trail off over beyond Rey to a figure standing outside the tent.

Rey goes rigid, her eyes blown wide. “No. I’d rather starve. You cannot make me!”

Ben’s heart races as his earlier fears were unraveling before him. His desperation to reach out to Rey is now more fierce than it had been in any of the previous memories.

Plutt gives a foul laugh. “Perhaps you forgot, girl, but I own you. You will do what I say and I say you go to him because believe it or not, somebody wants you for once. This man paid me good money so I suggest that unless you want to keel over, you cooperate and maybe there will be some portions in it for you.” Plutt steps out away his side of the counter, his grubby hands snatching her arms and dragging her out of the tent to the man waiting outside.

Rey thrashes about, “You sick bastard! Let go of me!”
“Rey!” Ben calls out to her, already knowing his attempts were fruitless but he is unable to just stand there and watch.

Rey tries to break out of Plutt’s hold, but then the other man comes over. The one with beady eyes and an unnerving grin molded on his face as Rey gets closer. He lurches forward and Ben thinks he might be sick.

“No!” Rey screamed. “Never. Never!”

“No!” Rey screamed. “Never. Never!”

“Silence, girl,” the filthy man snapped at her. He yanked at her hair. “You will do as your owner says.”

At the man’s words, everything seems to slow down and Ben watches, horrified as Rey screams louder than ever before. Her face contorts in rage and fear and Ben has never seen anything like it.

It’s deafening and Ben brings his hands to his ears but suddenly feels something strange. An intense rush as a familiar but all-powerful energy expels from Rey and the two men are propelled away. They go flying back, far away from her and their bodies thud heavily into the sand.

Ben is completely shocked, his heart beating out of his chest.

This was her awakening. She didn’t fall in a Star Destroyer at all. She had been attacked and had an extremely powerful outburst. The energy lying dormant within her had woken up suddenly at the imminent danger she was faced with.

But as Rey seems to gather what has happened, she stumbles a bit as she steps forward. She looks utterly confused but remains cautious as she approaches the man that tried to hurt her. She holds a hand to her mouth as she looks at him.

He’s dead.

A shuddering breath escapes them both and Ben can hardly believe what happened.

A strangled groan sputters out from further away and Ben spins around, already knowing it was coming from the crolute. Rey notices this as well and gasps in fear, knowing he was still alive.

More people were beginning to trickle in, looking at the two figures on the ground in shock.

Releasing a small sob, Rey sprints away. Tears flying past her face, ignoring the calls coming from the outpost. If Rey could hear him, he would tell her to run faster, to keep going. To get away as fast as she can and to not look back.

He shakes in complete fear, terrified of what was going to happen, forgetting that Rey was alive and on Oquinn. But he’s so caught up in the tragic reality of Rey’s life that he can’t even recall how this all started anyway.

She speeds ahead through a junkyard of ships and Ben realizes she’s headed for the Millenium Falcon. His father’s ship.

She runs up the ramp, races to the cockpit and starts the engines. She’s crying so hard that her tears are landing all over the controls.

“Rey,” Ben croaks out and he can feel how quickly his own tears race down his face.

But before the frustration of having no voice in this mysterious void could fill him again,
everything seems to end rather abruptly and the sequence of memories ends.

He’s back standing in the forest right in front of the real Rey. Their hands are still touching but the tears remain on his face. Rey looks up at him. Her hazel eyes red and her tears rivaling his own.

She had been through so much. So much pain and so much fear.

And always alone.

Ben feels like he’s gasping for breath. “Rey,” he croaks out. “I-I just...Did you-”

“Oi, you two!” Ben pulls away his hand from Rey’s touch, panicking as he recognizes the miserable voice of Hux. He quickly looks over his shoulder to see him sauntering towards them with Soldar at his side. “We’ve been looking everywhere for you assholes. It’s dinner time. Did you not hear the fucking bell?”

Ben spins his head back around, trying to get rid of his tears before they could see and he hears Rey sniffle. He knows she’s probably doing the same. He tries to take a deep breath but it’s hard.

He’s still shaking.

Chapter End Notes

Some of these memories were inspired by a one-shot that I wrote a year ago where Ben goes to Rey's AT-AT and sees a series of memories of her growing up on Jakku. None of them are the same though, I tried to think of new things.

The woman who had the miscarriage, Katarina, was the same character I used in Lorelei (chapter 3, I think). She was the woman that Rey helped deliver a baby to. It doesn't end well then either. The woman who buried her in this story is E’di but she didn't reveal her name here.

I realize that this probably is not the most heartwarming story right now but this all part of the build-up I have planned when it comes to how Rey and Ben trust each other. Thank you to the people that are reading and sticking with it. We have to get through the hard stuff before we can get to the fluff stuff.

The fluff stuff is a coming.

<3!!
The walk back to the temple is filled with tension.

She had a thousand questions and no answers but her eyes strayed to look at Ben, trying to remain passive with Armitage and Soldar walking with them.

Every time she looks at him though, he looks like he’s going to vomit. His eyes were blown wide and he looked absolutely shaken.

Unfortunately, Hux seems to take notice. “What’s the matter with you, Solo. Did you get a boo-boo?” Hux laughs with the voice of an infant, pointing to Ben’s hands. Rey realizes that his hands are still all scraped up. She's forgotten that it was his wounds that made her reach for him in the first place.

“Fuck off, Hux,” Ben groans at him. His words hold no real fire. He sounds as exhausted as Rey feels. She had been drained emotionally after seeing so many aspects of Ben’s life.

And if Ben was exhausted as she was, she can only wonder if he saw something too. Maybe he saw his past too and was upset at the reminder of all he had been through.

“Not very nice, Solo. I can’t imagine how difficult it’s been on young Rey to be spending so much time with you.” Armitage says, coming to walk closer to her. “I’m sure you’re dying for some more formidable company,” he says right before both of them peel into laughter.

Rey clenches her jaw, holding back her tongue. She wanted to screech at them for being so rude.

She turns to look at Ben for a moment but he doesn’t even seem to have heard the insult. Something was definitely wrong because he really did look sick.

The two of them continue to complain to Ben and Rey about how boring their daily lessons had been and how they already knew everything. Rey tunes in and out, mostly focused on Ben and unsettled as to why he’s so quiet.
She’s extremely relieved when the temple comes into sight and they make their way in. Everyone is already in the mess hall and the four of them get in line for trays, approaching the counter where BX was serving dinner. Rey doesn’t even know what the food is and she isn’t even sure if she’s hungry.

It was strange to have so much food right in front of her and yet not have to desire to eat it. Seeing Ben’s past had really taken a toll on her. She had waited her whole life for her parents to return and she admits that in her solitude, she came up with many imaginary families. When she first came to the Academy, she was envious of Ben’s family and the life he was born into. She had been confused to see the dynamics between Han and Ben but to see the history behind it all, she realizes that having parents did not guarantee happiness.

Ben had lived so long in loneliness and longing for his parents to return to him but they were elsewhere. And if they were with him, Ben seemed to push them away or be pushed away by them.

In a lot of ways, she and Ben are more similar than she ever could have expected.

Rey doesn’t understand why she saw the things she did or the strange place she existed in while she watched the years of Ben’s life pass her by. She realizes though it only happened once they touched, and she hadn’t touched him since she arrived here.

Did this happen whenever she touched another person, skin to skin? She doesn’t recall anything happening when she and Maz hugged or when that trandoshan tried to strangle her.

Did it only happen with people that were more attuned to the force like Ben was? Maz had mentioned she knew the force but Rey wonders if something has changed since then.

Curious, she squeezes closer to the person ahead of her in line, trying to brush her knuckles against Iella’s. Iella’s hand was gripping the edge of her tray and Rey bumps into her, probably not as discreet as she should have been but their hands connected for a brief moment. Nothing happens though, at least vision wise or anything resembling what she had experienced with Ben. Because all she gets out of it is the sudden spin of Iella’s head as she turns to glare at Rey.

“IT’s called personal space, desert rat. Ever heard of it?” She pulls away, inspecting herself as if Rey had gotten her dirty.

“S-sorry.”

“Whatever,” Iella rolls her eyes, turning back around and ignoring her again. Rey feels like an idiot, her face heating as Iella whispers to the others in front of her what happened. Feeling the eyes of the room beginning to migrate to her, she wishes she could shrink into herself.

Eventually, Hux and Soldar peak their heads out from the front of the line where Xid let them cut in, both of them wearing smirks. The minor encounter has made it all the way down the line and Rey wishes she wasn’t there.

Rey begins to back up, tempted to just flee altogether when she runs into somebody. She doesn’t have to turn around to know it’s Ben, but she looks up to him anyway and sees a scowl on his face. It isn’t directed at her though. He’s looking at the line of people ahead of them who were all looking at her. But at Ben’s hard stare, everyone seems to refocus and continue loading their trays with food.

Rey turns too, but only to look at Ben. Now in the indoor lighting, she notices just how pale he looks. Even paler than usual. His eyes still look a little red from crying. She probably looks about
the same which is likely part of the gossip that has spread throughout the room. She doesn’t care so much about that though. She’s too distracted by the boy next to her and the life she now knows all too well.

She knows he saw something too and she’s dying to know. But this isn’t exactly the conversation that they should have with everyone else in the room.

So she just gives him a nod, “Thank you,” she whispers, grateful for his support with the others.

Ben leans closer then, ignoring the incident altogether and whispering in her ear. “Rey, we need to talk.” His voice is laced with urgency. She nearly shivers at how deep it is.

“I know,” she answers back, trying to keep her voice low too. “Ben, I—” Rey starts but stops when she sees Luke walk in. He heads right for them with a smile on his face. “Luke,” she whispers to Ben and he turns around, just as his uncle claps him on the back.

“Hey, you two. How were your lessons today?”

Rey realizes just then that aside from their morning in the library, they didn’t actually have any lessons. They went out to the shore and just talked all day while she drew. Hardly the kind of stuff the Master of the Academy would want to hear.

Thankfully, Ben answers first. “Good. Everything’s good.”

Luke gives a content chuckle while he gives Ben’s shoulder another pat. Rey watches as Ben’s jaw clenches at the gesture. “Glad to hear it.”

The line moves forward and Rey shuffles a little to move ahead, trying to stay in the conversation but it seems like Luke is speaking directly to Ben now. “Ben, I was wondering if you would join me in my quarters for dinner.”

“Okay, I’m coming,” Ben says, his tone a little impatient.

Luke strolls off then and Ben speeds ahead to stand beside her again in the line and they pretend like everything is normal for a moment while BX loads their trays with food. They get to the end and Rey knows he won’t be coming with her to the table they have been sharing. Suddenly, she’s faced with new anxiety of where she’s going to sit. If she can’t sit with Ben, she just wants to be alone. After the incident in the line, she doesn’t want to deal with anyone else.

Ben leans in closer when they get to the beverage counter and she tries to remain passive as he whispers to her again. “I’ll come to your hut when I’m done.” He looks to her, waiting to see if that was okay and when she nods her approval he pulls away. Ben leaves the room with his food and Rey watches him go.

Gathering her dwindling energy and releasing a heavy breath, she turns around to the mess hall. Everyone seemed to be distracted enough, talking amongst themselves and Rey is amazed at how quickly she became invisible to them.

A new thought strikes her just then, wondering if they would notice if she was here at all. They didn’t seem to notice Ben had left just now. She turns back around to BX-778 behind the counter. “Umm, Beex?”

He turns to her, attentive and eager to help her. “Yes, Madam Rey? Is there something I could help you with?”
“Oh, I was just wondering if it would be okay if I ate in my hut. I have a few things to finish that Ben assigned to me and I want to finish them before tomorrow.”

“Madam Rey, I must say, you are a most devoted student.”

Rey forces a chuckle, wishing his compliment would not come because of her lie. “I just want to try and catch up for everything I’ve missed.”

“I understand, of course. You can go to your hut to eat your meal. Are you sure you don’t want to sit with your new friends though?”

Rey shakes her head. “Maybe another time.” She forces another smile. “Thank you Beex. The food here is amazing by the way.”

“How kind of you to say. I am quite glad to hear it.”

With a brief farewell and a nod, Rey slips out of the room, desperately hoping no eyes trail after her.

She revels in the small victory when she returns to her hut. It’s been so long since she left since that morning. It feels like so much has changed.

Rey sits down at her desk, setting the tray down. She sighs once again and rests her head in her palm as she just stares at the food in front of her.

She’s ashamed she has so much food in front of her when she knows she doesn’t have the appetite to eat it.

All she could think about was Ben.

Still, she tries to eat and pushes her fork around the tray, trying to repress the flashes of sadness and fear she had felt from Ben’s memories.

The most unsettling was the hiss of that foreign voice that had haunted him in his most isolated and vulnerable moments.

Spending dinner with his uncle was probably the last thing Ben wanted to do but he couldn’t object. He knew if he defied Luke that would only make things harder for him and his main priority was speaking with Rey. It was why he really needed to speed through everything as smoothly as possible so he could be dismissed.

He makes his way up the stairs to Luke’s quarters, finding the door open when he arrives and stepping inside. Luke is already talking to someone when he comes in though and he stalls when he realizes it’s his mother’s voice coming from the holopad.


“Oh, here he is. Ben, come sit down. Your mother wants to talk to you.” Luke waves him over, pointing the place next to him for Ben to sit. He sets down his tray and shrugs his backpack off, turning to look at the holoprojector, finding the face of his mother looking back at him.

“Hello, Ben.”

“Hi, mom.”
“Listen, I only have a moment so I can’t stay long.” Ben refrains from rolling his eyes. So many of their conversations have started with those words. “But I spoke with your father this morning. I was very surprised to hear he got the Falcon back. He tells me the new student found it.”

Ben nods. “Her name is Rey,” he says. And she’s the only person I really want to talk to right now, he keeps to himself.

“Yes, that’s what Luke was telling me. I hear you’re in charge of training her.” She looks impressed and hopeful. Just like she does every other time she thinks things are going to get better for him.

At least she didn’t seem to mock him as his father did.

So he nods. “Yeah. It’s only been a few days though.”

“Well, she sounds lovely. I can’t wait to hear more. Call me soon with more information, Ben. I love hearing from you.”

No, you don’t.

“I will, mom.”

She smiles once more before looking at Luke, “Alright, well, thank you, Luke, for bringing him in. I didn’t have much time but I’m glad we all go to chat. You’ll tell me when I should plan to come for parents night?”

Parent’s night, Ben really does roll his eyes at the mention of the event but it goes unnoticed by the two adults.

“Of course,” Luke says, still eating his food. “I’ll send out the invitations way ahead of time so you’ll know when to prep for it.”

“Excellent,” Leia says right before Ben hears Threepio whining on the other end. “Oh, damn it, I have to run. Alright, bye, Luke.”

“Bye, Leia.”

Leia’s eyes focus back on Ben. “Bye, Ben. I love you.”

“Bye, mom,” is all he says as he looks back down at his food and pretends like he’s about to eat. He can’t though. He has no appetite and he’s honestly surprised he didn’t throw up on the walk back to the temple. He seemed to repress it all well enough with Hux and Soldar trying to belittle him.

All he can think about is that last memory of Rey as she looked upon the dead man lying in the sand. Right before she ran away into his father’s ship, sobbing and afraid and utterly alone.

He had been terrified himself and he had only seen it pass him by in some kind of strange projection that only occurred when they touched.

That has never happened to him before, with anyone. He has no idea why it happened with Rey or if Rey experienced anything like it either. It was why he needed to talk to her immediately, but he was sitting helplessly and uncomfortably in his uncle’s quarters, knowing that despite the call from his mom, Luke probably was going to talk to him anyway.

Ben looks down, totally forgetting about the small wounds on his hands. “Oh, yeah. I just tripped a little. It’s nothing.”

“Artoo, can you bring Ben the medpac,” Luke asks the small astromech on the other side of the room.

“Luke, it’s nothing-”

“Well, just tend to them for my sake then, okay?”

“Fine,” Ben grumbles, accepting the kit from R2 and begins to put some bandages on his palms, already irritated at how it limits the mobility of his hands.

Luke clears his throat, eating his own dinner. “So, how did everything go today?” Luke asks again. Maybe he thinks that now they are alone he was going to be more direct about Rey’s progress.

Ben doesn’t even know how to dissect everything, assessing for himself all that has happened since he woke up but somehow holds back the scoff that threatened to release from his throat, knowing he has to behave himself. “Good.”

“Has Rey shown any signs today. Any outward expressions of the force?” Luke asks, gesturing with his fork as he poses the questions.

Ben freezes for a moment. “Uhh...” Suddenly, the sight of those two vile men flying back in the sand comes into his mind. “No. Nothing.”

Luke hums, giving a slight nod. “Maybe I should have her join regular classes for a few days. Perhaps if I can help her deconstruct more of her past, we can find out what is troubling her so much. That way she can progress further.”

“No!” Ben says a little too quickly and Luke looks to him a little curiously. Ben thinks fast, trying to buy himself some time. “No. She’s making really great progress. If I have just one more day with her I think things will change. She’s...She’s really strong, Luke. I can feel it.”

He’s seen it for himself.

He knows if Luke were to see what he has seen from Rey, he might react too much like a typical Jedi. He might see Rey as more of a threat to the other students when she was only trying to protect herself.

He understands why she lied now. She had told Luke what she did for a reason and it all begins to make sense. The fear and restraint he had sensed in her were apart of keeping herself distanced from the experience. She didn’t want to return to those emotions or feelings. She was afraid to access that power again after what happened on Jakku.

And he had been the asshole who yelled at her when he was too impatient to think of anything but himself. He had told her to access the feelings she felt right before her awakening and snapped at her when he felt her pulling away. He had accused her of lying and although she had, he knows she had no choice.

It makes Ben ache with guilt as well as a burning and lingering fear for Rey and what she had been through.
She had to go through all of that alone. She’s had to keep all of these crushing things to herself all her life and he can’t believe that despite all of it, she’s as kind and friendly as she is. Hardly the type of person he would expect to have grown up in the harsh sands of Jakku.

Luke surprisingly gives an eager grin, blissfully oblivious to the thoughts roiling in Ben's head. “I have to say, Ben. I’m really glad to see you taking so much responsibility.” Ben’s heart slows down a little, eased by Luke’s words. “Take your time then. I trust you with this. Come to me if you do need help or if Rey is having problems.”

“Thank you,” Ben finds himself being surprisingly genuine to his uncle.

“I think Rey trusts you too. That’s important,” Luke says.

Ben gives a nod, forcing down a few bites of his dinner, hoping the subject will change soon. Luckily it does when Luke tells him about what his mother has been working on lately.

Apparently, the Centrists have been getting more aggressive lately and it has his mother more than a little agitated and overly busy than usual.

Ben jumps at the window of opportunity when Luke yawns in the middle of his sentence. “You sound tired. I should probably go.”

“Oh, okay,” Luke’s brows furrow a little and Ben knows it wasn’t his smoothest display but he remains committed, leaning over and grabbing his backpack. “You’re finished with your dinner? You didn’t eat very much,” Luke pokes at the edge of the tray of unfinished food.

“I ate lunch late,” he lies. “I’m not very hungry.”

“Oh, okay,” he pulls the tray closer to himself. “More for me, I guess. Goodnight, Ben. I’ll see you in the morning.”

“Goodnight,” he says quickly before stepping out of the room and rushing out of the temple.

He arrives at Rey’s hut rather quickly, planning to knock on the structure before stepping in but as he walks up, the curtain pulls to the side and Rey is already waiting there. She waves him in quickly and he brushes by her as he steps in.

At the proximity, he feels that strange and almost electric energy he felt right before they touched hands. Is this what it was going to be like every time he got close to her? It was almost addictive but he knew that was hardly the response he should be having so he ignores it, trying to put more space between them as he steps further inside, shrugging off his bag and letting it fall to the floor.

Rey crosses her arms, standing in front of him and he can tell she is as desperate to say something as he is, but neither of them seems to know how to start. There’s too much to say. But as always, Rey is the one to break the silence first.

“How are your hands?” she inquires, looking at the bandages rather casually but he knows that’s not what she really wants to ask him.

He scoffs, “Rey, my hands are fine.” He looks down at his hands, flexing them as much as they could without disrupting the bandages. She steps closer then and she looks at his hands too, but this time she doesn’t try to touch them. She just looks at them curiously and he knows she saw something. “Rey...ummm,” he begins, unsure how to ask. Thankfully, she takes charge again. He really has to get better at starting conversations.

“Ben, what happened out there?” she looks up to his face finally and he sees that the redness in her
eyes hasn’t receded. Had she still been crying?

He takes a shaky breath, “I don’t know. I’ve never felt anything like it.”

“I saw something. Something I’m not sure I was meant to see but I did.”

“I saw something too. I don’t know if I was supposed to see it either, but I did,” he tells her. He’s
still at a loss when it comes to actually discussing it.

“I saw you,” she breathes out and Ben stills suddenly. She saw him? Confusion fills him as he
looks at her, even more lost than before.

She saw him and he saw her…All because they touched hands.

“Tell me what you saw, Rey.”

She looks down again, moving to the foot of her bed and sitting down. “There’s a lot, Ben.”

He comes to sit beside her, desperate to hear what she’s going to say. “Please, try,” he begs.

She sniffs a little. “I saw your life pass me by. I saw you grow up and how you went through
different things.”

“You saw my past,” he breathes out. He knows now that whatever it was, they seemed to have
glimpsed into each other's lives. Their pasts barred to each other.

Why would the force do that? Were they even true memories though? He would know if they were
false.

Knowing there was only one way to be sure, he looks back to her. “Rey, can you tell me what you
saw exactly?”

And she does. He is quickly reminded of all the things that have brought him to be the person he is
today as he hears her recount the more poignant moments he went through and how they affected
him.

How alone he felt when his mother would leave for work and he would spend his day alone in their
apartment.

How excited he would be for his father to come home, only to realize that Han didn’t like coming
home. He would leave almost as soon as he returned.

She tells him how she stood right next to him on his tenth birthday and watched him open the
blaster from his father. How she was with him in his room as his parents argued through the walls.

Rey begins to cry when she speaks about his mother and how she came to him hours later with the
calligraphy set he loved so much. The same set he had heard his father call pointless.

“It’s not pointless, Ben,” Rey says to him with tears running down his face and he clenches his
jaw, trying to keep his own tears from falling.

He had not expected this. It seems Rey has been witness to his most vulnerable moments in the
way he must have been witness to hers.

But why?

“Is that all? Did you see anything else,” he croaks out. His heart drops when she nods.
“The last memory showed you and your mom in an argument.”

She doesn’t have to say anything else. Ben already knows which one she means.

The one where Ben was so angry after Han left that he took his fury out on his mother, yelling and cursing at her. His inkwells exploding on his desk from his rage. The same inkwells that came with the calligraphy kit she got for him on his tenth birthday.

Silent tears spill down his face as he remembers the look on his mom’s face. She backed away from him like he was a monster. It was then that she seemed to really consider the necessity for him to be sent away.

Ben nods, holding up his hand so Rey doesn’t have to recount it for him. “You don’t have to say it. I remember it well enough.”
Rey shakes her head. “I’m sorry, Ben. I didn’t mean to see those things. If you’re upset, I understand.”

“I’m not upset with you, Rey. We had no control over what we saw. The force wanted us to see these things, I just don’t know why.”
Rey looks to him, her brow furrowing a little as she asks, “Then what did it show you?”

He looks to her, knowing he’s a mess. The last time he cried in front of anybody had been his mother, four years ago, when she told him that he would be coming to the Academy. When she told him he wouldn’t be living at home anymore.

He should know from his training that emotion is a sign of weakness, but it doesn’t feel like that with Rey. This feels like something else, but Ben has never experienced anything like it. He doesn’t know what to call it.

“Rey, you saw my life and I saw yours.”

“What?” she asks confused.

“I saw your past, too.”

Rey thinks she’s heard him wrong at first, but the words ring in her ears as she just stares at him, totally dumbstruck.

_He knows. He knows what I did. He must have seen it!_

She leans away from him and wondering where it was going. He had already spoken to Luke at dinner. He could have already told him all about it if he had seen the memory she fears so much.

Rey clears her throat, trying to sound as composed as she can. “What did you see?” She can hear well enough the fear in her voice, knowing he could hear it too.

She sees his throat bob as he searches for the words. “I saw a lot, Rey. I don’t know how to say it.”

Her lip trembles and she repeats his earlier request. “Try,” she begs. He looks at her with his big dark eyes and she sees how the events of her life and the reminder of his own have stripped him to the core. She feels like she can see so deeply into them that she can also see herself.

“I saw you get left behind by your parents. They sold you to that man, Plutt. The crolute,” he starts. He looks like he might be sick again at the first mention of Plutt’s name. Rey thinks she could be
sick too.

Plutt had that effect on most.

Ben continues though and she realizes that he experienced the same things she did. He saw her life in stages and her secrets and embarrassments are lying out in the open.

“I saw you in your AT-AT and the marks on your wall that you made every day, waiting for them to come back...but they never did. You were alone” Rey shudders, closing her eyes and looking down at her lap. The tears falling onto her clothes.

She doesn’t want to look at him as he recounts what happened. She doesn’t want to see his face when he tells her what he saw.

But then she feels something gently brush past her hands and it isn’t her tears. She opens her eyes to see Ben’s bandaged hand resting over hers. She looks up to him confused as he takes hold of her hand, looking at her as frightened as she felt.

She turns her hand over, taking hold of it completely, wanting to feel it for as long as she can. It isn’t like in the forest when they touched hands. There are no visions this time, they remain on her bed. And this time it isn’t just the briefest touch, but the firm embrace and comfort of someone she calls her friend.

For however long that will be.

“It’s okay,” he whispers, squeezing her hand a little tighter and even if she doesn’t believe him, it strengthens her enough to urge him on. She needs to know what he saw. All of it.

“There’s more?” she croaks out, afraid of his answer but suspecting it already.

He nods but looks hesitant to share. “Rey, I don’t know if-”

“Please,” she clenches his hand tighter.

Silent tears continue to run down his face. “You were at that outpost and you met a woman who got pregnant and Plutt wouldn’t help her.”

Katarina, Rey’s mind shouts.

“You went back to give her your doll a few weeks later, but she had died. An older woman told you she had a miscarriage.” Rey squeezes his hand then, remembering the despair that coursed through her when she heard the news herself.

Rey had suspected that Katarina's miscarriage was her attempt at getting rid of it herself but she died with it. The thought of the vacant tent haunting her and all that it represented.

Ben continues and she hears him account everything that happened just as she remembered it. He had seen these things too. “The older woman told you to never return to the tents. She was afraid you might be...forced to do that work. Katarina was afraid of that too. She told you to leave but you couldn’t. You said...you said your parents were coming back for you and you had to wait for them.”

Rey winces then. She hates to hear the reminder of how oblivious she was. She was so foolish to think that her parents would return after dumping her there. A small sob rips through her, embarrassed that Ben had seen that for himself. She had seen how pathetic she really was.
“But then it all changed again and you were back in that outpost, trying to get portions for something you found when Plutt turned you down. But there was another man there. Plutt said if you wanted to eat then y-you’d have to…” Ben sighs, trembling as she sees the tears fall down his face quicker. He can’t say it. “Rey, I saw what happened.”

Rey pulls her hand away, feeling like she might get him dirty from touching her. She stands up, pacing the small space of her hut, knowing it was over now. Ben knew the truth. He knew what she was.

She was a murderer.

“I didn’t mean to, Ben. I didn’t know I could do that. I was just so afraid and I refused to let Plutt force me into that life. I saw what happened to Katarina and I was too stupid to listen to her warning. I was too stupid waiting for people that never loved me—”

“Rey—” Ben holds out his hands cautiously, and she knows she must be speaking too loud. She can’t seem to stop though. She talks over him, her fears and defenses spewing out of her.

“I know it’s horrible and I know that I don’t belong here. I know I lied to you and you must think I’m a monster, but I can’t go back, Ben. I can’t go back to Jakku and I—”

Suddenly, she is silenced as her face is pressed into the firm and surprising warmth of Ben’s chest. She feels his long arms wrap around her and he holds her closely. She can hear his shuddering breaths in her ear as he buries his face in her hair.

He was hugging her. Maz was the only other person who had hugged her before but this one was totally different. He’s so much bigger.

“You’re never going back there, Rey. You’re not going anywhere, I promise.”

Confused but strangely comforted by his words and embrace, she brings her arms to wrap around him too, crying into his tunic. “But, what I did, Ben—”

He pulls back, holding her arms to look into her eyes. “Rey, you did what you had to do. None of that is your fault. Tell me you know that,” he pleads, tears still falling from his own eyes.

No one, not even Maz has ever looked at her like this. Slowly, she nods. “I know.” At her words, he pulls her back into his embrace and Rey feels a new warmth spread through her as she tucks her face against his chest.

They remain like that for a moment. Holding each other in the middle of her hut, not saying anything but finding comfort nonetheless. But then Ben speaks again. “You knew not to tell Luke what happened.”

She looks up to him, surprised slightly. “Maz told me it might complicate things.”

“It would’ve,” Ben confirms and she swallows, wondering what that meant now that he knew.

“Did…did you tell Luke?” She asks, looking down, not sure what she hoped to hear. She couldn’t expect him to take on this burden. To lie to his uncle.

“Of course not,” he exclaims and Rey looks up to him, truly surprised this time. “I’m not going to tell anybody, Rey.”

“Really?” she gasps, grabbing his hands and holding them tight as she looks into his eyes. “You’re
not?”

He shakes his head. “I won’t. I promise, Rey.”

“Thank you,” she sobs out.

“I couldn’t. I didn’t live those moments but I saw how frightened you were. Shit, I was terrified and I was just watching it all pass me by. And although I think you’re justified to everything you did, Maz was right, it would only complicate things and these lessons between us would be over.”

“Would Luke send me back to Jakku?” Rey asks, holding him tighter.

“No, I don’t think he would,” Ben answers. “But he would be afraid that your outburst would be a sign of something else. He might think you would be a threat to yourself and others when we both know you were just protecting yourself. He would probably train you separately just to make sure you didn’t put anyone else at risk.”

“I don’t want our lessons to end,” Rey admits earnestly.

Ben swallows and she sees the slightest smile twitch at the corner of his lips. “Neither do I.”

Rey is filled with relief at Ben’s assurance that her secret remains safe and feels herself take a deep breath, finally feeling like she could manage steady breaths again.

Ben looks over her head then, frowning slightly. “You didn’t eat dinner.” He must see the tray of unfinished food.

“I tried to. I think for the first time in my life, I wasn’t hungry,” Rey tells him, turning to look at the tray of food but already missing the warmth of his hold.

“I wasn’t hungry either. I forced down a few bites just so Luke wouldn’t notice anything. I think he still did but I didn’t really care. I’ve been so distracted but my mother called and Luke made me talk to her.”

“Your mother called?” Rey asks curiously.

“Yeah. She wanted to say she was looking forward to hearing more about the girl I’m training. I guess my dad called her, told her you found the Falcon.”

“Well...I guess you know I stole it now,” Rey says, feeling undeserving of the attention she’s received for recovering the infamous ship.

“None of that matters now, Rey. It’s over.”

“I know. I have to remind myself of that sometimes.” Rey tells him. The freedom to be honest with him is liberating and she continues. “Sometimes, I still feel like I did when I was running from the outpost as fast as I could, hoping no one would shoot at me before I could get on the ship. My hands were shaking so bad when I was trying to work the controls. I set the coordinates to Takodana but I had no idea where that even was at the time. I just knew I had to get away. I knew there was nothing left for me on Jakku. There never was.”

Ben listens to her, letting her speak and she finds the emotions welling within her since she arrived releasing themselves. Making themselves known. “When I went to lightspeed, I had never seen anything as amazing as those swirling colors, but I couldn’t even look at them...I had never felt so alone.”
“You’re not alone anymore, Rey.”

Rey looks up at him, finding his eyes still on her. “Neither are you.”

He takes in a deep breath when she says that and he moves back to sit at the end of the bed. “I’ve never told anyone those things that you saw,” he admits. “I always just keep everything to myself because I didn’t think anyone else could understand...but you do.”

Rey nods, coming to kneel beside him. “And you understand me.”

Ben smiles softly although the tracks of his tears make it look sadder than it really is. “I guess we really are friends.”

Rey gives a soft laugh, brushing her tears away and sniffing. “I had a really good time today, Ben. I mean, you know, before all the…” she gestures between them. “...the other stuff. You showed me the ocean. I’ll never forget it.”

“We’ll go back. Every day if you want.”

Rey chuckles softly, “Thank you,” she whispers. “For everything, Ben.”

He scoffs a little bit. “I didn’t do anything, really. In fact, I don’t think I finished my apology from earlier. I can’t believe I said that to you,” he covers his face with his hands.

Rey shakes her head before leaning up to wrap her arms around him this time, hugging him tightly. “You did apologize and I already forgave you,” she says into his shoulder, reveling at the feeling of being in his arms. She knows by tomorrow, the small amount of leniency they have allowed to comfort each other must cease. He told her this morning that Jedi were not meant to be close with others and although they are only friends, she doubts hugging him as often as she pleased would be appropriate. “Not everyone would keep this secret, Ben. Really this means everything to me. Thank you.”

“Thank you, too,” he says into her hair.

“For what?” she chuckles

“For just…” he gives a sigh. “For being here, I guess.”

Rey nods, knowing what he means, seeing for herself how he felt when he was alone. He felt like that all the time, as had she, but she was distracted by the thought that her parents to return. She had hope while Ben didn’t have anything.

Except for those scary voices, she remembers suddenly.

She pulls away then. “Ben, I forgot to mention it but in a few of your memories, I heard this awful voice speaking to you but no one was ever there. It was trying to break you down, make you feel weak. It was terrifying.”

Ben’s eyes go wide. “You heard it too?” he asks shocked. She nods quickly and he bites his cheek. “I...I thought I was imaging that.”

“Do you still hear them?”

He shakes his head. “No. I haven’t heard it since before I arrived here. I’ve never told anyone about it, I thought I was just crazy.”
He’s never told anyone. But she heard for herself just how eerie and terrifying it was. She doesn’t want him to face that alone should they return. “If you do hear them again will you tell me?”

“Why?” he asks confused.

“Because we aren’t alone anymore. We’re friends and if you’re scared, I want to help you the way you’ve helped me.”

Ben’s eyes look glassy again. “Really?”

She nods again, hoping he understands how much she would want to help him if the voices returned.

When he nods back, she finds herself able to breathe again. “Okay. I mean I don’t think they will. It’s been years. But if they do I’ll tell you...no secrets.”

“No secrets,” Rey repeats with a smile, glad that her friend trusts her the way she trusts him. “Besides, if this was as new to you as it was to me, we have to find out why the force showed it to us.”

“Yeah,” Ben agrees. A small smirk appearing on his face. “I like that.”

Rey smiles back. “Me too.”

Ben sits at his desk, staring at a blank page of his journal. How could he possibly recount the way the day has gone? There was not enough paper in the galaxy for him to express himself in the way he feels, and yet there is no way at all.

Because he doesn’t feel like writing.

He feels drained.

Rey knew him more than anyone else ever has. She knew things he’s never spoken of but she saw for herself anyway. And he doesn’t hate it. He always thought that if anyone knew him in such a way it would make him feel defenseless and upset. But Rey’s words and compassion was nothing to chase away. He found himself reveling in the warmth of it all.

She’s the strongest person he’s ever met. She’s kind and caring and more than Ben would ever deserve in a friend.

He recalls how nicely she fit in his arms when he held her. She had been speaking so frantically and a little too loudly and in his moment of desperation, he launched forward and embraced her, letting her know that no matter what, she wasn’t going back to Jakku.

He would never let that happen.

A strange protectiveness has taken over him ever since he saw the full extent of her memories. Of course, he knew that Rey could undoubtedly take care of herself but it didn’t stop the feeling from surfacing. Even when they were in the mess hall and Iella called her a desert rat, he felt himself holding back screams, about to snap at anyone that dared to even look at her.

But he knew even then that was irrational.

He stands up then, pacing in front of his desk. He’s exhausted but there’s still strange nervous energy in him that leaves him unsure what to do with himself. He really should go to bed, but he
doesn’t. Instead, he just thinks about some of the earlier parts of the day. 

Her face, when she saw the water for the first time, was unforgettable. He wishes he could draw as well as she could so he could capture it in some way. 

He feels his cheeks heat up when he thinks about how she drew him earlier. She had a true skill and again he’s amazed of everything she taught herself in those frightful sands. Pages and pages filled with studies and notes and landscapes. 

And a picture of him, Ben thinks again. 

Her materials looked so weathered though. The charcoal was absolutely gone by the end of the day and her sketchbook was filled to the brim. He doubts she could fit anything else in it. 

A new thought strikes him then, looking to the trunk at the foot of his bed. 

He had mentioned that she could have some of the inks he didn’t use, which he planned to give her. He pulls them out of the trunk, setting them on his desk but still continuing to dig, looking for something else. He pulls out anything that she could possibly put to use, finding old pencils and lining them up on his desk, hoping they don’t roll away. 

He finds what he’s looking for a moment later, brushing it off and bringing it to his desk, ignoring the mess he made in his trunk. 

It’s a sketchbook, or at least it could be. The pages are all blank and the binding is much stronger than that of Rey’s current one. He had planned, at one point, to write in it or practice his calligraphy a little more but he had forgotten about it, resorting to the smaller journals he keeps at his desk. 

This book had some room to do things that would probably make Rey really happy. Because he wants her to be happy. He doesn’t know if he’s ever wanted that for anyone, even himself, but the thought doesn’t strike him as odd. It fills him with a new determination he’s seldom felt in anything. 

He looks to the ink on his desk and the cup of brushes and pens he’s ignored for months now. He hasn’t been keeping up with the calligraphy, mainly because every time he used it he could recall how devastated he was when he heard his father call it pointless. 

A memory Rey had seen too now and told him flat out, “It’s not pointless, Ben.” 

Maybe that was true. 

Encouraged by her earlier remark and his returning fondness for the medium, he opens to the inside cover and reaches for the nearest pen, dipping it in the ink. 

Rey deserves a new beginning and he wants to give her the chance to take it. Even if it arrived in the form of a measly sketchbook he found beneath a pile of clothes. 

Chapter End Notes 

What do we think? Lay it on me!
I'll probably reread this later and gag but I decided to post it anyway...so thanks if you made it this far, lol.

If you read my stuff, I dig you!

<3!!
Rey slept better than she has in a long time. It was even better than the night she spent in Maz’s castle.

Finally being honest with Ben helped her ease the stress of withholding so much of her past. She felt like she finally had some room to breathe now that someone understood.

And Ben understood her just as she understood him.

She woke up, got dressed and ready for the day, unsure of what awaited her but knowing that she had a friend to face it with.

She steps out of her hut and sees scatterings of the other students headed up for breakfast before their morning lessons. She ignores them though, looking to Ben’s hut and smiling when he pulls back the curtain and steps out.

He’s got his backpack on again and she wonders if they are going back to the cove.

When he sees her, he smiles back and she walks over to him. “Hi,” she says rather quietly.

“Hi,” he says back, the smile still on his face.

“What’s on the schedule today, boss?”

He snorts, rolling his eyes. “Rey, I’m not your boss. I’m your...tutor and classmate and-”

“And friend,” Rey adds, poking him in the arm.

“And friend,” he repeats with a smile.

“Well, then what are we doing today... friend?” she asks again, wiggling her eyebrows, making him laugh as they begin to walk up the path to the temple.

“I have a few things in mind,” he tells her.

“Oh?” she asks intrigued.

“I...um. I thought we might try meditating again,” he says, looking at his feet.

“Oh,” Rey says, recalling their first day of lessons. She should have suspected that.
Ben stops in his tracks, making Rey turn to look at him. “I know it’s not your first choice but if we can get past this hurdle I think everything is going to be clearer for you. I don’t want you to live in fear of yourself. This power is a gift and I know you can do amazing things with it.”

He speaks so earnestly and Rey is filled with admiration.

Ben believes in her.

“Okay,” she says.

“Okay,” Ben nods and they continue their way up to the mess hall.

They went to the beach again. Ben knows Rey feels comforted there and he wants this time to be an improvement from the last day of meditation he imposed on her.

He understands now why she felt so distant and afraid that day. He thought she was afraid of him for a time but then he realized she was frightened of herself. He needs her to trust herself the way he trusts her.

Although he hasn’t known her for long, they know each other more than he expects anyone else ever would. After yesterday, he is still baffled by their shared visions in the forest, and although he is determined to discover more of the connection, Rey’s training came first.

He had briefly panicked when Luke suggested she be placed in regular classes, so she might progress faster, but Ben knew that it would only lead to the exposure of her secret. Ben wouldn’t let that happen. He promised her.

So, he tells her to sit down on a big rock that sits just at the edge of the forest. It lies upon the dirt and leaves, just before the forest floor turns to the sand that leads to the shore. The crash of the waves still present.

She sits as he told her to the other day. Her legs crossed and her wrists resting on her knees.

“Close your eyes and just breathe,” he tells her softly.

Her eyes flutter closed and she releases a heavy breath at first, gradually steadying them until she sounds more relaxed. He gives her a moment anyway, not wanting to rush her. When she seems comfortable and steady, he speaks again. “Now, just try to reach out.”

“Ben?” she asks, slightly nervous.

“It’s okay. I’m right here.”

She breathes deeply again and Ben keeps his mind open, observant of her energy. He can tell that she is anxious to step forward, but not as hesitant as before. She is getting closer to unveiling the truth within herself and he stands by, ensuring that if the extent of her fear returns, that he will help her from falling into that painful memory again.

“You must feel the Force around you. It’s here. Between you, me, the rock, the waves, everything... You just have to reach out. Search your feelings...” he tells her, trying to help as her guide as she eases herself further into the place where she can feel the power he knows lies within her.

Ben watches her, transfixed by the sound of her breathing and her peaceful countenance. He
focuses as well, blocking out everything but Rey.

He focuses until there is only her.

Rey does as he says, his words sinking in more than they did the other day.

Before, she admits it had been fear holding her back. To encounter the power that has plagued her so much was daunting.

But where there was once fear and the need to conceal the horrible nature of how this power originated there is now something else. Ben’s frustration isn’t there either. She can sense how he is calm and focused. He’s here with her, and she is elated to know and to feel that he wants to be.

She reaches out, further and further. More so than she’s ever gone before. Time fades and she exists in a place where there is nothing and yet where there is everything.

She sees the beach. The forest. The small creatures that live in calm burrows. The even larger creatures that disrupt their peace but have burrows of their own. Families existing in all different forms.

She sees the wind blow, the trees shake. She sees the bones buried in the soil, the new life that grows on the surface.

She sees Ben. She sees herself.

She can feel the energy existing between all living things. Between them.

The peace, the chaos, the tragedy, the triumphs.

It’s always there.

But this is the first time she recognizes it as the force.

It’s the same energy she feels in herself.

The same one she feels in Ben, more than anyone else. The force seems to hum a little louder when he’s near and she wonders if he feels it too.

She sees light just as she sees darkness. The darkness Ben had told her about when he discussed his grandfather.

He fell to the dark, believing it would protect the woman he loved. Something he must not have believed the light capable of. Were these just empty promises made by the dark side to tempt anyone to be seduced, or was there something to be found there?

Rey resists the pull, the call into the shadows, deciding to remain in the light. The place she knows she’s supposed to remain.

She realizes that the further she travels, the force is strongest when she resides with Ben. His presence in the force reminds her of his embrace. The memory of his arms and chest as he held her was calming.

She feels the brush of things around her. Ghosting past her arms, her face, her hair. It makes her feel safe but she doesn’t know what it is.
“Rey,” she hears him breathe out. Only a whisper but she could feel it, greeting her as a gentle hum that made her shiver. It rouses her from her meditative state with a gasp and she springs her eyes open to see him watching her. His jaw is slack and his eyes seem transfixed.

She looks around her to see everything levitating. The rocks, the leaves from the ground, the flowers and their fallen petals. Her bag and her sketchbook as well, the pages fluttering.

A thrill runs through her as she realizes this was her doing. She did this. And it wasn’t terrifying as it had been on Jakku. It was soft and calm and amazing.

It didn’t have to be like it was before. It could be something else entirely.

Rey laughs, reaching out to her sketchbook and it speeds to her grasp. Her intentions clear in the force. She chuckles in surprise. It was so responsive once she understood how to communicate with the energy within her.

She looks to Ben, beaming with excitement, but her smile falls when she sees how his face and stance remain unchanged. “Ben? What’s wrong?”

Had she done something? Did he sense her thoughts or how she acknowledged the dark? Was she not supposed to do that?

But then he speaks, halting those thoughts. “Th-That was...You were amazing, Rey,” he stammers. She instantly blushes, not used to compliments. She looks down, setting the sketchbook in her lap.

She hears the branches snap under his weight as he steps closer, her neck craning up to look at him to see he’s still shaking his head a little, a small smile on his face. “Truly, Rey. That was beau-” his cheeks go red and he clears his throat. “That was really incredible. I could sense you the whole time but you reached out and you found it within yourself. I knew you could do it, but that was...I mean, you did it!”

Rey smiles, “Well, I was just doing it like you said. I couldn’t have done it without you.”

Ben scoffs. “Rey, I just gave you the same generic speech that Luke gives when he’s teaching people. This was all you. This is you and your power and you did something amazing. I just stood here and got to watch it pass me by.”

Rey stands from the rock, noting the sun in the sky is higher than before. She must have been meditating for some time. “Regardless if you just stood there, it is only because of you I was able to do it at all, Ben. I feel like a weight has been lifted off my shoulders now that...well, I just mean that now that we don’t have to keep secrets.” Her gaze drifts down to her hands and pulls on the fraying edges of her sketchbook. “Somebody here understands. It’s not just Maz who is far away and told me to never speak of it. I don’t have to just pretend it didn’t happen.”

She feels his hands settle on her shoulders and she looks up at him. “You don’t have to pretend,” he says and his voice is so low again. It makes her heart speed up and suddenly his touch feels so much easier to sink into. She’s tempted to lean against his chest again and wrap her arms around him, but she refrains. “You did really good, Rey. I’m really proud of you.”

No one had ever said anything like that to her before. To think she could make anyone proud seemed like a very foreign idea. She watches him curiously. “Really?”

Ben nods, rocking on his feet. He looks nervous but she doesn’t know why. It fails to distract her much from his kind smile though. “Of course, Rey.”
Something warm blooms in her chest, almost like she could feel for herself how much he means that.

Ben should probably be concerned at how quickly Rey is catching on but she’s just a natural at it. Everything she does seems so fluid and inherent, it’s like she’s been doing it all her life.

They meditate for a while linger. He wants to make sure she really grasps the idea, not wanting to rush her but finding her more than capable of the task every time. She is a quick learner. Very adaptive.

And as she comes to understand more about her signature, he starts to understand why she said the things she did.

She said a weight had been lifted off her shoulders at their shared honesty and it made her powers react accordingly. Ben is almost certain the same thing has happened to him.

He feels different. He’s been able to think more about it now that his initial shock from the shared visions has faded. Ben is left with the lingering sensation of being so close with Rey.

It was unlike anything he’s ever experienced.

And then watching, bewildered and in complete awe of Rey, meditating and finding peace within herself and the Force and knowing she wasn’t afraid of herself made him beam with pride and joy.

It leaves him feeling strange. He’s seen plenty of people in the temple meditate before. Levitation was not uncommon when it came to the meditative state, but what struck Ben so deeply with Rey is just how much of her power he could sense within her. And how much it felt like his own.

Like an extension.

Maybe he should be alarmed at these sensations and were he a better student and more determined Jedi, maybe he would go to Luke with these questions. But aside from the new feelings that have surfaced, her proximity, her energy, her smiles, and teasing comments are comforting in a way Ben has never felt.

So, regardless if it’s what a Jedi should do, Ben just lets the force guide them in whatever facet it is.

They continue until Ben hears Rey’s stomach grumble and he drops what they are doing almost immediately. He knows she’s probably not starving to death like she was in that one memory, but the thought is still too fresh in his mind to deny.

Rey points to the boulder they sat on yesterday, asking if he would want to eat there instead and he eagerly agrees. He could only tolerate so much sand. They sit down and Ben passes Rey her food and she smiles, digging into it. Ben does the same, watching how her bag sits against the rock. The spine of her sketchbook exposed.

His mind thinks to the sketchbook in his own backpack. The one he wants to give her.

He’s never really given anyone a gift before. He had made things for his mother before but this felt different.

Does he give it to her now? Does he wait? Does he do it at all or is it too weird to give her something?
He wrestles with his thoughts for a moment until he hears Rey say his name. “Ben?”

“Hmm?” he looks to her.

“Are you alright?” she eyes the sandwich in his hands. He hasn't taken a bite yet.

“Yeah. Fine,” he says, taking a large bite to convince her.

But it doesn’t.

“You seem…” she starts but turns away, looking back at her food.


Rey chuckles a little. “You seem nervous.”

“Can you sense that about me?”

She nods. “I think so. But even if I couldn’t, I think I can tell the difference.” He raises his eyebrows in question and she chuckles, gesturing to them. “Your face is really expressive when it wants to be.”

Ben gives a laugh, knowing she was right. Maybe that was why he usually resorted to a scowl and tried to keep it that way. But his priorities seem to shift whenever she’s around.

“I am kind of nervous,” he admits and her smile falls.

“Is it me?” she asks.

“No,” he says quickly. She watches him, waiting for an answer. He doesn't want to lie to her, he told her they didn't have to keep secrets and although this is something rather small, the matter of a present, he doesn't want her to think he's being dishonest. So he gives a sigh. “I just...well, yes.”

Her shoulders sink a little and her face falls. “Oh,” she says. Her voice sounds dejected and he curses to himself as he realizes he's doing it again. He's messing things up with how he talks.

“Rey, really, I don’t mean to talk like this but I must be a true asshole if it comes this naturally.”

She shakes her head and looks at him. “Ben, you’re not an asshole.”

It wasn’t eloquent or how he expected the conversation to go at all, but it encourages him enough to reach for his backpack, grab the sketchbook and pulls it out, holding it out between them. “I got you something.”

Her face lights up as she must realize what it is. “Ben,” she breathes out, a smile spreading across her face as she reaches for it. “You didn’t!” she says, taking it in her hands and opening it to the middle, seeing the blank pages for herself.

She brushes her fingers past the pages. The texture of the paper is a little rough and she smiles. She must approve. “This is amazing!” She tells him and he releases a breath, relieved that she likes it. She flips through the book, “There’s so many pages. So much more space. It’s perfect.”

“Well, I thought you could put it to better use than I could,” he says, his eyes burning a hole into the front cover, he isn’t sure he wants her to find her or not. He’s unsure if he should be embarrassed at what he left there but when she gasps, he knows she found it anyway.
“Did you—” she starts but she already knows the answer. “Ben, I don’t know what to say.”

He finally looks up to see her admiring what he left on the front cover. He had written her name in calligraphy rather large, labeling it as hers.

“It’s beautiful, Ben,” she breathes out, admiring it.

He feels his cheeks heat up at the compliment. He had been embarrassed for a long time of his fondness for calligraphy, starting to believe the remark his father made of it being a waste of time. But he was reminded last night of how much he actually enjoyed it.

“It’s not my best work. I haven’t done it in a while. I’ve been neglecting it lately.”

“Oh, shut up, Ben. It’s amazing. Really.”

He reaches further into his backpack. “I also found some pencils and spare pens, too.” He holds them out to her and she looks at them in his hand. “Those inks I told you about are still in my hut. They stay in glass wells so I thought it would be better if I just gave them to you later. These things are more portable.”

Rey reaches for the pencils and pens, but her hand falls halfway. “Ben, you didn’t have to do all this.”

He frowns slightly, confused. “I’m not using them. I want you to have them.”

She shakes her head, hesitating. “But...Ben, this is too much.”

Too much? A few things that were sitting at the bottom of his trunk, never getting used was too much?

He shakes his head. “It’s not, Rey. Please. Take them. I want you to have these things,” he reiterates.

She smiles again, reaching out for the items in his hand. Their fingers brush past one another again and his stomach flutters at the sensation. A rush of her energy brushes past his own when they touch but she pulls away, admiring the pencils.

“Wow. These are perfect.”

They weren’t but Ben keeps the thought to himself. He watches as she tests them on the corner of the first page, humming to herself. “I like them so much better than charcoal already.”

“Well, they aren’t reduced to stubs so that’s an improvement.”

Rey laughs, setting the things down beside her. She launches forward, wrapping her arms around him, hugging him tightly. “Thank you so much, Ben.” He gasps quietly, lost in the sweet-smelling blow of her hair as it brushes along his face.

He brings his arms to wrap around her too and smiles so big his cheeks hurt. Relief and content flood him as her reaction is better than he had hoped. Even if she didn't have a reaction, he would have been glad that at least she had some new things to draw with. But the combination of her voice, her expression, and how brightly the signature within her shines makes something in Ben’s chest flutter.

“No one has ever given me anything like this,” she says, wiping away at her eyes, trying to keep
tears from falling. “I love it, Ben,” she says again.

Ben’s breath hitches at her comment but he tries to shake it off. Instead, he shrugs, feeling undeserving of so much gratitude when it was something so small, but she likes it so much. “You’re welcome, Rey.” He watches her as she grabs the sketchbook again and the sight of her smiling and happy with something transfixes him almost as much as her display in the force earlier that morning.

It seemed no matter what she was doing, she managed to look beautiful.

Beautiful? Where did that come from? Had he thought of that before?

The thought is not as foreign as it probably should be but as he watches Rey open back to the first page, a small smile on her face and the breeze blowing gently through her hair, he finds himself smiling at the thought.

Because she looks beautiful and it makes that fluttering in his chest and stomach return. It’s a near critical condition when he hears her laugh to herself.

“What?” he asks, reaching for the rest of his sandwich, thinking it would be best if he tried to distract himself.

“Now I just have to draw something and break it in.”

He clears his throat, wondering why the breeze was doing nothing to cool him down. “What are you going to draw?” he asks her before taking another bite.

When Rey doesn’t answer, he looks up to see she’s got a smirk on her face. When she raises her eyebrows, he realizes what she means.

“No. Rey, literally anything else,” he insists with a full mouth as he chews.

It makes Rey laugh. “Just one. A quick one. Five minutes,” she indicates with her hand.

“You can draw me in five minutes?” That seemed kind of fast.

“Well, I can,” she says with a smug grin, “but if you gave me ten minutes it might be a little more-”

Ben cuts her off, knowing where she was going with that. “Alright, five minutes, but no more than that,” he insists.

She draws him for ten minutes anyway and Ben finds he doesn’t mind.

Later that night, Ben sits at his desk, once again starring at his journal but unsure what to write. There were far too many things to describe and he was uncertain how to retell it.

It’s strange how he could write for hours about absolutely nothing before this. He would recall the events of a day where practically nothing happened and he spoke to no one but himself. But now that things actually happen to him, now that he has things to actually dissect and consider, he hardly knows how to find the words for it all.

Sighing to himself, he grabs the pen and figures he should try anyway.

He accounts for the morning, Rey’s meditation, their continued lessons, the gift of the sketchbook
The hug she had given him in return. The rest of the day following that had been great. They hadn’t really focused on her lessons further, both getting preoccupied in their conversations and Rey’s insistent studies of him in her sketchbook. The collection of portraits far exceeding the original five minutes he had allotted to her but he hardly minded.

The thought of being observed so closely that initially made him uncomfortable now fascinates him, more focused on the grace and speed of Rey’s skills, ignoring his own distaste in his features. Because despite his opposition for his appearance, Ben knew Rey wasn’t thinking of it like that. She wasn’t trying to make fun of him. She wouldn’t do that.

He had taken over the colored inkwells he promised Rey after dinner. She had been so grateful that she even hugged him again. They were standing this time and when she leaned forward he could feel the soft caress of her breath on his face.

It was something so trivial but he couldn’t stop thinking about it. It made that strange sensation within him rise again. The same feeling that he couldn’t find a name for.

The sensation, that feeling, is all he could think about. It’s almost like it keeps him company, distracting him from the usual loneliness in which he often finds himself but it also makes him yearn to be with her again.

Was it because she was his friend? Was that what this was?

No, it felt like something else. Something rivaling in intensity to their strange and sudden connection when they touched for the first time.

It was like that exchange was a powerful charge, and despite how it frightened him at first, the lingering traces of the near electric sensation is distracting, but not troublesome.

It makes him think of Rey constantly. How talented and kind she is. How understanding she is. And how beautiful she is.

That thought of all of them has been rather prominent today. Whenever it resurfaces, his heart beats a little faster but it wasn’t in malaise or unease. At least not the kind he was used to. It was hard to name. He’s never felt like this before.

It was almost like he-

Ben’s heart seems to halt completely as realization crashes into him. He drops his pen, halting whatever he had been trying to explain on paper, knowing he is not brave enough to write it.

He likes her.

And this wasn’t just the pleasant new feelings of having a friend. This was Rey. And he likes her in a way he’s never liked anyone.

He likes her because she’s amazing and she makes him feel like he isn’t alone.

He likes her because she understands him like no one else ever has.

He likes her because she’s been broken but still tries to be strong and forge ahead when he knows how hard it is.
He likes her because she makes him want to be a better person.

And if he were anyone else, those feelings might feel liberating and uplifting. And in a way, it might be.

But he likes her in a way the Jedi are never meant to and suddenly, he finds himself flooded with dread as he knows that it’s already hopeless. Nothing akin to that could ever be kindled in a place like this. In a place where emotions cannot be. It couldn't be anything substantial enough that would not escape his uncle’s notice.

*Only peace.* At least that is the way of the Jedi. What his uncle seems to insist upon.

His own troublesome emotions, in regards to his frustration and anger, were hard enough to hide from his uncle. It’s why he was instructed to teach Rey in the first place. To help himself find some way to ground himself in a lighter way of thinking.

And in a way, it has. Rey has managed to alter his perception of so much in such a short span of time.

It was terrifying.

Is this what it was like to realize something about yourself, only to find it was impossible to truly embrace?

He had heard the other students gossip about vapid things such as crushes and stolen kisses while they play that ridiculous game.

Ben was inclined to believe that a crush was a fleeting and trivial thing. Something someone harbored when they liked the idea of a person rather than the person themselves. Something someone had before they could realize how foolish their sentiments were. But Rey didn’t make him feel foolish or vapid or any of the things the others have mentioned in hushed passing judgments. The likes of which Ben normally ignored.

But Rey was impossible to ignore. She was impossible to mistake for any of those childish sentiments because she makes him feel like he isn’t alone anymore. She doesn’t make him feel embarrassed about his past or his hobbies or the things he does.

She just knows him and he knows her. He thinks it transcends him far beyond whatever a crush was supposed to be. The true depth of his affections too alarming to consider any further than he already has. At least for now.

Because it’s hopeless, isn’t it?

He stands up from his desk, pacing the small space of his hut, exasperated at his self-discovery.

All he wants is for Rey to feel safe and comforted in all the ways she deserves. Despite how he longs to give that to her, he knows

But then he considers Rey. What may her feelings be? Not that he could pursue anything of course. Not here. But a smile ghosts his lips though as he imagines a distant future. One where they are far from the Academy. Perhaps when they are both finished with their training. A future where they are free to embrace such feelings. Free to love.

He slumps to the end of his bunk, aching at the thought.
Is that what these feelings were to become? Is that what the truth of these affections really meant? *Love*?

Ben isn’t even sure if he knows what that word really means or if he was even capable of it.

He falls further against the bed, the mattress creaking under his defeated mass. He stares openly at the ceiling, wondering how the fuck he managed to let himself fall so quickly to something so foreign and yet so achingly familiar. Almost as if Rey has existed in him all along.

But Ben knows when morning comes, these fantasies must cease. By now, he knows better to hope for something so outlandish.

Maybe he was being foolish after all. Foolish to believe Rey could ever care about him in such a way.

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Rey tosses and turns in her hut, fraught with the most traitorous thoughts. She had slept so soundly the night before and she expected a similar outcome for tonight considering all that happened. But she can’t seem to settle down. She feels restless. Her heart beats faster when she thinks about the source of her thoughts.

She looks over to her desk, admiring the sketchbook and supplies. The inkwells filled with liquid color she couldn’t wait to try for herself.

But they don’t distract her as much as she would like, too focused on the boy who gave them to her. The boy who inscribed the inside cover with her name in the finest penmanship she had ever seen. The boy she couldn’t stop thinking about.

Ben Solo.

During her time on Jakku, she seldom imagined of anyone but her parents but she admits there were a few occasions where she wondered what it may be like to have someone like her. Someone like Ben.

He told her just yesterday what the path of a Jedi looks like. At least when it comes to feelings and emotions of others.

*There is no emotion there is peace*, the code read.

So why does that disappoint her? Surely she should now realize that whatever this is is just part of finally having someone who understands her. Ben has lived here for years and he likely isn’t going through such troubles. Surely he doesn’t think this way and she shouldn’t either. She shouldn't escalate and build up to something that isn't really there.

Not that it would matter anyway. She was already risking enough for both her and Ben when it came to the severity of her secret. They couldn’t afford to add anything else to the list of things they shouldn’t be doing.

But no matter the excuses and rationality of it all, it does nothing to quiet the feelings she feels growing for her friend.

*Ben Solo*, she thinks again.

She smiles into her pillow, just thinking of what it would be like to live in a place where she didn’t need a reason to fall into his embrace. His hugs were warm and comforting. She doesn’t know if
she’s ever felt as safe as she has when her ear is pressed against his chest and his arms are wrapped around her. The sound of his beating heart the most soothing sound.

She thinks of how he told her he was proud of her.

She rather liked the look on his face when he did. And she just liked his face in general.

There are moments when she draws him where she stops making lines, just taking a moment to admire the lines of his face. The soft caress of his hair. The darkness of his eyes. His plush lips. The way the corners of them twitch when their eyes meet after a while.

Was it so impossible to think he could feel the same way? Her mind thinks fondly.

But she shakes her head, reminding herself of her predicament. They were training to be Jedi. Ben was the Master’s nephew. He was already harboring too dangerous a secret for her. And even if none of that were true, it probably wouldn’t change the fact that she and Ben were just friends.

She tries to keep the smile on her face at the thought. She should be happy that Ben was in her life at all and was her very loyal friend. But she knows deep down that she longs for more.

The thought makes her heartbeat quicken and she heaves a big sigh into the room, somehow feeling defeated after a day or many great things.

She tries to focus on the positives. It’s what usually helped her relax on her lonely nights on Jakku.

She tries to focus on the fact that when she wakes tomorrow, she will spend it with her friend and she has to accept that that’s all it will be.

Chapter End Notes

I'm sorry if this is stupid but hang in there. I think I'm going somewhere with this.
Ten days.

It’s been ten days and the longing in Ben’s chest has not receded or grown dim as he desperately hoped.

The feelings that had awakened in him that one night, the night he realized his feelings for Rey, have only intensified more and more by the day.

He sighs heavily into the quiet night, once again finding himself looking up at the ceiling and thinking of Rey.

He hardly knows how he’s keeping it as secret as he is. He wonders if his face betrays him at times when he watches her. If the affection he feels within him is evident on his face or in his eyes as well.

Sometimes, he thinks she might notice. When she looks at him and he thinks she might finally realize his feelings. Because in the past two weeks, her signature has only gotten stronger. She’s learned so well and he’s so proud of her and how far she’s come.

He tosses restlessly in his bed, grumbling to himself. Cursing his feelings but knowing they weren’t going anywhere. Whatever this was, this longing to be with Rey in a way he never could, won’t cease. It haunts him in his solitude but encourages him in her presence.

He has felt lost before. He’s felt confused for what he’s supposed to be or what he wanted for himself. But now he knows what he wants, but it’s far out of reach and even though he knows the course of action it would really be, it leaves him lost and wandering. Confused at what he’s supposed to do now that he knows he isn’t quite who he thought he was.

Ben thought he was able to abstain from thoughts like this. They have never plagued him before Rey but now that she’s here, they consume him. Her lingering glances, kind smiles, even the smallest touches keep him stuck in these thoughts.
“Fucking hell, I’m doomed,” he curses to himself, turning in his bed, groaning face down into his pillow.

He knows it’s only going to get worse from here.

Rey leads the way while they walk the now familiar path to the beach. Ben walks behind her, a little slower than he usually does.

He’s been strange all morning. At breakfast, he hardly looked at her. He wasn’t being mean or ignoring her in any way.

He just seemed...off.

She’s gotten used to Ben and the trust and friendship they’ve built over the past few weeks but he seems different today. She ignored it for a while, knowing everyone had their off days, but they were friends. Perhaps this is when she’s supposed to ask him if he’s okay.

This is when she’s supposed to show that she’s his friend, despite whatever she may really feel. Despite how he’s one of the first people to hold the title, the word ‘friend’ still feels insignificant to describe what she knows she really feels for him.

Those feelings within her that she has felt for a while now hardly relenting in their efforts.

Regardless of what they are to each other, her concern for him increases and she knows she must ask.

Rey halts on the path but it goes unnoticed by him as he continues making his way forward until he collides into her. It’s isn’t rough as he was walking slowly, but still, his mass is enough to make her stumble a bit and he quickly reaches out to stable her, clutching her arms. “Oh, sorry. I was looking down,” he says.

It’s the most she’s gotten out of him all morning but he pulls his arms away almost immediately, backing away from her.

She sighs. “Ben, what’s wrong?”

He finally meets her eyes again. “Wh-Nothing. I’m fine.”

“You don’t seem like it,” she says, trying to sound understanding.

His eyes go a little wide and he looks nervous suddenly. “I’m fine. Just tired I guess. I didn’t sleep well,” he insists though his tone is far from irritated. He really does sound tired but she wonders why. He steps ahead, making his way for the beach and she follows him, dejected.

Was something else bothering him? Suddenly the thought of those voices she heard from his memories returning. Had he heard them again?

She told him to tell her if they did, but what if he didn’t want to?

What if he didn’t trust her with that?

“Did you have a bad dream?”

She can’t see his face now as he walks ahead of her, but she can imagine how he must contemplate his answer in the beat of silence that follows. How he’s probably chewing the inside of his cheek
and looking at his feet.

The look he made when he was nervous or uncomfortable. The first one she was acquainted with when she first met him. Back when they could hardly say two words to each other.

They’ve come so far from that. Why were they going backwards?

“No, I just couldn’t really get comfortable,” he finally answers, still walking ahead.

She huffs to herself. She doesn’t want to doubt him but she feels like he’s shutting her out.

Perhaps it was their connection. It was something they still knew very little about. They were still learning what exactly their shared experience even was or what to call it when it came to researching it.

But regardless, something within Rey tells her that this isn’t nothing. Something is troubling Ben and she wants to help him.

They start to hear the waves as they get closer to the edge of the forest. She doesn’t want to start their lessons like this.

“Ben?” she starts, this time her voice a little more firm.

He must hear the change because he stops, turning to look at her. She got his attention now.

“Ben, is there something you’re not telling me?” she prods gently.

Ben gulps at her question, suddenly his heartbeat most deafening in his ears.

*She knew*, his mind screams. His fears have become reality. Rey knows how he feels and his weaknesses are painfully bare. It must be so obvious and he’s just embarrassing himself by thinking he could hide it.

“Rey, I…” His shoulders sink and he shuts his eyes. If she already knows then her reaction so far is hardly receptive.

Why did he bother living with such a shred of hope? The thought she would ever think of him in such a way.

He’s a fool. “I don’t know what to say,” he sighs.

She steps closer and he prepares himself for what’s coming. Maybe she’s going to slap him.

But then he feels her fingers wrap around his hand, gently running her thumb brush past his palm.

“Ben, did you hear those voices again?”

Did he...wait. “What?” He shakes his head, suddenly confused.

“Those voices I heard from the memories. Did you hear them again?” she asks him, worry dripping from her eyes and tone.

He quickly shakes his head, “No.”

“Because you told me you would tell me. I don’t want you to be afraid all alone and-“
“No,” he says again, this time catching her hand in his and squeezing ever so gently, trying to reassure her that he means his words. His own relief flooding him as he realizes what conclusion she’s come to. The truth of his upset remaining secret for now. “Rey, it’s not. I promise. I would tell you if it was.”

“Then what’s wrong? You seem...I don’t know. Not upset, but kind of lost.”

He sighs, reveling in the calluses of her fingertips but the tenderness of her palms. It’s like every aspect of Rey has two sides.

Rough but tender.

Strong but soft.

“I am kind of lost,” he admits. He looks back to her eyes, trying to gauge her reaction. Her brows knit ever closer and he knows she’s asking him to explain further.

She wants to understand.

And were their places reversed, he would hope that Rey would be honest with him. So, he will try to explain his strife in a way she might understand. In a way that conceals his true feelings.

“I...um. I’ve just been thinking lately and I guess...I guess just feel stuck, you know?”

She nods. “Is it me?”

Ben scoffs, giving her hand one more squeeze before letting go, knowing he’s held in for too long already. “No. Of course not, Rey. You’re the one thing that makes sense.”

That was mostly true. Rey was keeping him together, but slightly driving him crazy. But none of that is her fault. That was merely just his lack of control when it came to his emotions.

“I think you met me at a very strange time in my life.”

“Why?”

They continue their walk to the beach, side by side, arms touching. “Well, before you got here, I was already having some severe doubts about who I was and what I was supposed to do with myself.”

“You didn’t want to be a Jedi,” she says. It’s not a question, but a statement. A very true statement.

“It wasn’t exactly my first choice, no.”

“You told me something like that before.”

She was listening. It’s what made her a good student but an amazing friend, no matter how much the word felt like a punch to the gut.

Their boots sink into the sand and she moves to sit down, pulling him by the wrist to join her. “Do they know that? Your uncle and your parents? Don’t they know this isn’t what you really want?”

Ben scoffs, “They don’t know that much about me. They know I’m emotional and confused and a danger to myself. That’s why I’m here. The fact that I’m here to become a Jedi, a decision that affects my entire life, that was all arranged without my collaboration. The choice was made because I’m just a fuck up that can’t-“
“Ben, you’re not,” she says rather assertively.

He gives another heavy sigh. “Well then, I don’t know what I am or what I’m supposed to be. I don’t think I agree with all the Jedi believe and now I don’t know what to do. Because I know there’s nothing I can do. Not really.” He looks down, running his fingers through the sand, trying to focus on the mindless patterns he leaves behind, trying to distance himself from the truth that lives within him. The one he fears may expose itself if he looks at Rey too closely.

“I’m sorry,” she says quietly.

He looks to her, frowning slightly. “No, Rey. It’s not your fault.”

“I know, but that sounds hard. I’m sorry you feel like that.”

Ben shrugs, unsure of how to answer. “I don’t know. Maybe I’m just being selfish. If I were a real Jedi, I wouldn’t be so caught up in how all this makes me feel. I would be able to abstain from having these feelings.” The honesty and desperation of his actual feelings remaining secret to him. But he feels slightly relieved that in a way, he can find a way to confess to her of his troubles.

Rey shakes her head. “I think your feelings are what make you who you are. I don’t think you should change.”

“Well, I don’t really like who I am.”

“I do,” she says with a kind smile and Ben thinks his heart is going to burst out of his chest. He notices how her hands have started to mimic his movements in the sand as she leaves behind her own designs. Hers looking more precise and elegant, ever the artist.

He takes another deep breath but this time he relaxes, the tension within him relenting at her words and his own admissions. Despite that the depth of his feelings hasn’t been revealed, at least their trust remains.

“So, what did you want to be then?”

“Hmm?”

“When you were a kid, what did you want to be? If you weren’t here, what would you be doing?” she asks.

He hasn’t thought about that in a long time. “I wanted to be a pilot,” he admits.

Her head turns to him, her eyes looking surprised. “Like your dad?”

He nods. “I thought since he was the best in the galaxy, he would show me what there was to know...but every time we flew together, he just seemed irritated. I always liked it though. Flying.”

Rey nods in understanding, the smallest smile gracing her face. “I’ve mostly just flown in simulators, but I’ve always liked it. I think it would be fun to be a pilot.”

Ben stills his hands in the sand, suddenly curious. “What did you wanna be?”

She shrugs, “I don’t know. As much as I liked to imagine a different life with my parents, it was hard to think of a time where I didn’t have to be a scavenger. I just got so used to it. But if I could be anything, I think I would want to fly places too. I don’t think I want to get stuck in one place again.”
Ben knows how it feels to be stuck. He nods, looking to her in blossoming fondness. “So, in a perfect life, we’re both pilots, flying anywhere we want. I would know how to talk to people without sounding like an asshole and you would draw everything you saw, making it look even prettier than it actually is.”

She laughs, the sound making his chest inflate. “I like that. Sounds fun.”

*Fun.* Ben forgot about that word but realizes that in these moments where he and Rey can pretend they were somewhere else is more fun than he could remember having in a long time. And the thought of flying around the galaxy with her and showing her everything she’s always dreamed of. It sounded like fun.

“It does.”

It also sounded like more than he should ever hope for.

A dream. But the good kind.

Not that he usually has those.

A few days later, they’re back at the cove. He brought some bo staffs with them to practice some combat training. She didn’t have a saber yet so it was really the best they could do.

But Rey seemed to be no stranger to the intensity required when it came to combat. Or wielding a staff.

She’s mentioned before that she used to have a staff of her own and he had seen it in her memories. And she certainly knows how to use it.

If anything, Ben feels like he’s learning a few things from her. Her technique, or perhaps lack of it, is what makes her such a worthy opponent. She knows when to strike and what to look out for without relying on more typical moves. Not to mention she’s extremely agile and adaptive to so many situations.

When she knocks him on the arm, putting her one point ahead, he groans. “Damn. You’re so fast.”

She laughs. “I practiced a lot back on Jakku. In the evenings.”

They start again. The ends of their sticks clacking as the begin. “Did a lot of people meet the end of this thing like I am or am I not as good at this as I thought?”

“Oh no, you’re horrible. Really,” she says fighting a smile and he knows she’s teasing him. They both counter the other’s movements, circling each other in the sand. “Worst adversary I’ve ever met,” she tells him with a smirk.

“Oh, well I’m sorry I’m such a disappointment,” he smirks. “But, you’re only one point ahead. No need to be so rude.”

For a moment all that is heard is the clacking of the sticks and the swift sound of the staffs striking through the air as they spin them.

And then Ben gets a lucky break when he tags her on her leg. “Oh, look at that. Even again,” he says smugly. “Not so horrible, I guess.”
Rey huffs and he rejoices at the look on her face. She’s not mad. In fact, she looked rather amused. He soaks it in, not wanting to forget how she looks. Her cheeks are red. Her forehead is sweaty her hair is a wild mess. And yet, she still looks beautiful as always.

There’s that word again. Filling him with joy as much as dread.

In the midst of his daydreaming, he finds himself stumbling to the sand. She’s knocked him down and he lands on his rear.

Rey laughs and he doesn’t even care that he looks like a fool. She puts a hand over her mouth, trying to hold it back.

“Technically, that’s cheating,” he tells her.

She shakes her head, “No, I think this is called winning.”

“Fine,” he concedes or at least pretends to. She was right. In a real fight, she would have to seize windows of opportunity. But he hardly cares about winning now but a new idea comes to mind. “Help me up, my ass hurts.” He holds out his hand and she reaches forward, almost looking guilty. Ben smirks as he pulls her down to join him in the sand. She yelps as she falls, landing beside him.

“Ben Solo!” She scolds him but he can tell she’s trying to hold back a smile. “How dare you!”

He smirks. “Looks like it’s a tie after all.”

“You smug bastard. You can’t do that. I still win.” Ben finds himself far too amused at this version of Rey. The one that wanted to be mad at him but was too busy holding back laughter to do so. It makes his stomach flutter. Even more so when he sees she hasn’t let go of his hand.

“Yes, you still win.”

She rejoices for a moment before leaning back in the sand, her hand slipping out of his. They remain there for a long moment, catching their breath and watching the waves as they lazily lap along the shore.

Ben takes the time to realize that he feels more at ease than he’s been in...well, he doesn’t know how long, but it makes him feel good, regardless. It makes his gaze shift until he’s looking at her again, watching as she closes her eyes, letting the mild spray carried by the breeze grace her features.

“Ben?”

“Hmm?” he hums, snapping his attention back to the sea, pretending like he hadn’t been staring at her.

“How do you think we’ll find out more about what happened?”

He rouses out of his daze, realizing she was asking him about their connection. The connection they still don’t know much about despite consulting the plethora of books and holos in the library. And despite the tidal wave of thoughts and emotions that have plagued him since he realized what he really felt for this girl.

He sighs a little. He was at a loss of where to go from here. He definitely wasn’t going to consult Luke so it left them to their own devices. “I don’t know. But even if we can’t find anything on it, that doesn’t mean it wasn’t real. Maybe we even discovered something of our own.”
Rey smiles. “‘Something of our own,’” she repeats. “We seem to have a lot of those things.”

Ben’s heart beats way too fast for his liking, hoping his face wasn’t betraying him and his efforts to conceal what her words really did to him. Just the barest implication that she thinks about their connection as seriously as he does is a very dangerous concept although the more selfish parts of his brain rejoice at the possibility.

“We’ll figure it out. No matter what it takes, I think we’re meant to figure it out together. Search for it.”

“Scavenge,” she reiterates. Ben nearly frowns but she keeps her smile, making him think she wasn’t so devastated at the prospect. And maybe she wasn’t. Maybe she was trying to redefine it. Give it a new, clearer meaning.

He shrugs, “Sure, scavenge.”

Their breath has finally settled from their shared exercise but Ben still feels sweaty. Suddenly, the calm waves calling to him in a way they seldom do. A new thought coming to mind.

“Do you know how to swim?”

She snorts immediately and although he knew it was probably a stupid question, he thought it best to ask.

“No. Wouldn’t even know how to go about it really,” she says shaking her head.

Opportunity blooms in his chest, overpowering the sound reason telling him to stop. Was he really about to suggest something that may only strengthen his burdening feelings? Was he about to give himself more insight into something he could never have?

Yes. Because regardless of how he feels about it, he knows it would make Rey happy. “What if I taught you?”

She spins her whole head to look at him. “Really?” Her eyes look surprised at the proposal. “Could we?”

He nods. “It’s a good skill to have. I think you should know how. Safer that way.” It was practical. The sudden thought of her drowning comes to mind and the urgency to teach her intensifies. He gives a small sigh of relief when she accepts.

“Okay,” she says, sitting up straighter but unsure what to do next. “Here?”

He stands up. “Yeah, here.”

Ben rises from the sand and she just watches him for a minute, intrigued and excited to go in the water. But then she sees him lift his tunic over his head, leaving him in just a thin shirt to cover his chest and she wonders if he’s going to keep going. Her heart speeds up, her thoughts screaming that yes, she wants him to.

But her senses break through and she looks away. She had seen a collection of people strip down to nothing and jump in the watering hole before they were punished for dirtying the water supply. She knew what a naked man looked like, but felt unprepared to see that from Ben.

“Are, um...are we supposed to swim naked?” she asks, anxious of what his response might be.
Suddenly, she hears a loud thud in the sand and she turns back around to see Ben has landed back on the sand. His face and ears bright red. “Uh…” he clears his throat, “No.” He starts chuckling. “Kriff, Rey, of course not.” He covers his face with his hand, hiding his embarrassment that she hadn’t meant to cause him.

She starts laughing too, “Well, I didn’t know how far you were gonna go. I didn’t think people swam in their clothes.”

“They don’t actually,” he says, halting whatever he was doing to speak to her. Her comment probably startling him and she feels so ridiculous for jumping to such a conclusion. “Usually, people wear bathing suits.”

“What do those look like?” she asks curiously.

His cheeks stay red. “They resemble basics,” he answers, unable to meet her eyes. “But we can just swim in our clothes, I was just taking the tunic off because it’ll be easier to move. When fabric gets wet it weighs you down.”

She hums in understanding. “It would also be suspicious is we returned with our clothes totally drenched, wouldn’t it?”

His head lowers. “I guess it would.”

At that, Rey decides to be bold and pull off the first layer of her own tunic. “We can do it another time then when…” Ben’s voice trails off. “Rey, what are you doing?”

“Well, you said they look like basics and we can’t get our clothes all wet so we can just swim in our basics,” she explains, undoing her belt.

She hears him clear his throat, “Uh, yeah. You’re right. It’d probably be best.”

Her heart picks up when she hears him fiddle with the buckles of his own belt, but she tampers it down, reminding herself that this was purely academic. She was just learning to swim. Just as the staffs are the equipment for combat training, this attire is the equipment for swimming.

She chants that in her head when she turns to see Ben’s bare chest in the daylight. The chest she’s thought about way too much. How her head fit against it so tenderly and how she can hear his heartbeat against her ear. How warm he is.

She’s wondered what he might look like without a shirt on, but this was unfair. How is she supposed to keep herself from drowning when he looked like that?

Maybe she should have just swum in her clothes and told the others she fell in. But then Ben lays out his clothes and steps closer to the shore, clad in his black underwear that stops at his mid thigh. She follows after him, forgetting for a moment how traitorous her thoughts had turned. Instead, her ankles are met with the surprising and refreshing feeling of the water rushing past her.

It’s not warm, but it’s not cold either.

It’s perfect.

Ben wades ahead, stepping until he’s waist deep in the water. She looks up at him, knowing her face is split in half with the smile that aches her cheeks.

He smiles back and whatever awkwardness that existed on the sand dissipates instantly. Slowly,
she steps out to join him. “Whoa,” she breathes out when the cool water touches the skin of her stomach. It’s more sensitive to the cooler temperature but after a moment it isn’t so bad.

She turns around to look at the beach, surprised at how far away it looks. She didn’t think she had walked that far but she can hardly tell by now which discarded pile of clothes is hers or Ben’s.

“Watch our there’s a-“ She turns back to Ben to heed what he was saying when she suddenly steps into something deeper, her body slipping further beneath the surface. She doesn’t go under completely, but her face is all that sticks out. She hears Ben say something but she can’t hear it, the water muffling his voice with her ears under water.

“What?” she asks, wondering how to get out but then she feels his hands wrap around her arms, pulling her from the hole, the surface of the water returning to her stomach.

“Sorry, that was my fault,” he says. He runs a hand through his hair and it slicks back with the added water, making her gulp. She shakes her head.

“No, it’s fine.”

He relaxes his hold on her arms and she instantly misses the heat he had supplied although the water wasn’t cold.

He purses lip before he seems to decide on what to do. “Let’s start with floating.”

Ben can’t decide if this is the best or the worst idea he’s ever had.

His head is still spinning at the fact that he was swimming with Rey while they were in their underwear. Thankfully, she’s got on a thin tank top over her breast band, saving him from further torment. And he spent a lot of time showing her how to tread water and keeping her above the surface with how to move her arms and how to kick her feet.

It’s actually quite academic and straightforward. And still, despite the innocence of it all, it feels like the most scandalous things he’s ever done and Ben wonders if this is what normal seventeen-year-olds do.

But if the standards for what other teenagers do are based on what he’s seen from his other classmates, he doesn’t really want to be normal. Not in that way at least.

He just wants to be with Rey.

There are moments where she gets ahold of something and she laughs a little, smiling at the accomplishment and he tells her what a good job she did. It makes him smile too and he forgets for a moment everything else.

He feels happy.

And then there are the moments where his hand accidentally holds her arm or her waist when he doesn’t want her to fall and his chest burns or he goes deaf with blood rushing past his ears. He pulls away from her quickly in those moments, not wanting to make her uncomfortable.

It only gets worse when she doesn’t seem to mind.

And that’s why he was feeling so conflicted with something as fleeting as touch.

But Rey is having a fun time and picking up quickly as she tends to do. It distracts him enough for
him to enjoy himself too instead of torturing himself as usual. He knows there will be plenty of time for that later.

For now, he laughs as Rey splashes him with water when he pretends to mock her form. He laughs when she spins around in the water, making ripples and small waves in the gentle tide of the cove.

He smiles when she moves to float on her back, gazing up at the clouds. He watches her for a moment, feeling as focused on her now as he is when they meditate. Like the rest of the world falls away. Even his doubts and trepidations that he thought would plague him until he died.

“It’s so beautiful here.”

He looks up to where her attention is, moving to his back and coming to float beside her.

He looks up to the sky as she does, admiring the oranges and pinks that grace the atmosphere. The sun sets on the other side of the forest but he knows this sky is accompanied with it. The night approaching.

“Yeah, it is,” he sighs. He’s never thought so much about the place. He’s mostly felt disdain for it. But it feels different now.

He feels different.

It feels like hours as they drift there but he knows that it could only be minutes as the last light of the day begins to fade.

He doesn’t even realize they’ve been floating there in silence for as long as they have because it’s been pleasant. Content. A stark contrast to the long awkward silences when they first met. When he was still certain she had no place here and he was too selfish to bother with how she may have felt.

So much had changed in such a brief amount of time.

Ben sighs into the air knowing that soon the dinner bell would ring and regardless of their dry clothes on the shore, the rest of them, including their hair, was very wet. Their fingers pruned and wrinkly, or at least his were. He recalls a modestly sized rag in his backpack that they could attempt to use as a towel.

“We should head back to shore.” He shifts his feet to land back on the sand floor, the water rising to his chest. “Don’t want to-” he starts but chokes on his words when he realizes he’s talking to himself.

Rey isn’t there.

His heart speeds up, spinning all around. “Rey!” The water looks so much darker, so much more threatening, at the thought that Rey may be beneath it. “Rey! Where are you?” he shouts, feeling all around. What has he done? He’s failed her.

And right before he dives in, fighting down the sob in his throat to gather all the air he could, Rey breeches in the water, splashing him from behind.

“Boo!” He spins around to see her laughing and dripping from where she had been hiding beneath the water. “Gotcha.”

He brings a hand to his chest, giving a big sigh. “Damnit, Rey. Don’t do that!”
Her smile falls and she stands straight. “Sorry, I-I didn’t mean to—“

“No, I know you didn’t, you just...you really scared me. I thought—” he steps closer to her. “Kriff, I don’t know what I thought. Please don’t scare me like that.”

“You’re right. I’m sorry.”

He knows everything is fine but he panicked so bad. His body is taking a moment to catch back up and he turns away from her, not wanting to appear weak, walking back for the sand.

He hears the water splash with the rise of her legs as she follows him, other than that, the silence has returned between them. “Ben, really. I’m sorry. It wasn’t funny.”

He holds up his hand. “It’s fine. It just really freaked me out.” he breathes out.

As they step further out of the water, it’s at his mid-calves when he feels the slight tug of his arm. Her hand clamping to his wrist. He halts, turning to look at her. The lingering light of the day, the water shining on her skin and her hair tangled but sticking to her neck in dark tendrils. All of it combined making her look like a something near ethereal. A woman from ancient ocean myths who has come to tempt him beneath the water and never breathe again. And were she one of them, he would probably let her.

Her eyes are wide now as she looks up at him. “Ben?” she asks, nothing more.

He knows what she’s trying to say though and he gives a heavy sigh. “I thought you were hurt, Rey,” disclosing his full distress.

Her hand moves from his wrist, her fingers finding his and her thumb brushing past his knuckles. She steps even closer as she whispers to him, “I’m fine. Really. Everything’s fine.”

He can’t hold himself back. He doesn’t even realize he’s doing it until he hears her small gasp of surprise when he pulls her to him, wrapping his arms around her.

He doesn’t know why he did it, or why he’s so affected by what was meant to be a joke, but he had been terrified. And although he knew Rey was okay, it seemed like holding her, hugging her was the only way he could accept the fact that everything was fine.

What was happening to him? He couldn’t behave like this. Not when the truth of his feelings needed to remain hidden.

But she holds him back and when he feels her hands grip his bare back, he thinks he’s about to burst. Her hands are small, he knows, but now that he feels them on his skin, her hands seem to hold him completely and he feels like he may have drowned after all.

And he doesn’t want to do anything about it. He wants to stay here, near ankle deep in the water, holding close to her the way they are, for however long he can. For however long he can pretend like this was the entire world. The entire galaxy consisting of some ocean, some trees, some lingering light of day, and them.

She tucks her head against his chest like she has done all the other times they have hugged. Her ear flat against his heart. He rests his cheek on the side of her head. His lips are so close to her temple. Close enough to press them there.

He’s thought of it only a few times but she’s never been in his arms when the opportunity presented itself. It makes his heart beat faster.
She must notice because she pulls back to look at him. The evidence of his condition likely obvious as she could hear for herself how fast his heart was pounding again.

"Ben?" she whispers, looking up at him. Now her face is just inches from his. It's so close that he can feel her breath on his face. As he sees a strand of her hair shift, he knows she can feel his. When he looks back to her eyes, he could swear he see them drift down to his lips.

And so his eyes drift to hers.

Does he dare? Does she want that too? What if she doesn't?

If she doesn’t, how is he any different from the vile people on Jakku? What if he’s just like all the other assholes that have tried to hurt her?

What if she does? Hope burning in his chest at the possibility.

But then in the distance, they both hear the inevitable dinner bell and they pull away from each other, breaking out of whatever trance they had been in. Had they almost...? No, it couldn't be.

Ben shakes his head, turning back for the shore. "We should get dressed and hurry back."

"Right. Of course," Rey says, clearing her throat and shaking her head as they make haste for their pile of clothes. They laugh briefly about how cold it suddenly feels, both trying to find a middle ground of conversation. Anything but which they had just done.

When they are dressed as well as they could be, their hair still damp, they make back through the forest, each carrying a staff over their shoulder. They speak about what BX might have made for dinner as Rey claims how hungry she is.

It's like the events in the water, the moment where they had both clung to each other, never happened. Ben knows it’s probably for the best, even if it doesn’t feel like it.

Regardless of what it was, he knows the thought of it will keep him up all night and very likely many to come.

Chapter End Notes

Sort of but no really the inspo for this:
BTW I got a Supreme Leader Kylo Ren Disney pin and it's probably the best purchase I ever made. My 12-year-old sister got Rey and Kylo rag dolls and then walked around the park with their faces smushed together saying, "Look at the babes! This is their future!"

Needless to say, I was very proud.
They are sitting in the mess hall, eating breakfast. Ben sits across from Rey and she watches as he eats his oatmeal even though she knows he hates oatmeal. Rey eats her own, but not as enthusiastically as she usually does. She keeps looking at him and she really hopes he doesn’t notice because for some reason she can’t look away.

It’s been several days since they went swimming, and although they carry on about as regularly as they usually do, the memories of that day are a constant distraction.

Really, nothing has changed, but Rey can’t help but feel like something has. She felt like there was a strange sense of pretending between them as they both evaded any mention of it. Although they had just not spoken of it though, she nearly felt like they were keeping secrets. Something they had sworn not to do.

She has spent far too long at night, thinking of how they stood there in the water, staring at each other. Close enough that she could feel the warmth of his breath on her face or how the water from his brow dripped all the way down to his lips.

She had thought about his lips often. Before that, she had tried to confine them to a studious nature. Admiring them for how they looked and how she liked to draw them. But at that moment, she realized just how desperately she wanted to taste them.

And when she looked up at him, she could have sworn his eyes were looking at her own lips. Had he leaned forward then? Or had she leaned forward? Or has she spent so long thinking about it that it was now a muddled memory? Perhaps she wasn’t recalling any of it as it actually happened.

Whatever it was, they both seemed to know not to bring it up, to which she can’t help but be relieved. Rey is afraid of where such a conversation would lead. Unsure if she could trust herself and curious as to what might have happened if the dinner bell hadn’t rung.

“Rey?” she hears his voice and she’s pulled from her thoughts with a jolt, realizing he had said something.

“Hmm? What?”

“I asked if you wanted to go to the library today,” he asks, his expression a little concerned at her initial lack of response. She steeled herself into focus, not wanting to appear as distant as she really felt.

“Yeah, sure. Okay.”

“Okay. After lunch, we can spar again if you want. Maybe meditate or practice levitating. Whatever you want,” he shrugs, leaving the options up to her.
“Yeah,” she says, nodding her approval though she knows he shouldn’t need it. He is her tutor after all. “Yeah, that sounds nice.”

The day passes as Ben suggested. The went to the library until lunch where Rey read more about the old republic and they discussed how it varied from the new one. He talked about his mother being a senator but they mostly just talked about what politicians actually do rather than his mother herself and the current frailty of their relationship, regardless if she chose to ignore it.

After lunch, they went back to the cove with bo staffs over each of their shoulders. They remained there until they heard the dinner bell again although this time they were totally dry and clothed. Ben resisted even looking at the water today as he knew he would only think of what happened last time they were here.

It was the main reason he’s hardly slept for the past few days. The memory of them holding close to each other in the water. The closest they’ve ever been.

It’s left him a bit of a mess in his own company while his time with Rey has been difficult on its own. He’s trying to go along with the supposed act that it never occurred. At least that was the game that they seemed to be playing.

He was grateful for it during their lessons when he knew that’s all they could do. Acknowledging it might compromise the steady place they have found.

At night, he curses it, wishing he had the courage to do anything but act as if it had no effect on him. Which according to the near novel length entries he had written on the subject, was about as far from the truth Ben has ever been.

But now as they make their way back to the temple, stomachs hungry, and ignorance seemingly buried as they chat about what they might work on tomorrow.

“Staffs again? Or should we try hand to hand combat?” she says and despite the small smile on her face, he can’t tell if she’s joking or not.

He’s not sure he could handle that. “Uh…” he clears his throat, “If you wanted to.”

She shakes her head. “I’m kidding.”

He chuckles a little, trying to think what the best approach in her training should be. He feels like no matter how much they spar with staffs, Jedi training should consist of how to handle a lightsaber, especially considering how well she’s caught on.

A new idea comes to mind and he clings to it, glad for a task that didn’t fill him with conflict or guilt. The concept to get Rey a lightsaber was a definite one because he knew she was ready for it.

She seemed ready for anything. A stark contrast to himself, he thinks. He never thought he was prepared for anything thrown at him, least of all Rey.

She must notice he’s thinking because she prods him gently with the end of her staff. “You okay?”

Did everybody do what they did? Was that just part of having social skills that he missed out on for the past seventeen years? Could discovering more about someone be as easy as asking them what they were thinking and being willing to share?

It probably is, but he adds it to the mental list of things that he and Rey are adept at. Pretending
like they are the ones to discover it because he believes whatever they've found is a profound discovery all on its own.

Even if it’s all on his side, it still feels important.

“Yeah,” he answers, feeling enthusiastic at his new idea. “I was just thinking.”

“That sounds dangerous,” she says with a smirk.

Ben pulls his staff from his shoulder, holding it out in front of her so she can’t pass. She halts, turning to look at him with curious eyes. Chuckling when she no doubt sees the smile he feels appearing on his face, despite how he tried to keep it hidden.

“Do tell.”

He unclips his saber at his belt, looking at it in his hand. Her attention falls to it as well. “Here, hold it for a moment.”

Obviously, they’ve talked about lightsabers. She’s seen some of the other students training with their own when they pass by the classes during regular lessons. But he realizes that he’s never really let her feel for herself the power that is accompanied with a lightsaber.

And it’s a power he knows she’s ready for. More so than at least half of their classmates that already have them in possession.

Slowly, she reaches out and takes it. Her fingers barely touch past his palm and they both gasp. Rey likely does it from holding the saber while the contact of her skin alone is the source of his.

He backs up, taking her staff and giving her some space. She looks at him apprehensively for a moment before he gives her an encouraging nod.

“Try it.”

Biting her lip, she looks to it. Hesitant at first but her expression resolves into one of courage as she ignites it. A blue glow illuminating her face. Her eyes go wide and his heart seems to expand in his chest at the look on her face.

It makes every hair on her body stand straight as the hum from the saber spreads through her body. She brings her other hand to it, worried she might drop it or cut down a nearby tree if she wasn’t careful. Even as it wavers slightly in the air, she feels like she might have caused some damage.

What was she doing? She wasn’t able to handle this?

“Ben, I can’t—” she looks to him, pretending to ignore how the blue glow illuminates his features so well, combined with the dwindling sunlight that peaks through the trees.

“You can,” he insists. “Focus on the energy within it. How does it make you feel?”

She huffs at first, realizing she’s fallen into another one of their lessons. But as she closes her eyes and reaches out, she feels the essence of the saber. The energy concealed within. The crystal at its heart speaking to her in a language she didn’t know she knew.

And warmth blooms within her when she knows it feels like Ben.

She opens her eyes, emboldened by the power she’s found and spins it in her hand, watching the
light of the blade slice the air. The humming intensifying with every move.

It isn’t so scary after all.

When she looks back to Ben, he’s smiling. “So?”

She chuckles. “I like it.”

“Good. ‘Cause you’re going to make your own.”

She deactivates it then, stepping closer to him. “Really?”


“Wow,” she breathes out. “You think so?”

He nods again, most earnestly. “I know you are.”

She beams at his words before she presses his saber back into his hands. Her fingertips tingle again, her skin seeming to want to fuse to his but she resists it, pulling back when the rest of her screams to stay.

“Thank you, Ben.”

He smiles. “Thank you, Rey,” he says though Rey can’t imagine why.

As they continue to stroll back, she can’t be bothered to ask, her thoughts lost to what it might be like to have a lightsaber of her own.

Ben fills his tray with food quickly before he leaves to go speak with Luke in his quarters. There’s no line for food tonight as they arrived a little later than they usually do, given the impromptu saber discussion on the way back.

But she hardly minds, feeling all too excited for the possibility that lies ahead. She turns with her tray, making her way for their table, not even minding that she will dine alone for now. She sits down digging into her food, thinking of Ben’s words and how happy they made her.

She pulls out her sketchbook, planning to finish a sketch from earlier while she nibbles at her food. She opens to a page where she had been drawing Ben and decides that his hair could be a little darker, giving her an easy enough task of shading while she eats with one hand.

But then another tray plops down across from her and she snaps her head up to see the face of Armitage, grinning like a smug prick as he asks, “Mind if I join you? You look like you could use some company.”

No, she didn’t. She was obviously occupying her time just fine. Maybe too obviously actually. Looking down, she closes her sketchbook, concealing the portrait of Ben and pulling her tray closer. “Go ahead,” she answers him.

Armitage gives a weird kind of laugh before sitting down, leaning over as far as he can on his elbows, just staring at her. “How are your lessons going?”

Rey doubts this is just his attempt at pleasant conversation but decides to play along with it anyway. She can only assume that a negative response would only encourage him further. If she played along she could keep herself from his ridicule.
“Great, actually.”

“Well, I’m glad to hear it, though I can’t say I’m surprised. Ever since you’ve arrived, it seems like Solo has been very dedicated to your education.”

“Well, he is my teacher as far as I’m concerned. That would make sense.”

“Although, Solo was also the biggest trouble in regular classes. No doubt his uncle was just trying to get rid of him. That and perhaps he didn’t think it would be best to have someone as new as yourself in such a progressed class,” he shrugs nonchalantly but Rey knows it’s meant to be an insult.

“Maybe it would be too quickly paced for a new student, but if the most troublesome student in the class received the task of teaching me, I’m rather glad it was. He actually seems to know what he’s talking about.”

“Right. Of course,” Hux says, looking into his food, seemingly unsatisfied that the conversation didn’t go the way he wanted it to. What she said was a little rude, she knows, but it was worth it to get him off his ego for a moment.

“I notice you draw in that book rather often. Are you an artist?”

Rey shrugs, shaking her head. “I just like to draw. I don’t know if that makes me an artist.”

“Oh, modest too, I see. That or they must be truly embarrassing,” he laughs. “Can I see?” He holds out his hand, expecting her to say yes.

“Uhh, no. They’re private.”

He scoffs. “Nothing stays private for very long around here, you know.” He reaches forward, attempting to grab it but she summons it quickly to her hands.

She thought it was subtle enough, but it draws the attention of some of his friends. Xid and Soldar particularly, taking notice and turning in their seats to watch.

“Well, I see you are learning something after all,” Hux laughs, leaning back into his seat. “That’s okay. You don’t have to share if you don’t want to.”

“Well, thank you,” she says. Her words holding little gratitude. She shouldn’t have to thank him for what he should know is just basic decency. To mind his own business and respect that she didn’t want to share her sketchbook with him.

“Do you draw people?” he asks a moment later. He was rather good at keeping himself composed. His face is nowhere near as expressive as Ben’s.

But his question makes her panic a little. Had he seen her drawings of Ben? Was he mocking her?

“Sometimes,” she answers, pretending like she wasn’t as mad as she actually was. If Hux knew he really upset her, he would probably only pester her further.

He chuckles, nodding to himself. “Well, I know you do. I saw Ben’s ugly mug on the page when I walked up. Of course, no offense to your skills of course. You depicted him as well as you could. I just mean his face really does nothing for him. Does it?” Hux says this with a laugh, assuming she will agree with him.
She frowns, “‘Does it?’” she repeats, confused.

“Well, all I mean is that he hardly could flatter your abilities as well as someone else’s features could. Like myself for instance. Why don’t you draw me?”

*Why doesn’t she just throw her whole tray of food in his face while she’s at it? What an asshole.*

She should storm out now. To hell with the people that would laugh as she went and mock her when she reacts as they probably anticipated. And she doesn’t care that they think of her. If this is how they think of Ben then she doubts anything she says will change their opinion.

But then she has an intriguing idea and despite how childish it sounds, she finds herself nodding. She knows she shouldn’t, but it’s too tempting. Especially when he was being such an ass.

“That’s not a bad idea. It’s good to practice all kinds of people.”

Contradicting her earlier thought, Hux actually does look slightly surprised. “Well, it’s good to know you see some sense of reason.”

“Oh, thanks,” he says, stepping in and making for the living area where he sees Luke speaking to someone on the holonet. Parents by the look of it.

Luke hangs up on what Ben thinks must be Boris’ father. Given that he was the only Chadra-Fan at the Academy. His uncle gives a big sigh as he falls back on the couch. “Kriff, this is exhausting.”

“How many more do you have to do?”

He chuckles. “That was just the third one. Eleven more to go.”

Ben counts quickly enough to wonder if he was planning on calling someone for Rey. Unless of course, Maz was available.

Luke leans over to grab some food from his own tray before he pats the spot on the couch next to him. “Come. Sit down.”

Ben obliges and moves his tray to the small knee-high table. He sits down, leaning on his elbows,
Luke notices, chuckling with a smile this time. “Are you alright? You’re doing that almost smile that you never do.”

Ben rolls his eyes. “I’m not smiling,” he insists.

Luke shrugs while he takes another bite, responding with a full mouth. “Well, not anymore, you’re not.” He sits up a little straighter and gives a small sigh of his own. Ben wonders if he’s annoyed that his intrusion gave him less downtime from his overly exhausting task of speaking to parents. “What’s on your mind? This must be the first time you’ve come to me by choice. Is there something going on with Rey?”

Ben’s composure betrays him for a brief moment, worried at the accusation he thought Luke was insinuating. But he realizes that he’s not asking if there’s something with him and Rey. He’s merely asking about Rey’s lessons and how they were going.

“Well, she’s doing really good. Amazing actually and I was wondering—”

“No,” Luke says before he could even finish the sentence. “I know what you’re going to ask and the answer is no.”

Ben fumes, shaking his head. “Would you at least hear me out before you reject my idea, please?”

“Fine, go ahead.”

Ben’s jaw is clenched as he tries to tamper down the words he’d really like to say. But he sticks to the ones he was running over in his head since he thought of it in the forest. “I think Rey is ready for a lightsaber.”

Luke shakes his head. “And I already said no.”

“But she’s working really hard and I know this is happening very fast but—”

“Exactly. She’s been here just a few weeks, Ben. Maybe not even that. She’s not ready for it.”

“But she is. I’m the one with her all day. You left me in charge to train her. I thought you trusted me.”

“I do.”

“Then why don’t you trust me with this?”

“It’s not that I don’t trust you, Ben. It’s the fact that I don’t believe she’s ready for this. None of the rest of you got your lightsabers until well after a year of actual training.”

Ben shakes his head. “Rey isn’t like the rest of the students, Luke. She’s different.”


Ben shakes his head, casting aside his own feelings to make his point. “She doesn’t need a year to prove that she’s ready for this responsibility. This is the girl that lived her whole life on a desert planet and looked after herself. She knows more about responsibility than most of those other monkey-lizards will ever know!”

Luke rolls his eyes. “Okay, well, I’m not going to have a serious conversation with you until you
can actually be serious.”

“I am serious. I wouldn’t suggest this unless I was.”

“Okay, well, regardless if you’re serious or not, I would be more comfortable until I knew for myself of how Rey is progressing. Although you are her tutor, I am still the Master to all my students, including you. This is not your decision to make. When I believe she’s ready, I will permit her to go to Illum and construct her saber. Understood?”

Ben’s heart sinks. He already told Rey about it.

“Fine. Never mind then.” Ben stands up, leaving his tray of food which he hardly touched. He can hear Luke scoff as he heads back for the door. “I just thought you should know that Rey is an amazing student and she’s more capable than anyone else here. I can feel it.”

Before Luke could say anything else, he storms out heading back downstairs.

He tries to think of what he’ll say to Rey. He’ll try to explain that although it won’t be now, it will happen at some point. He supposes that’s the best he could do at this point.

As he rounds the end of the stairs, he sees how some of the other students are leaving, having finished their food.

They don’t seem to notice him as he walks past them. He sees Iella and Dono attached at the hip, whispering and giggling. He never pays attention to what it is but he halts when he hears Iella Rey’s name.

“Why is he even talking to Rey anyway? She’s like a scab with limbs.”

Dono laughs. “Well, he’s probably just trying to get her to come tonight. If Armie wants to make out with a ‘scab’ then that’s his problem.”

Iella groans in disgust and they leave the temple, making the way down the path to the huts. But Ben doesn’t focus on that. He’s too upset about what he just heard. Not only what they said about Rey. That was enough to nearly make him spin around and shout at them. But then they mentioned Hux.

His heart beats a little faster at the concept. Rey going to those late night rendezvous...with Hux!

No. Ben wasn’t even gone that long. Last they spoke of Hux, Rey thought he was a pain in the ass. She wouldn’t be sitting with him or even considering going to hang out with people that are horrendous enough to call her a scab.

But then he hears Hux’s loathsome voice from the mess hall. He slowly makes his way to the large entrance of the room. He takes a deep breath, hoping he’s just being ridiculous because he was being overly ridiculous wasn’t he? He looks around the corner, looking for the table they usually sat at and selfishly hoping that she was alone. Rey was sensible and she wouldn’t...

His heart drops when he sees her. At their table. Right across from Hux.

*Kriffing Hux!*

He’s talking about something but he can’t hear what because blood is rushing past his ears. He looks back at her. She’s drawing in her sketchbook, glancing up every few moments to look back at Hux. He’s familiar with that pattern, as her eyes flit between the face and the page. She’s drawn
him enough to know that she’s drawing Hux now and it makes him want to scream. Especially when he says something that makes her smile.

He turns away then, not able to look anymore. He rushes out of the temple, trying to get the image out of his head.

All he can think about is that smile she had on her face.

Ben would be pissed off if they were trying to force her into joining them but what devastated him the most was that she didn’t seem to mind at all.

She was smiling. She was drawing Hux, for kriff’s sake. She wasn’t doing anything she didn’t want to do it seemed.

And the hope and longing that was building in his chest is crushed beneath the weight of it all.

He passes by his hut at the end of the hill but doesn’t go in. He glances at Rey’s hut beside it, and then he turns to look at the hut where he knew a handful of the other students would be flooding to when it got late enough. When they could all gather around and play that stupid game or whatever it was they did these days.

The thought of Rey going in there spears through his mind and he turns away, trying to refuse the tears in his eyes as he marches for the woods.

He wants to be in a place where he feels safe, even from himself.

“‘So, Rey…’” Hux says after a moment and Rey rolls her eyes, hoping she would have been done before he could say something else. She doesn’t need to look at his face so much anymore, in fact, she didn’t really need to look at all. She was relying more on memory and imagination than an actual reference.

Unfortunately, Hux keeps going. “I don’t know what Ben has told you about me but I’m actually not as horrible a person as he claims.”

“I can make my own decisions about people,” she says though not for the reasons Hux thinks she is.

“Good. I’m glad to hear it. Because I was wondering if you’d like to join me and some of the others in my hut later.”

“‘Later?’” she stops drawing to look at him.

He leans in closer on his elbows, looking over his shoulder to make sure Luke wasn’t around. If Rey was actually drawing him in the pose he was in she would have snapped at him to stop moving “Well, sometimes, a couple of us like to play a game and despite the cursed vow of celibacy we have to stick to for the rest of our lives, that doesn’t mean that some young curious padawans can’t just explore a little, right?”

The look on his face is so disgusting. She wants to lean over the table and spit on him. But she doesn’t.

Instead, she waits. After all, she has some finishing touches to do.

“And what? You’re inviting me?” she asks with a smile.
He nods a little. “I think you would have a great time.”

“Really?” she tries to sound intrigued and not massively pissed off.

“Really,” he answers, leaning even closer. His voice dropping lower.

She puts her pencil back in her bag, finished with her work.

There, done.

She looks back up to Hux, trying to hide her smirk. “Well, I’m sorry but I’m going to have to decline.”

“What!” he exclaims, his brows shooting up on his forehead. “You’re refusing?” he sounds legitimately shocked.

“I’m not going to be attending but I do hope the rest of you have a nice time,” she says with a false sense of sincerity.

“What the–” he stammers. “Then what the hell was all this about?” he gestures between them and to the sketchbook in her hands.

“This?” she laughs, ripping the page out of the sketchbook and slamming it down on the table between them. “This was so I could draw someone who needs to realize the amount of absolute bantha shit that leaves his mouth.” She pulls her hand away and Hux can see it in all its glory.

She’s drawn his face on the rear end of a bantha.

“Oh, you bitch,” he mutters. He looks to her so furiously. “How dare you?! I should go up to Master Luke right now and–”

“And what?” she asks with a scoff as she swings her legs over the bench and standing up. “Because I could think of some things I could tell Luke as well. The nature of what you and some of your friends will be doing later tonight in your hut, perhaps? I think that beats a somewhat crude but truly harmless drawing doesn’t it?”

Hux gives a big sigh when he realizes he can’t tell on her after all.

“Enjoy,” she says with a smirk as she strolls out of the room. Her sketchbook under her arm and her bag across her body, leaving Hux with the most honest rendition of himself he’ll ever get.

She conceals her amusement until she’s outside the temple, chuckling under her breath as she makes her way down the hill.

She doubts Ben is finished speaking to Luke but she goes to his hut anyway, just to check if he was. It’s empty so she waits, moving to sit on his bed and she debating on the best way to tell the story to him.

She leans back, opening her sketchbook to the sketch she had been working on earlier. The one of Ben where she thought his hair might need to be a little darker. She works quietly in the light of the lantern on the nightstand nearby. It’s only after she’s redefined near everything on him that she realizes how long she’s been there.

Ben hasn’t returned.

She sits up then, starting to get concerned of what happened to him. Surely he couldn’t still be
talking to Luke. Could he?

She gets up, leaving her sketchbook and bag on his bed as she quietly steps out, looking back to the temple. All the lights are off, as well as all of the lanterns in the huts. All except for a small glow coming from Hux’s hut and she rolls her eyes, trying not to think of what was going on in there. She wasn’t sure what they were doing exactly. She didn’t give Hux enough time to explain, but she can only imagine what he meant by exploring their curiosities.

But even that doesn’t distract her from the worry of where Ben might have gone.

She knows what his signature feels like. Maybe if she focused hard enough, she could locate him. Did it work like that?

She should at least try. Ben would do it for her.

She takes some deep breaths, finding that meditative state that reveals the force around her at a frequency she’s learned to hear. To listen to.

She reaches out further this time, intently searching for him and when she senses him, she feels the strange jumble of emotions clouding him. Plaguing him.

He’s upset although she doesn’t know why.

Clinging to the sensation, she follows it with an invisible thread and hoping to find Ben at the end of it.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for reading!

<3!!
Ben is pacing back and forth. He’s close enough to hear the waves but he doesn’t cross over to the sand. The sand he’s come to associate with the majority of their lessons.

In such a brief time that he’s known her, they’ve made so many memories at this shore. Good memories as well as some that still baffle him.

He looks through the trees to the spot where he thinks they might have been standing the other day. In the water. It felt so profound. Like all that existed was them and something beyond his senses was drawing him closer to her. And her to him.

But not anymore, it seemed. Not after what he saw in the mess hall. Not after his mind has already tortured him relentlessly with the image of her and Hux together.

The petulant, childish side of him mocks himself, wondering why he should care. What was he supposed to expect? Everyone was a disappointment.

But another part of him, one that he thought didn’t exist until a few weeks ago shouts back. He wouldn’t lump Rey in with everyone else. She wasn’t like that. She wouldn’t try to hurt him. Not intentionally.

But she also doesn’t know the depth of which he cares for her. She doesn’t know how much this hurts him.

And it just makes him feel so lost. Lost and confused and left to cursing himself in the darkness of the place he had finally started to feel good about.

Maybe he just wasn’t meant to be happy.

Maybe he was meant to be a strange shell of a person, void of anything but his loneliness and conflict.

Maybe he was supposed to be alone and confined to his anger and his upset. Because that makes sense. Doesn’t it? He deserves to suffer.

But Rey doesn’t deserve to be around people that treat her like shit. She deserves so much more.

He growls out, furious and blinded by traitorous tears. Before he knows what he’s doing, he strikes out, punching his fist into the nearest tree, not even minding the sting that comes with it.

So he punches it again, imaging Hux’s face instead of rigid bark. He punches again. And again. And again.
“Ben!”

His head snaps behind him and he sees Rey charging for him, slightly out of breath. Her hair flying wildly behind her. Horror on her face when she sees what he’s doing.

He wipes at his face, trying to rid of any tears that might have fallen. “Rey, what are you—”

“I’ve been looking everywhere for you. What the hell are you doing?” she snaps at him, looking to his fists.

“I-I was—” he doesn’t have an answer for her. He doesn’t know what to say. What he does say was probably not the best. “What are you doing here?”

“What am I—?” she starts, totally flustered. “Ben Solo, I’ve been looking all over for you!” she exclaims, striding forward until she’s right in front of him. “You scared the shit out of me!” Her tone is not unlike the one he used with her when he thought she had drowned the other day. But he’s never seen her like this. It’s nearly frightening.

“I-I thought—”

“What have you done?” she asks, reaching for his hands and seeing the blood on his knuckles. “What happened?” she asks, her voice just a whisper as she already knows the answer.

“It’s nothing,” he says, pulling his hands away. He should know not to revel in the warmth and softness of her hands. Not when his hands are meant for something else. His gaze focusing back on the tree.

“It’s not ‘nothing.’ What are you—” she moves to place herself in his path, blocking him from the tree. He sees her face, riddled with sadness and confusion. “Don’t hurt yourself like this, please. What’s going on? Talk to me!”

He shouldn’t say it. He shouldn’t let it leave his lips. But it’s too late once he realizes he’s already saying it. “Why don’t you go talk to your other friends?”

“What?” she asks, her brow furrowing and he can’t tell if it’s anger or hurt. Maybe both.

He huffs, trying to express himself as well as he can without flying off the handle. “Listen, I don’t care who you hang around or who you decide to spend your time with. You can make your own decisions. But I just think you should know that you can have something better than that. Those people don’t respect you and I think you have the insight to see it. You deserve more than that, Rey.”

She shakes her head. “Ben, I really don’t know what you’re—”

“I saw you with Hux.”

She looks offended. “And what do you think you saw me doing with Hux, perhaps?”

“I saw…” his anger falters and his argument starts to falter, leaving him confused. If she was here and she was looking for him, she wasn’t with Hux. “I thought you… I mean you were drawing him and I thought that you were going to that thing. I heard some of the others talking and I thought—”

“You thought what?” she asks him, sounding outraged. He backs up, realizing she might be angrier now than he is. “Believe me, I know what Hux wanted me to do but I made it very clear to him of my opinion. Any future invitations to such a thing are long gone. I assure you.” She crosses her
arms, making her way for the beach. She doesn’t tell him to follow but he does anyway. Curiosity clawing at his chest.

“Why? What happened?”

She huffs. “I shouldn’t have to explain myself, you know. I’m not the one who went running into the woods to punch things.”

He lowers his head. “I know.”

She takes a deep breath. “He did ask me to join him and his shady friends in his hut. But I would think you would know me well enough to know I wasn’t going to accompany them.”

“Rey, I—”

“And I was drawing him but not in the way you thought. I was going to storm out when he asked but then I decided to do something I probably shouldn’t have. But I did it anyway because I thought it would be funny. I thought you would think it was funny. I’ve been waiting in your hut to tell you all about it when I realized you were missing.”

“You did?”

If she heard him she gives no sign of it, continuing on. “I reached out, searching for you, and this is what I find?”

Shame floods him. He realizes now that he overreacted. It hasn’t happened like this in a long time but this time seemed different. He was so upset at the thought of Hux and Rey together, or how horrendous the others spoke of her. But he realizes now he was the one that disrespected her.

Rey was right, he knew her better than that. It was just his emotions that seemed too impulsive to rationalize.

He really needed to work on that. “I’m sorry,” he croaks out. “You’re right. I should have known you wouldn’t. I knew you didn’t like him but I guess I kind of looked over that. I’m sorry, Rey.”

She nods, accepting his apology as she moves to walk further on the beach.

He follows her, starting to feel the pain throbbing in his hands.

She moves to sit down in the sand, taking a deep breath. Unknowing what else to do, he sinks down beside her. She’s so quiet now though. She won’t even look at him.

His courage sparks only for a moment as he pleads for her to do something. To know he’s upset her like this fills him with guilt. “Rey?”

She turns to look at him finally and he gives a small breath of relief. She looks worried though.

“Rey, please say something. Anything,” he begs.

“I thought something might have happened between you and Luke. I thought he said something that made you upset,” she says.

He looks at his hands. “I did talk to him. It didn’t exactly go the way I wanted it to,” he shakes his head. “Luke is…” he gives a sigh. “Luke likes to pride himself on being a more ‘untraditional’ Jedi but unless he thinks of it first, he’s adamant about sticking to old ways and things that are supposed to stay the way they are. And I just don’t get it.” He shakes his head, daring a look at her. He
doesn’t know if he feels stronger or weaker when he sees she’s staring back.

“I’m sorry, Rey. He said now isn’t the right time. I don’t agree with him because I know you are but it got me feeling...irritated. Like he wasn’t listening and I just felt bad because I already told you about it and—”

“Ben, that’s okay.”

“But I told you that you would get one and I wanted you to have something. I wanted this for you so bad and—”

“Ben, I told you. It’s fine. And if that’s what Luke says then that’s the way it is. I can wait.”

“You shouldn’t have to, Rey,” he whines. She’s waited for so long in her life. He wanted at least this to work out.

Suddenly, he hears fabric ripping and his head turns to see Rey pulling at her tunic. A strip of the cloth pulling free and she grabs his wrist, bringing his hand closer so she could wrap his blistering knuckles. He should stop her, or at least suggest his own tunic be ruined for such a purpose. But then the memory of her concern for his hands floods to his mind. The day they first touched.

“Ben,” she starts, not looking up from his hand. “I don’t care about that. I just care that you’re alright. I don’t want you to do this to yourself when you knew you could just talk to me. You can always talk to me.”

She means that. “I know. I’m sorry.”

Rey shakes her head. “You don’t need to be sorry, just, give yourself a moment to breathe if you feel like this again. Just breathe and wait for me if having a hard time.” He nods, knowing she was right.

Breathe and wait for her.

He could try that. Her encouragement was convincing enough. “Okay. I will.”

As she pulls forward his other hand, pulling another strip of her tunic, and he looks into her eyes. He sees the concern there. Her compassion.

He sees that although she’s upset with him, she’s not turning him away but helping him. She doesn’t hate him. Rey still accepts him as he is. Something that baffles him even further.

She finishes tying the strips of fabric around his hands. There wasn’t much blood but the barrier serves as a good enough bandage for now. Her hands fiddle with the threads and he catches her fingers, holding her hands gently.

He could cry from relief when she gently squeezes back. But instead, he asks her a question. “What were you going to tell me? Before?”

She chuckles a little, the sound letting him breathe a little easier. “Maybe it was a little too ridiculous of me, after all. I just thought it was funny but if I knew it would upset you then…”

He holds her hands a little tighter. “No. Please, that was all me. Again, I’m an asshole. But tell me. I want to know.”

She smirks. “It was so bad. I shouldn’t have done it but he was being such a pompous shit and I
couldn’t resist.”

“Hux?”

She nods, “Of course. Ben, if you think you’re an asshole, it’s nothing compared to him, I assure you.” She looks to the ocean and her hair flies behind her as she smiles secretively to the sea. “I was sitting at our table, just eating and drawing. I was just keeping to myself when that prick comes over. Well actually, he threw his tray down and I nearly shit myself when he did because he had to do it like a spaz. He’s so dramatic,” she rolls her eyes and a small laugh is pulled from Ben’s throat.

“Anyway, he makes his usual shitty comments, mainly about you, so I was already pretty wired up.” Ben pretends like that doesn’t make him extremely pleased. “But then he actually tries to take my sketchbook and look through it,” she shakes her head, recalling Hux’s attitude.

That bastard. He had no right to do that and he’s not surprised Hux waited until he was gone to try and pull this shit on Rey.

He swallows his anger, knowing it wouldn't do any good now. Or ever, perhaps. “What did you do?” he asks, trying not to clench his fists and disrupt the wrappings

“Well, I insisted that it’s private and I don’t want him to look at it. He seems a little dejected at first but you know that twat is nothing if not relentless.” Ben laughs, feeling his rage from earlier bleed out. The softness of her touch and words a soothing balm, as if that was enough to mend the skin of his knuckles.

Rey’s smile grows as she tells him more. “So, then he asks me if I draw people. And I’m not an idiot, I could see where he was going with it and I could have said no and fled but then I had an idea. It was a little crude and unlike me but he was rightfully begging for it. I could hardly keep a straight face while he was talking.”

Something twists in Ben’s chest as he realizes this is the point to which he saw for himself. The smile he thought she was giving Hux was really for herself.

But he still thinks of Dono’s words. Of what she thought Hux was going to do with Rey. But that didn’t happen. Obviously, he was missing something.

“Why?”

“Because I ended up drawing his face on the ass of a bantha,” she says, grinning from ear to ear.

“You did what?” he asks, chuckling but unsure if he heard her right.

She composes herself a little. “I told him he needed to realize the amount of banthashit he was spewing all the time and then I showed him his face on the back of a bantha. He was so pissed off.”

Ben bursts out laughing. He could hardly believe it, but it takes almost no time at all for him to realize that this is much easier to believe than the truth he believed previously.

“I would give anything to see that,” he tells her honestly. “Do you still have the drawing?” He would love to see that too.

“No. I left it with him. But he won’t show it to Luke.”
He furrows his brow, “How do you know?”

“Well, I mentioned that if he told Luke, I might say something about his late night escapades he was trying to invite me to.”

Ben finds himself surprised by Rey yet again. She got back at Hux with the insurance that it wouldn’t get back to Luke. Hux was always one to tattle, trying to be the teacher’s pet but hardly having the pleasurable disposition to hold up the title. He wouldn’t want to compromise his already fragile reputation with Luke if he found out about the things he was planning after dark with all the other assholes.

“That’s, like, the most amazing thing I’ve ever heard, Rey.”

“Not too bad, huh?”

“No. Not bad at all,” he says, their laughter settling as they look back to the ocean. Ben’s nerves and worries start to cast away from him. The thought of how he acted before seeming so rash as he looks at the calm tide. He feels like such a fool now.

They’re both leaning back in the sand. Their hands must have separated when they were laughing but despite the contact, Ben still feels at ease. It seems like everything’s okay once again and–

“Have you ever gone?” Rey asks suddenly.

He frowns, unsure what she means. “Gone where?”

“To those...oh, I don’t know what to call it. To one of those gatherings where they ‘explore’ things?”

He takes her meaning and quickly shakes his head. “I’m not the kind of person that gets invited to things, Rey.” He holds up his battered hands as if they would explain himself.

Rey rolls her eyes but she doesn’t look annoyed. She looks like she’s trying not to smile. “Well, I was just curious.”

He wonders what that means. “Not that I would go if I was invited.”

“What do they even do? I mean, besides the obvious.”

He scoffs, “To my understanding...I think they play a game.”

“A game?”

“Yeah, I’ve heard them talk about it a few times. They call it ‘spin the lightsaber.’”

Rey snorts But her eyebrows hike up her forehead, begging for more details.

He rolls his eyes but complies. “Alright, well, by the sound of it, they get in a circle and place the saber in the middle. Someone spins it and whoever it points to when it stops, the two of them have to kiss.”

Kiss. Ben doesn’t think he’s ever said that word out loud before and it makes his cheeks heat up.

He clears his throat. “I don’t really get it though because I think it would be too easy to manipulate. If they use the force to direct the saber, they could have it stop on anyone they want.”
Rey chuckles at his criticism. “That does sound stupid.”

“I don’t know if that’s what they do anymore but if it’s how Hux and his cronies like to spend their time these days, it’s hardly surprising.” They both laugh, knowing that was true.

They don’t say anything for a while after that. The sound of the waves too soothing and comforting. But then she speaks again. When she does, he notices she looks away from him, keeping her stare determined on the sea. “Have you ever thought about it?”

His heart picks up at her question. “You mean...like, kissing?”

She finally looks at him again, chuckling a little and shrugging her shoulders.

He hopes his cheeks don’t get as red as they feel and if they do, they are at least hidden by the darkness.

As of late, he’s thought about it a lot. Too much, really. Just in the past few days alone, he’s been a total mess, wondering what might have happened if that damn dinner bell didn’t ring and they both kept leaning forward.

Surely she recognized that too. They hadn’t talked about it at all. As if it never happened. But she must have felt something too. She had to be asking this for some reason.

Only slightly panicked of where it might lead, Ben admits, “Yes.” Her eyes go a little rounder and losing his courage, he starts to ramble. “I mean, I guess everyone thinks about it at some point. I mean as much as I hate those pricks, I can see that they’re just curious. Not that I would do that with any of them, you know...I wouldn’t want to--” he realizes he sounds ridiculous and there was no point. There was no way he could say what has desperately been on his mind. There was no way he could say that he wouldn’t want to do that with anyone with her. “Nevermind,” he says with a sigh.

Rey looks down, running her fingers through the sand. “No, it’s okay. I’ve thought about it too. It’s not like there was anybody on Jakku. I honestly didn’t even think about it that much, I was hoping for other things.” He nods, knowing she means her parents. “But like you said, everybody thinks about it at some point. And even if we’re supposed to just deny that as Jedi, I guess it doesn’t just make the curiosity go away.”

“I know,” Ben breathes out. “I know what you mean.” He looks to her, finding her eyes. He doesn’t know how long they stay like that but his breath hitches when she says his name. Her voice sounding low and almost secretive.

“Ben?”

“Yeah?”

“Would it...would it be weird if...?” she turns her head away, taking a deep breath. “Kriff, it’s so stupid.”

He moves closer then, hope burning in his chest. He moves his hand closer to hers in the sand, just shy of touching. “No. Please. Say it,” he tells her softly.

She laughs a little, “Well, if we both knew what it was like, we wouldn’t have to wonder and I don’t know...I trust you and you’re my friend and I just--”

“Yeah,” he says way too quickly.
She looks at him. “Really?” She looks legitimately surprised. Like she thought he wasn’t serious.

He nods eagerly. “Yeah. I think it…” he can’t say what he’s trying to say so he just sounds like a fool. “...I think if we’re going to try it, it should be with each other.”

_Shit, was that too far? Too obvious?

But Rey nods, turning to face him more. “Yeah, that’s what I was thinking. Only if you want to though.”

_Is she kidding? Maybe his face wasn’t betraying him as much as his heart was._

“I want to. Really.”

She smiles, “Okay.” Her voice is soft but sure and Ben is at a loss for what to do now.

Was he really going to kiss Rey under the impression that they could satisfy some stupid and childish curiosity? Was he really going to do this because he would do anything for her and the chance to get closer? All because the reality of what he really wanted was too far out of reach?

Ben supposed so.

It still doesn’t help him in terms of what to do now.

They sit close, their legs touching. Rey doesn’t look nervous at all but seems to be waiting for him to do something. But what should he do? He looks to his hands that she bandaged, ashamed of himself. He wasn’t gentle. He wasn’t anything she deserved.

His doubt must be obvious because she places her hand on his knee. “Ben?”

“I just–” he starts, wondering if this was a bad idea. Despite how much he wants it, he feels he will only embarrass himself. “I don’t know how to…” he sighs, already feeling defeated.

What if she realizes just how deeply this runs for him?

But her hand squeezes his knee and he slowly looks back from his hands again and finds her eyes gazing at him. There was no judgment there. She just gives a small smile. “It’s okay. Neither do I.” And with that, she leans forward, pressing her lips to his.

She’s kissing him. Rey is kissing him.

_Holy shit._

Worried he would fall from the sensation, he reaches out, his hand holding onto her arm.

After the initial shock fades and allows him to actually feel it, he relaxes, leaning forward and pulling her closer as he kisses her back, that fluttering that has lived in his chest for weeks grows, making his whole body hum with something akin to joy.

Never in his life has he felt so weightless.

Her lips are soft and the hand on his leg is warm and reassuring. She pulls away by just a breath, only to kiss him again, fitting her lips gently against his. Her kisses are tender and sweet and he can only identify it as something very Rey. Like all of his senses are filled with her all at once and he can hardly breathe. It’s far more intoxicating than he ever would have expected.
And then it’s over. They both pull away and Ben watches as she slowly opens her eyes, finding his again. She looks dazed at first, but there’s a moment of clarity as she chuckles softly once again.

At first, Ben thinks Rey laughs because he embarrassed himself and she’s about to tell him how awkward it was for her.

But then... “That was nice,” Rey says, a small smile on her face and he can see the stars reflect in his eyes. She’s not just being nice. She means it.

Relief floods him. “Yeah. It was.”

Rey chuckles again and she leans her head against his shoulder. His hands move to hold her. His face is pressed against the top of her head as they hug. The sweet smell of her hair blowing gently across his face as he holds her.

He closes his eyes, pretending it could be for a different reason. He pretends that it could last forever.

He will never forget this. How right this feels. How happy he would be if not for how quickly the reality sets back in.

And then he hears her release a big breath and he wonders if it’s a sigh. “Well, now we know,” Rey says quietly.

“No, now we know,” Ben repeats but he doubts it’s for the same reasons she does.

He knows now there is no going back. There’s no denying his feelings now.

He’s in love with Rey and he’s doomed for sure.

Hux has his arms crossed as he paced across his hut, complaining to the handful of others in attendance about the desert rat that had the nerve to try and humiliate him, flailing the drawing in his hand, indicating the evidence.

“Lemme see that,” Xid holds out his hand.

Hux passes it with a scoff, “Here.”

Soldar and Iella perch themselves at either side of Xid’s shoulders. The three of them burst out laughing to see the drawing.

“Shut up!” Hux shouts.

“Well, it is a very strong resemblance, I have to say,” Xid laughs.

“What is? Let me see!” demands Dono but Hux snatches the paper back before anyone else looked at it.

“I didn’t show this to you to make you laugh. I’m showing it to you because I’m pissed off. Obviously, this girl is a problem. I should have known that was the case when Solo seems so enthralled with her.”

“Why don’t you go to Luke like you always do?” Nourdi says, not without his usual smugness.

Hux refrain from screaming. “Because she threatened to tell him about all this!”
Iella scoffs, “I knew she wouldn’t come anyway. That little rat is too prude. Even more than the rest of the crowd here.”

Hux isn’t so bothered by the girl’s supposed innocence at this point as much as he just wants to strike back in some way. “Well, then help me come up with a solution.”

Azmo shrugs. “Like what?”

“Ugh” he groans, unsure of what to do. He just knows he’s angry and the girl needs to learn something about her place here. But he also didn’t want to expose anything that might make Luke think less of him.

Although it was true Armitage held little respect for their master, he knew it was important to appear willing and eager to learn. Even though Armitage knew his own power in the force was shadowed by most of his other classmates.

Still, he had to keep himself at the top any way he could.

These tactics were encouraged by his father, Brendol. And regardless of how spiteful Hux felt about his father, he had made quite a lot of himself through the power of manipulation and tactics.

There’s no reason that just because he was training to be a Jedi that he couldn’t evolve his skills in a different way. He knew that peace was hardly the solution in a galaxy such as this. One had to ascend on their own terms, and peace was hardly reliable.

Which is why Rey’s little stunt upset him so. She needed to understand her place here just as Hux had to reassert himself after the evening’s humiliation.

“She thinks her lessons are going well. She seems to think Solo is a fair tutor indeed. But what if there was a circumstance that not only exposed Rey’s inabilities and insignificance while simultaneously destroying Solo’s little vacation.”

“What did Solo do?” Soldar asks confused.

Hux rolls his eyes. “He’s Solo. There’s always a reason to bring him down.”

That gets some laughs and Armitage’s pride surges briefly, lifting him briefly from the incident earlier.

Chapter End Notes

So, I know this is probably not the kind of thing you were hoping for but we have to work up to them truly revealing their feelings and emotions instead of just thinking that they're pretending.

Lol, that sounds so stupid and I know it was probably even more stupid to read but when they know they can't be in a relationship, the stages of progressing it takes a few more steps. But now that they've kissed, it's going to be more difficult for both of them to ignore things now.

Basically, Ben now knows he's (officially) in love with Rey and when we see Rey next chapter, she's dealing with her own realizations that developed during this chapter.
I really hope that makes sense. If not, thanks for reading anyway.
Nothing's Going to Change

Chapter Summary

Double dose of emotional (dare I say lovestruck with a dash of horny) teenagers that think they can hide their feelings from themselves. Lol, as if.

Chapter Notes

This one isn't very exciting but I needed something that showed how they handle the after effects of what happened on the beach and how they choose to proceed.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Rey can't sleep. She can't stop tossing in her bed or groaning into her pillow as she can't stop thinking about where she was a matter of hours ago.

On the beach. Her lips pressed against Ben's. Her hand on his leg and his hand on her arm.

It has brought quite a lot of confusing emotions and thoughts to claim her, making sleep impossible.

Part of her was frustrated. Part of her was nervous.

And another part of her was so ecstatic and in total disbelief as she realizes that she kissed Ben.

She had been so frightened of what she may find when she felt how distressed he was. She tried to think of all the reasons he might be upset as she made her way through the forest

She had suspected it was something to do with Luke.

But then she found him, pummeling his fists into a tree, only to discover the main reason for his anger was that he thought she had been enjoying Hux's company.

When she expressed her frustration, not just with Hux and the absurdity of the concept, but also with Ben's reaction, he seemed to realize what he had done. He had acted rashly and jumped to conclusions.

He had apologized for how he acted and seemed to relax a bit. She was glad he was able to laugh once she explained what had actually happened but even now she thought of how worked up he was.

*He was jealous*, her mind tells her.

It makes her turn over in bed, trying to chase the thought away. She knew that was an aspect of it but if she spent too long thinking of why he felt jealous, she would find herself thinking things she knew went beyond just innocent kisses.
Because despite how little she knew of what real relationships were like, she knew that Ben cared for her just as she cared for him. Obviously, she was not the only one suffering from such thoughts. If not made overly evident from his reaction to seeing her with Hux then definitely from the kiss they shared. Although she had suggested it as something they share to appease a curiosity and their willingness to share it with each other, she suspected that Ben may have had more sincere reasons to accept. The superficial facade only meant to protect them from their feelings while they shared something as beautiful as that.

Or perhaps that was her just imagining things. Maybe she was creating ways for people to care for her in a way they didn’t. The thought of her true parents coming to mind. She had held on for so long that they were returning because they loved her...but nobody loved her.

Maybe she was just pretending like Ben had feelings, trying to justify the overwhelming ones she had for him. Just like she pretended her parents had left her on Jakku as an act of love and she had been foolish enough to love them back for it.

Maybe she was fooling herself all over again and Ben just took pity on her or something.

But then the ghost pressure of his lips washes over her once more, leaving her in ruin. Would he have given her that in pity?

No. Ben wouldn’t do that. He was kind and supportive and gentle and frustrated and even lost at times but when she thinks of it all combining to make him the way he is, her stomach flutters with longing.

She adores him the way he is, loves him, she knows. She adores him for his qualities and loves him for his defects.

He’s her best friend and she trusts him more than anyone else. There was no one else she would have shared that with, even if she didn’t feel as deeply about him as she did.

She wonders where Ben’s feelings stand on all of this. Not that she could ever really know for sure.

She huffs into her pillow, unsure of which reality she wanted. Did she want Ben to like her in that way? A way where he reciprocated the depth of her feelings?

If he did, there was little that could be done. They were training to become Jedi and it’s not like they could have anything akin to an actual normal relationship. Not that she knew what that really was but she doubted it involved sneaking around and deceiving the school Master.

So then, maybe, it was safer to assume that Ben cared for her, just as a friend. That way, she could try to tamper down her own feelings and just try and move on. Because she should know better than to want more than what they shared on the beach. She should know that a brief kiss was likely the most they could ever be capable of when emotions and so many thoughts of confusion would only weigh down her training, or worse, her friendship with Ben.

She sighs as she turns again, caught between blissful and discontented. There’s no straight answer for it.

Despite what was practical or the sensible solution, how can someone just deny their feelings or push them away?

Her realization, her love for Ben, feels heavier than it should. She doesn’t want to be ungrateful for Luke’s hospitality or the Jedi temple in general but she wishes things could be different. She
wishes that despite the power within her, there was more to choose from. The dark side doesn’t appeal to her, not after what Ben told her about his grandfather. But were Jedi and Sith really the only options? Thousands of years and only two ways of thinking to show for it?

“Fuck,” she mutters, though it hardly sounds like anything other than a groan with her face buried against the pillow.

She just wishes she had an answer that didn’t make her feel like she was going crazy.

Ben hasn’t slept yet. He’s been laying on his back, running his fingers past the fabric Rey tied around his hands.

He couldn’t seem to relax from what happened on the beach. His heart hasn’t totally slowed down. He couldn’t help but get a little panicked.

Soon enough, he would have to get up and he would be seeing Rey and he had to pretend like he hasn’t been going insane. He has to pretend like he isn’t madly in love with her.

He has to pretend like nothing has changed, especially in front of others.

And he begins to doubt his ability to do so. Rey was right about his face when she said that it tends to reveal what he’s thinking. And given how well she can read him, he doubts he will be able to hold up any facade for long.

He knows he doesn’t have long before she connects all the dots.

But then there’s another voice that suggests that she already knew. Maybe the concept wasn’t as repulsive to her as his imagination would suggest.

She had been upset to find him the way she did and he expected her to run from him, disgusted at what he had resorted to. And although she had been mad, she didn’t turn away. She stayed with him.

After all, it had been her idea that they...do what they did. She kissed him.

It was this cycle of thoughts that had his heart bursting out of his chest. Every time he manages to calm down and try to convince himself to just act natural for whatever car next, he could only be reminded of how she was the one who sprung forward and initiated everything.

Was that so crazy that she could be feeling the same way?

He pulls the pillow over his face, wishing everything wasn’t so confusing. It’s not like he could just ask her. It’s not like he could actually pursue anything when they lived in this place. When his uncle would take everything Ben cherished away if he was even slightly suspicious that their friendship was not as platonic as he thought. Not to mention that it would drastically affect Rey’s life.

She has come from a horrible place. He tightens his fists just thinking about her there. The thought of that crolute...Of that man that tried to–

No, stop it! He tells himself. His fists are clenching again and he takes a few deep breaths, trying to relax.

He can't let his anger get to him like that again. The secure hold of the fabric from her tunic
reminding him to keep it together.

He thinks, instead, of how much happier she's been since she's come here. She hasn't gone hungry or thirsty. She has a bed. She has someone that cares for her very much. She has found a home here. If Ben made his feelings known and she didn’t feel the same, he would be making her uncomfortable. He would be making it all the more difficult for her to find belonging.

Despite his inability to find his belonging here, he shouldn’t assume she can’t. At least when it came to finding what she wants to do. Maybe she really would like to become a Jedi and if that’s what she wants then he would teach as best he can.

She was Rey. She could do anything.

And he was just a fool who has spent far too long thinking of something he can’t have.

He groans, “Kill me,” the pillow still over his face.

He’s officially been in love for about six hours now and he feels like he may be dying.

Rey walks out of her hut and Ben pretends like he hasn’t been waiting around, sitting on a rock, since the crack of dawn. He takes a deep breath, trying to remember the line he was practicing all night.

But as she approaches, he realizes she has a line of her own.

“Ben, before we start today there’s something I think we should talk about.”

His heart speeds up, unsure what that could mean.

“Listen, I...” she begins. She looks over her shoulder, seeing some of the other students starting to emerge from their own huts. She takes another step closer and speaks quietly. “I hope I didn’t make anything weird last night. The more I think about it...”

He holds his breath, dissecting everything she says and finding himself frozen when she trails off. What is he doing?

Say something, you kriffing moron!

“No, Rey. You didn’t. It was...it was great,” he says, already doubting his choice of words.

She gives a small smile. “Well, I’m glad. I liked it too.” She looks down at her feet and Ben thinks it’s probably the shyest he’s seen her look. His heart swells for some reason but he tries to pretend he’s just clearing his throat. “But, I mean, you know...” She’s not looking at him but instead, all around them. Anywhere but him.

Were things weird now? He didn’t want that. He didn’t think about that. It wasn’t one of the scenarios that ate him alive last night.

“We weren’t supposed to do that. Not that I regret it, at all.” She says the last part quickly and nearly reaches for him as if worried she had offended him. “But I just wanted to say that I’m glad I shared that with you because you’re my best friend and...I don’t know. I guess I’m just trying to say that I don’t want anything to change now.”

His heart sinks a little bit, despite the relief that he knows he should be feeling.
This was good. This was safe. They were friends and nothing changed. But a larger part of him hates to think of how quickly a door has closed. The possibility was too ambitious to hope for and he knows none of that is Rey’s fault.

The circumstances of this cursed temple weren’t going to afford them the freedom to say what he wanted to say. It seemed even Rey was having a hard enough time expressing it.

He smiles a little, hoping to ease her worry. “I’m glad we shared that too.” He is glad, despite how much the incident in question has been driving him crazy. “And nothing’s going to change. We’re friends. Always,” he assures her.

“Well, good.” She gives a small laugh and she seems to relax. She turns to head up to the temple and he falls in-step beside her. “Now I just have to worry about what that asshole is going to do to get even with me. I doubt he kept it to himself, even if I knew he wouldn’t go to Luke.”

She’s talking about Hux. His teeth grit, knowing she was right. It was his way to stay ahead of everyone, despite truly being capable of it in terms of his force abilities.

“Do you want me to do anything?” he asks carefully. But she stops walking, stepping in front of him and halting him where he is.

“No. Ben, just leave it. I can handle whatever it is. And who knows? It could be nothing.”

“But Rey. He’s—” he’s cut off when suddenly she grips his hands and holds them up to inspect.

“Ben, I don’t think that’s a good idea. Not when he gets you so upset.”

“He doesn’t!” Even when he says it, it sounds childish and stupid. There was no denying how he felt about Hux.

She gives him a look, raising her eyebrows. Ben gives a sigh. She doesn’t even need to say anything.

“Okay, you’re right. I won’t start anything. But if he tries something—”

Her eyebrows raise a little higher.

He sighs. “Then I will let you handle it,” he somehow manages to say in a remotely calm voice.

“Thank you,” she says quietly. Her attention resorts back down to his hands. Her touch is so soft and he refrains from catching her fingers, wanting to engulf them with his own. But then he hears her ask, “How do they feel?”

He pulls them away, recalling her face when she saw what he had been doing in the forest. When he pummeled his fists into a tree. “Fine. They’re fine,” he insists.

She doesn’t look convinced, gently reaching for his hands and peeling back the fabric. It sticks to where there had been blood but it’s all dry and kind of cracked now. He winces as he already knows, they don’t really look fine. As if Rey’s gasp wasn’t enough to concern him.

“Ben, we have to do something about this. They don’t look good.”

“They’ll heal on their own,” he says. “Besides, it’s not like I can just go to the med droid. Luke programmed him to make records on all visits and wounds. If Luke found out I went to the med bay he would only find out what happened. There’s not a whole lot of excuses I could have for
“these,” he lifts up his hands. “They’re distinct. The droid will know what they are and then Luke will know I was angry. He’ll be thinking I’m flying off the handle and then I’m suspended from our lessons or something ridiculous like that.”

Rey’s face falls a little, not arguing his point but looking disappointed. She was legitimately concerned about his hands and he didn’t blame her. They didn’t look very good now that she had pulled the fabric back and he notices a gash on his left hand that may not heal on its own after all. Maybe he did need to think about getting some help. “Listen, I can’t go to the droid directly. It will only lead back to Luke.”

Rey seems to see where he’s going with it. “But?”

He chuckles softly, just a sharp exhale from his nose. “But there might be a way that we can get a medpac unnoticed.”

Rey’s smile grew into a knowing smirk but he tries to keep his attention away from her lips. “Uh-huh,” she asks with a playful tone.

He shakes his head. “Well, you’re quick to conclusions, aren’t you? I must be a bad influence on you,” he jokes.

She laughs, walking back up to the temple, understanding that their errand would occur after breakfast. “Please, if anything it’s me. I’m having a horrible effect on you.”

Ben refrains from sighing. He knew what she was trying to say but his mind took on a different interpretation.

He attempts to walk on, trying and failing to ignore how beautifully the early morning light seems to make her glow. The small wisps of hair around her face illuminating her head to look like a halo. “You have no idea,” he says under his breath, hoping she didn’t hear him.

Rey has never been to the med bay so Ben leads the way as discreetly as they can when they finish their breakfast. Ben keeps looking behind her to make sure they weren’t seen or followed. It made Rey’s heart pick up in excitement even if they really were just going to the med bay.

Ben spins around when they get close to the doors, whispering softly his instructions. “Okay, your job will be to distract the droid while I steal the med pac. I would do it but Onebee is very observant. He’ll notice my hands.”

“If he’s so observant, won’t he notice you’re stealing something?”

“Not if you distract him correctly,” he teases and she lightly smacks him.

“Oh please. Don’t start with me.”

His look turns sincere, “Of course, you don’t have to do this, Rey. I shouldn’t ask you to do this at all and if we get caught stealing school property-”

She knows where he’s going with it and waves her hand, “No. We need to. If you can’t get direct help then we’re doing it this way.”

“I’m just saying that if we get caught then I will be telling Luke that you weren’t involved, okay?”
He seems to stop completely, blocking her with his body from even seeing the med bay. Unless she accepts, he won’t let her take part. He doesn’t want her to get in trouble for him when he has already carried so many secrets of her own. Stealing a medpac was nothing compared to the truth of her arrival here.

But she knew how he felt. If there was any possibility that Luke might discover what happened when she left Jakku, she would want Ben to act as if he didn’t know. She wouldn’t want him to be dragged down by his continued silence and concealing the fact that she had killed someone.

So she nods, “Okay, Ben. I understand.”

“Thank you,” he says earnestly and he turns back around to look at the doors. “Now, Two-Onebee is very polite so he will likely go through a lot of pleasantries since he’s never met you before. I suggest you just let him give you a basic scan and log you into the system. That should give me enough time and by then I’ll sneak out. When you’re finished, I’ll be in my hut. You can meet me there.”

“Okay,” she says, stepping ahead of him, glancing at him over her shoulder. It didn't sound nearly as elaborate as her imagination had created it to be but it still made her smile to be doing these kinds of things with Ben. It was still exciting. “Ready?”

He gives a small smile and nods and with that, she steps forward.

Once she enters the room, sure enough, there’s a droid whirring away at a counter and he rushes forward when he sees her.

“Hello. Why I don’t believe I’ve had the pleasure, which must make you the new student I’ve heard about.”

Rey gives a smile, “Yes, hello. I’m Rey. I’m sorry I haven’t come by to introduce myself yet.”

“Oh, it’s quite alright. Given the nature of most of the visits I get, I suppose I should be glad it’s taken this long. I do hope though that nothing is troubling you now, though.”

Rey walks ahead so 2-1B’s back is to the door, allowing Ben a silent entrance as he stays close to the walls, crouching behind the counters.

“Oh no. Actually, I’ve never been to a med droid before. I’ve tended to my wounds myself for the most part.”

“Heavens!” the droid sounded terrified. Scandalized even. “Never been to a- Why I have to scan you this instant. Forgive my haste but I only want my patient’s to be in the finest health.”

The droid urges her to sit on the examination table and when she does, she sees a figure rise from behind the counter and she laughs to herself at how obvious Ben looks. He’s so tall.

But still, it isn’t enough to break the droid’s concentration and she waits until he’s done with her brief exam to meet him back down at the hut.

2-1B had been very interested in her life on Jakku and amazed at the formidable nature of humans and how long she lived on Jakku without...well, he had called it "expiring" but she knew what he meant. She had survived on minimal resources. Something she had thought to be normal for everyone but she’s realized that since arriving at the temple, some of her classmates wouldn't last a day in the brutal suns there.
There were a few other things that the droid asked her that she was glad Ben wasn’t around for. Especially a series of questions involving the history of her menstrual cycle and how heavy and frequent they were.

She shakes her head, feeling odd at disclosing such information or even talking about it at all, but she supposes that’s what other people did. Normal people went to medical bays and talked about the nature of their bodies and how to stay healthy and stable. They didn’t just have to survive like she had been so used to doing.

Rey gets to the bottom of the hill and steps into Ben’s hut to see him sitting at his desk. The medpac open beside him as he tried to clean his wounds with one hand. He winces as he’s not doing so well and she rushes forward.

“Here, let me.”

He groans in frustration as he passes her the supplies. “Thanks. I was going to put the bacta patches on after I cleaned them but it’s a little difficult.”

She moves to kneel before him and she moves one of his hands to rest on his knee. She wipes away the dry and crusted blood with a wet towel. It pulls on the sensitive skin but he doesn’t even seem to wince. Her neck heats up as she feels him staring down at her.

Thoughts from last night resurge but she quickly tampers them down. The reasoning she had come to reminding her that despite her feelings, it was safer to abstain from them.

So she tries to think of something to say. “Two-Onebee was very nice.”

“Oh, yeah. He’s always been like that. How did that go? Did he give you an exam or something?”

Rey nods, her attention remaining on his hands though. “Yeah, he seemed very keen to do so when he found out I had never been to a doctor before.”

Ben chuckles a little. “He takes his job very seriously.”

Rey chuckles in agreement and then reaches for the bacta patches Ben spoke of. She had used a medpac similar to this to tend to the claw marks on her neck in Maz’s castle. Although she had seen something labeled bacta, she had just settled to put some ointment on the shallow wounds and lightly bandage them.

She opens the bandages and looks at them curiously before applying them.

“Have you ever used them before?” Ben asks her.

She shakes her head, “No.” She’s not going to tell him about the instance where she nearly used it after her run-in with the trandoshan. She wasn’t sure what his reaction would be considering the current state of his hands. “What is bacta exactly?” she asks back instead.

“It’s a medical compound. It helps regenerate things and heal wounds quickly. It’s pretty amazing actually. If I keep these on for a little while, we probably won’t even be able to tell there was anything there in the first place.”

It sounded too good to be true but Rey doesn’t doubt it. She knew there was a lot she had yet to learn about things in a more developed world. Carefully, she places the patches on Ben’s knuckles, gathering the trash and cleaning up the things from the medpac. “Maybe you should keep this in here. In case~” she stops herself before she could say it but by his face, Ben knew where she was
going with it.

“Right,” he says sadly, looking down at his hands in his lap.

“Not that I meant–”

“No, I know you didn’t, it’s okay.” He adjusts the patches on his hands, obviously trying to distract himself and Rey feels like she may have overstepped. “It doesn’t happen like that often. I swear. I mean I know I get upset sometimes but that was...that was out of line and it’s not going to happen again.”

Rey shakes her head a little. He’s trying to prove to her that he wouldn’t disappoint her like that again. But he shouldn’t be telling her that. He should keep himself from doing it because he was hurting himself. And yet, he only seems to acknowledge that he has hurt her.

“Ben, I just don’t want you hurting yourself like that. I meant what I said last night. If you feel yourself falling into these thoughts, just breathe. Wait for me if you think I could help.”

He nods slightly. “I will, Rey,” he says softly.

Ben looks down at the bacta patches and she realizes that he can’t take them off until they’re done healing him, she concludes. It doesn’t allow him much movement and she takes advantage of his entrapment by pulling out her sketchbook.

He pretends to roll his eyes in annoyance when she opens to a new page but she sees the smile he’s trying to fight down.

Rey fights a smirk of her own. She knows he doesn’t mind.

As she draws him as he always does, filling the time with conversation, it's like nothing has changed after all.

She doesn't know whether to be relieved or discouraged.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry, this probably wasn't particularly exciting. It was probably disappointing too because I know, in a way, it feels like a step back but no worries. We gonna get there soon.

Honestly, this chapter isn't my favorite, but we're going to keep going forward and eventually get to the stuff that I'm really getting geared up to write. Mwhahaha.

Next chapter, we'll be spending some time with Hux and his merry band of assholes as they try to give Rey a shitty time.

But as always...
HANG IN THERE BABY!
Meddling

Chapter Summary

The story is a mess, what else is new?

Chapter Notes

Okay, so this chapter was supposed to show a lot more but then it got longer than 8000 words and I decided to kind of split it up into two parts.

Again, it's stupid and probably as lame as the last one.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Armitage sat at his usual table with the usual group during breakfast. But his attention was focused mainly on a table about twenty feet away. Although physically close, it seemed to exist in an entirely different reality.

Armitage found it interesting that despite living in the same place and being apart of the same lessons, there was a clear divide between the social circles of peers.

The most obvious being the very small yet strangely intimate connection between Ben Solo and Rey.

The bitch.

He hadn’t recovered from the little stunt she pulled a few weeks ago. The one where she humiliated him by drawing his face on a bantha ass.

The first night, he thought that some of the incompetent assholes that he considers his friends would assist him in getting even, but they seem to have all but lost interest in his affairs. They were so selfish.

Couldn’t they see that she needed to be taught a lesson of her own? To behave that way was unacceptable, especially when the respective social circles needed to be kept in order.

And perhaps he was embarrassed that she had gotten the chance to belittle him preemptively. He never liked to be at a disadvantage.

Not that Armitage would ever admit it to himself but he was at a disadvantage at nearly everything in his life.

When Rey laughs at something Solo says, he rolls his eyes. She really must be pathetic if she thought Ben fucking Solo was the preferable company. Armitage turns to Xid, sitting beside him. “This is ridiculous,” he says. As Xid turns to him, Iella, Soldar, and Dono must hear him because they lean forward too. Ignoring whatever gross contest Nourdi and Azmo were having to shove as much food into their mouths at once.
It was disgusting really.

“What’s ridiculous, Armie?” Dono asks, her voice is high pitched and whiney as always.

“Just look at those two. It’s like they think they’re the only ones who exist.”

“Who cares about them anyway,” Soldar says, rolling his eyes. “Just let them be losers together.”

“Have you forgotten what that little shit did to me?”

Iella seems to recall as she scoffs. “She thinks she’s so clever.”

“I know,” Hux relaxes slightly, glad someone was seeing reason. “I want something done about it.”

Xid shrugs a little bit. “Well, not that I disagree, but what can we do? It’s not like they’re in class with us or anything. They get to do their own thing.”

Iella groans again, her own upset resurfacing. “It’s so unfair. No wonder she didn’t come to the hut that night, she’s probably busy whoring around with her tutor.”

That gets a few laughs of disbelief. “I seriously doubt that Solo would compromise his holy purity for that skinny little thing,” Xid tells her.

Armitage considers it for a moment. Regardless if Solo had or hadn’t attempted something with the girl, it was clear that they had something resembling a friendship. Otherwise, the girl probably wouldn’t have defended him as she had.

And Solo was overly emotional. More so than anyone else at the Academy. It was his biggest weakness. He got all worked up.

It had been quite a while since everyone got to witness one of his famous tantrums. It was too good to pass up when Master Luke would practically baby him into a time out until he had to go call his mother.

Just thinking about Leia Organa makes Armitage roll his eyes. She was a politician, working for pretty much everything his father Brendol was against. Everyone was so obsessed with her in the public eye.

If only everyone knew what a total piece of shit her son was like. Surely no one that couldn’t even parent their only child should be given any sense of control or say in how to run the galaxy.

Not that Armitage particularly thought that his father was the kind of person that could do the job either. He thought Brendol was a prick, but he still craved his approval. At least some acknowledgment every once in a while.

The looming thought of parent’s night, now less than a week away, is on his mind. Brendol would be stopping by, seeing what he’s done in the months since he last saw him.

Every time he came, it was rather obvious that his skills in the force were hardly as adept as everyone else in the Academy. His father might have told him what a waste of time it was if he didn’t think that leaving the school would mean being stuck with him all the time.

Armitage knew that in many ways, he was an embarrassment to his father. Before he was even born, he was always meant to be a burden to the man. Just like his real mother probably was though
he doesn’t ever remember seeing them in the same room together.

Hell, sometimes, Armitage doesn’t even recall what his own mother looks like. Brendol was clear that contact was to cease completely after leaving Arkanis for good.

Basically, there were a lot of reasons for Armitage to take the Ben Solo route and cry about it every time his father hurt his feelings, but it made so much more sense to use it to an advantage. To build something of his own. To prove to his father that he was above it all, coax him into thinking he could ascend to greatness. If not through the force then at least through the power of manipulation and tactics.

Because one day, Brendol would realize his mistake. Armitage just had to get to that point first.

Which is what makes his thoughts keep coming back to the two pupils that have likely stolen Luke’s praises. All when the girl was probably as force sensitive as the rock she crawled out of. As long as he can show his father there was someone, anyone, further beneath him, then it was a fair place to start.

After all, he still had a score to settle anyway.

If both Solo and Rey were to somehow fall on their faces or at least get separated for a while, Armitage could definitely use it to his advantage. Looking to the small group of peers surrounding him, smirking at the concepts already taking shape in his head, he leans forward and they meet him in the middle, ready to hear his plan.

He knew they were good for it, to follow through with it. Those of them that could not see the true value of the act were too stupid to question anything else.

At least that’s what Armitage tells himself until he realizes that Azmo is too dim to pay attention at all and needs to be told three times what’s going on.

Rey watches Ben out of the corner of her eye as she pretends to be meditating. He doesn’t seem to notice she’s not really committed to it. He seems to be distracted with something else though. Lost in thought. Almost as if he was meditating himself but she knows he isn’t. He just looks a little zoned out.

Because if he wasn’t, he would realize that she wasn’t really doing anything.

They had decided that their kiss would change nothing between them. And at least on the surface, and that was true to any of the onlookers.

But then there were still times when she would be drawing him, just getting lost in every detail of his face. She’s gotten to the point where she’s pretending to use him for reference. As if she didn’t know every angle of his face by now.

But any excuse to look at him was worth it. Especially when she knew there was no other excuse to do so.

Not when, in the most basic sense, he was supposed to teach her and she was meant to learn.

And although they both have decided to move past their kiss, claiming it was pure curiosity than anything else, there were obvious topics they avoided.

Things had changed and when she noticed him spacing out like this, she wonders if they never
should have done it in the first place. It had obviously created some tension between them that neither could address outright.

For instance, last week had a rather warm day and she could tell that Ben wanted to go in the water again but purposely didn’t suggest it. Just as she knew it was better not to say anything either.

Not when it may lead to more close contact and acknowledging something that was better left buried.

So this is how they exist. Learning and reading and sparing and eating and avoiding anything that may compromise the seamless energy of that.

Never anything else.

Not that they should. But during the more restless nights of hers, she would find herself wishing to be closer to him. Wishing she could cuddle against the warmth and safety of his chest in the way she loves so much. Wishing she could tell him all she was feeling. Wishing they really didn’t need to hide from each other when they were just a few feet away. When they had said “no secrets.”

Perhaps knowing it was wrong is what made her so desperate for it. Maybe it was what made her stomach flutter at night when she would try to think of literally anything else but the thoughts of his large hands and all they could do to ease it.

It was exhausting, but as always, neither of them were going to change their circumstances, so obviously, she just needed to tough this out until she got past it.

Even when she doubts she could ever just “get past” something like this. Something as strong as love. If that’s even what it was.

Doubt trickles in her mind constantly. Did she even know what love was? Was she qualified to label her feelings as something as powerful as that?

Probably not. Which is why she just needed to keep it together until this passed. At least until her mind realized that regardless of what she wanted, she was here to become a Jedi and that was that. This was her home now and she couldn’t sacrifice it just because she couldn’t control her feelings.

It was strange. On Jakku she was so desperate to hold onto her feelings and try to cling to the love she had harbored for her parents. All while she should have been letting go.

And now she knows it would be better if she did let go. If she could let go it would make everything so easy. But no matter how desperate she was to cast any thoughts of love away, it was much easier said than done.

Ben doesn’t really know what he’s doing.

He was trying, really trying, to move past his feelings and devote himself to teaching her rather than anything else but it was difficult.

More than difficult. It was fucking impossible.

They had promised there would be no secrets, but in the weeks that followed their kiss on the very beach they sat on now, he can’t help but feel like they had taken a step back.

Honestly, he didn’t trust himself to even approach certain topics anymore, knowing he wasn’t
strong enough to just ignore the loud protests of his heart and mind.

Swimming was out of the question, which he knew was probably a disappointment to her. She loved it so much the first time, but then again, she hadn’t suggested it either. Maybe he wasn’t the only one suffering in the aftermath of what they had done. Which was sad. What had been a moment that clarified his feelings more than ever was also a sign that he needed to clamp them down. It was safer that way.

But there was still so much left unanswered. Whatever he felt for Rey went beyond just the trivial feelings of having a first crush or something as childish as that. Their initial connection in the forest, the time where their pasts were revealed to each other, that had meant something and he had been very adamant about finding out what it was.

But it also felt like another topic that he probably shouldn't bring up. Not when he thought that perhaps the depth of their connection resided on his feelings for her. Or her feelings for him.

It was those thoughts, the thoughts that she might reciprocate all of this and have her own doubts as well that keep him up the most.

The thoughts that make his heart beat a little faster when he’s lying in bed, staring at the ceiling and trying not to give any acknowledgment to the rush he feels heading south. Never has the temptation to take care of such matters been so alluring. But he never did. He definitely wouldn’t be able to face her with any sense of dignity if he caved into something such as that.

It makes him feel extremely out of control of himself, now that it was impossible to hide the truth of the attraction, he figured it was best to just ignore some things, even if he felt like he was losing something else along the way.

He wonders if maybe all this time they spend together was only making it worse. They were so close but so far away and it almost seems worse off to whatever would happen if he were to tell her how he feels. At least then he would be honest with her for the first time in what feels like forever. He should just risk the possibility that he would scare her away and for once hope that his worst fears may not be as bad as he thought.

Because he can’t even describe how relieved he is when she asks to draw him some days. It gives him hope he should be reluctant to expect but couldn’t help and embrace. It gives him hope of a future he knows could never come true.

Back and forth like this was all he did. Embracing his feelings and hoping they could be returned. Wishing he didn’t have feelings at all and trying to pretend they weren’t there only to be dragged back when he looked into her eyes or brushed against her when they walked.

It was this that had made him upgrade the situation from difficult to absolutely fucking impossible.

Just then he hears the distinctive sound of Rey’s stomach growling.

She gives a small chuckle as does he and it’s the most at ease he’s felt all day. “Hungry?” he asks.

“Always,” she answers with a smirk and Ben’s heart expands at the sight of it.

They begin to head back, knowing the first lunch bell would likely ring by the time they arrived. Hopefully, the urge to hold her hand or do anything else foolish would fade before then too.

Xid and Azmo are outside the temple, sharing a death stick behind the huts before they have to
meet back up with the others at the mess hall for lunch.

“How many do we have left?” Xid asks, nodding to the death stick.

Azmo shrugs. “I’ve got about three left. Maybe my brother can smuggle us more at parents night. I’ll call him later about it.”

“Sweet. See if he can get whiskey this time. Corellian. I heard it’s good.”

Azmo scoffs, “Okay. But if he gives me a hard time then you’re paying him back for it.”

As soon as the first lunch bell rings, they hear twigs snapping under footsteps and they turn to see Ben and Rey stepping out of the forest, making their way for the temple. Both of them are speaking to each other while they walk side by side.

Xid turns to study them, smacking Azmo’s arm. “Look. There they are.”

“I’m standing right next to you,” Azmo says, slightly miffed.

Xid ignored Azmo’s lack of enthusiasm or discretion. Although it had been Hux’s plan to mess with the two of them, Xid wasn’t one to turn down the chance for a little excitement. It was boring enough around the cursed Academy and whenever the handful of friends he had decided to stir things up, he was always eager to take part.

At least it looked a lot better than getting lumped in with the other losers. Losers by the likes of Hevaj or Boris or Pim.

Or Ben fucking Solo and the girl from the scrap yards of a trash planet.

Not to mention, after she drew that picture of Armitage (despite how hard it made him laugh) she needed to realize that there were consequences.

They march up after them, fanning the air around them, trying to rid the air of the smoke from the death stick. “Hey, guys, wait up!”

Ben and Rey halt where they are on the pathway, turning to look at them.

Xid already rejoices at the way Ben’s eye twitches in annoyance as they come to fall in step beside them. “Coming to lunch today, I see. Wonder what the occasion is.”

“We’re hungry. It’s lunchtime,” Ben says bluntly.

“Right, of course,” Xid starts. “But some days you two don’t come back until dinner and that begs the question: What are you two doing that can’t be interrupted by having a meal?”

Rey looks to Ben, her face a little flustered. “We still eat, we just pack lunch.”

Azmo gives a mock gasp. “Oh, they pack lunch, Xid, you hear that?”

“Sure did, Azmo. If I didn’t know better I’d say they were avoiding us.” Xid brings a hand to his chest, feigning offense. “Or maybe keeping certain things to themselves.” That earns him a glare from Ben.

He carries on. “Makes me wonder what they must be doing that’s so important. Because given the state of her progress, Rey doesn’t seem any different than she did on day one. No offense, Rey.”
Rey’s face falls but it’s Ben’s reaction that has both of them repressing grins. He spins around, rage in his eyes aflame. “The state of Rey’s lessons and her progress are of no concern to you.”

“Well it’s not so much her lessons I’m concerned about. I am however wondering what kind of company you’ve been keeping our newest edition. Maybe we should join you some time and teach her a few things,” Xid runs his eyes over Rey’s form suggestively.

The meaning is not lost on either of them. Ben’s teeth are bared and he looks ready to charge, but before he can, Rey reaches for him, one hand on his chest, the other wrapped around his arm, keeping him still.

“Come on, Ben,” she urges him in and Ben seems to take a deep breath, turning back around.

They continue to walk up to the temple and Xid finds himself just watching them side by side.

It was interesting to see how Ben was holding himself back but were it not from the girl’s presence, surely he would have acted on the impulse. And as interesting as it was, he still needed a larger reaction.

Hux said that Solo needed to be separated for a while. At least for enough time to do some damage.

Xid and Azmo wait for the proper moment, watching as they get closer to the temple. He can see Armitage head inside with the rest of the crowd, giving them a subtle nod that everything was going as planned.

They step in and Master Luke seems to be waiting for their arrival, calling to Rey and waving her over, wanting to talk about something.

She turns to Ben for a quick moment, whispering something softly neither Xid or Azmo could hear. Ben nods though and Xid thinks he hears him say, “It’s okay, I’m fine,” to whatever she had asked but Xid isn’t sure.

Rey steps away, going to speak with the Master, leaving Ben alone. He seems to be waiting for her before going into the mess hall, standing off to the side with his arms crossed. The usual scowl on his face remaining firm. Xid and Azmo avoid the mess hall’s entrance but walk past it. Just enough for Azmo to give a smug nod to Armitage and let him know everything was going well so far.

Ben seems to notice they’re looking at him. Their eyes meet again and his scowl deepens.

Xid seizes the window of opportunity, pulling Azmo along to join him.

“Hey, Solo. I thought you were hungry. Not heading in though, I see.” Xid follows his stare to see he’s watching Rey. “But now I see you must be hungry for something else.”

“Piss off, Xid,” Ben throws out through his teeth and Xid feels like their right on the precipice of success. Ben didn’t take much prodding to strike something out of him and he’s already held out longer than he expected. Surely just a little more would do the trick.

Azmo chuckles, “Whoa, Solo. Little hostile there. Wonder if you’re the one who should be getting one on one lessons for your behavior.”

“Maybe he already is, Azmo,” Xid furrows his brow, pretending to be contemplating.

Ben’s scowl fixes back on him while Azmo just holds back laughter. It encourages Xid further as he explains himself.
“It just seems like Rey has got quite the handle on you. Maybe she’s been easing your stress.”

Ben’s arms fall to his sides, his hands clenched in fists once again and his chest rises and falls with untethered rage. “Don’t,” he warns. His tone is low and tense. Solo was definitely getting worked up now. Especially with no one to hold him back.

Xid just chuckles further. “I wonder how far she had to go to get you to calm down. Was it just with those little hands of hers or was her mouth involved?”

Xid looks to Azmo for shared enjoyment but before he can, he’s pulled forward by his collar and nearly lifted off the ground as Ben holds him in a firm grip.

“Don’t you ever talk about her like that, you understand?” Ben seethes. His hands holding tighter to the collar of his tunic. “And don’t you ever fucking-”

“Ben!” a voice rings out from across the room and the three of them turn to see it’s Luke, wide-eyed and charging for them. Rey close behind him, concern all over her face as she looks to Solo.

Ben releases his grip on Xid’s collar and steps away from him, cursing under his breath at how strong he is. He expected Ben to get upset but Xid forgot how abrasive he was.

“All three of you, come with me,” Luke says in his teacher voice.

Azmo is the first to protest. “But he was the one-” he points to Ben but Luke shakes his head, pointing in the direction of his private quarters.

“I said all three of you. Come on,” Luke points to the stairs. His tone is far from patient and Xid walks alongside Azmo as they follow Luke out. He tries to crane his neck and take a look at Armitage and the others. They notice, of course, and wink at both of them as they are escorted out.

Rey watches as Ben leaves behind Luke with Xid and Azmo.

Rey doesn’t know what they said to Ben to make him behave the way he did, but she didn’t doubt Xid and Azmo were obviously trying to get a rise out of him.

Ben turns over his shoulder to look at her. Guilt oozes from his eyes and he purses his lips before bowing his head in apology before he is gone from her sight.

Sighing to herself, she is confused why so many of the others were so mean to Ben. They seemed to be looking for ways to taunt him and upset him every time they crossed paths.

She didn’t understand.

Noticing the lingering glances and whispers, she makes her way inside the mess hall, keeping to herself as she gets a tray. She speaks briefly with BX and it distracts for a moment from the incident. But when she turns around to the small sea of tables, she puts her head down, marching her way towards the table she and Ben usually occupy.

She’s nearly there when she suddenly hears her name. “Rey!” Her insides construct, knowing instantly it was Iella. “Rey, why don’t you sit with us today?”

That’s the last thing she wants to do. “No, thanks. I’m okay.”

Dono speaks next. “Rey, we don’t bite. Just join us this once.” She jumps up from her seat. “It’ll be fun,” she says with a knowing grin but Rey doesn’t miss how she eyes Iella, holding back a
Rey knows she’s the punchline of some joke, but she can handle herself. She wouldn’t let them get to her. Dono snatches her wrist and drags her down until she’s sitting beside her and the tray clammers with a small crash against the surface of the table.

Suddenly, she’s trapped and she finds herself in the rueful company of Dono and Iella. She takes note that it’s just them and they are huddled together with the usual jumble of boys, including Hux. All except for Xid and Azmo.

Still, Rey would rather eat quarter portions from Jakku then spend her dinner with Dono and Iella. She knew they hated her. Surely this was all part of a ruse to humiliate her.

_Fuck_, she screams in her head.

Looking around, she would have preferred to sit at one of the other tables. Some of the other students didn’t seem so bad. They could likely see what was happening now, but she knew better than to expect anyone to come in to help her.

Annoyed, but knowing it was far from the worst situation she’s ever been in, Rey just puts her head down and starts to eat her food, pretending like she was hungry still.

“Kriff, this food it pitiful,” Dono says with a laugh, starting a conversation.

“I know. When my parents come, I’m letting them know that this place is practically abusive. This food is for scum,” Iella grumbles but throws another glance at Rey. “But you must be enjoying it, Rey.”

Both girls go quiet while they look at her, waiting for her response. Was she supposed to just pretend like she hadn’t insulted her?

Whatever. Rey wouldn’t let it get to her.

“Actually, I am,” she says as casually as she can. She carries on eating her food, ignoring their words as well as she can.

Even now, her mind wanders to Ben and she worries about what happened. She didn’t hear what Xid had said to him but it obviously upset him enough to grab him the way he did. He looked so mad. She had seen a similar look in his eyes the night she found him punching the tree.

That wild look in his eyes.

Rey represses a shiver just thinking about it and then melting when she thinks of how he looked at her when he had followed Luke to his quarters.

He looked so ashamed of himself and she knows he is probably upset that she had seen him like that. Just like he had been so remorseful the first time she saw it happen.

She gets lost in thought of her concerns for Ben and it’s distraction enough to ignore whatever Iella and Dono were gossiping about.

Ben waits in the hallway next to R2-D2 while Azmo and Xid were inside speaking to Luke.

He was still fuming about what Xid had said. A part of him wanted to rip them apart for even suggesting something so vile and disrespectful.

And another part of him scolds himself, knowing that he didn’t do as Rey had advised.
Breathe and wait for me, she had said when she found him in the forest that one night. He had tried his best at first and he could tell that Rey was doing her best to keep him calm. The lingering touch of her hand resting on his chest or gripping his wrist when they were heading back to the temple. It had been too long since he had revealed in the warmth and comfort of her actual touch and he had hoped it would go unnoticed to Xid and Azmo following close behind them.

He couldn’t believe what they had said about her. It was so vile and it made him want to scream.

Fuck.

R2 beeps at him and Ben just rolls his eyes. “I said I’m fine, Artoo. Can you just drop it?”

It earns him several beeps and whistles in reply.

“Because he said something and it made me really mad.”

The droid spins around, again, low whistles ringing out.

Ben rolls his eyes. “I can’t tell you what he said. I don’t even want to think about it really, but I think I was entitled to have a reaction.” Ben knows the reaction he displayed was likely not the right one.

More beeps.

“Yeah, well you’re an astromech so don’t try and tell me what the proper reaction was supposed to be.”

The droid then says something along the lines of, “But you’re supposed to be a Jedi,” and Ben halts his defenses. He realizes no matter how he tries to explain himself, he was saying it to the wrong crowd. Even if the astromech could understand, Luke wasn’t going to see that.

Feeling defeated, he crosses his arms and ignores the droid until the door slides open again which takes a rather long time and Ben wonders if lunch is over by now or if Rey is still downstairs.

Xid and Azmo walk out with their heads down, Luke standing behind them. “And if I find out either of you has been smoking those things again you’ll be getting a punishment a lot worse than this. They’re literally called ‘death-sticks.’ Try to have some common sense.”

“Yes, Master Luke,” they both say, bowing slightly before continuing back down the hall to the mess, throwing smug glares at him as they do. Ben bites his cheek and tries to fight down the impulse to scream at them.


“Ben, would you mind joining me, please. Artoo, you can come back in as well.”

The droid spins around, his wheels turning towards the door and nearly cutting Ben off as he steps inside. His uncle moves back to a table in the middle of the room where he already has a tray of food situated on a placemat.


“If you heard what they said to me then you wouldn’t-”

Luke shakes his head, not even bothering to ask for his side of the story. “You know they’re just trying to mess with you. They want to get a rise out of you because they know it makes you go
crazy. Just don’t let them get to you, it only gives them more power over you. Just don’t listen to what they say.”

Ben scoffs. “I usually do, but this time was different. They went too far.”

“What did they say?” Luke asks, but he doesn’t sound like he’s listening. He’s speaking like he already knows everything.

Ben nearly says Rey’s name but then bites his lip, unsure if he should answer truthfully. “Does it matter?”

Luke shrugs. “Not really, because you know whatever it is wasn’t true, I’m sure. The second I called them in here, I could smell those filthy sticks on their breath. I could see it in their eyes. They were hopped up and decided to make a scene. They went for the closest target: You.”

“It wasn’t just me,” Ben spits out, regretting it immediately but knowing that Rey deserved some kind of justice.

Luke nods, the news not surprising him. “They mentioned they were nagging both you and Rey. They admit it was wrong and they’ve received their punishment as well as a near knock around with you once they said whatever they did.”

Ben rolls his eyes. No matter what punishment it was, it wouldn’t erase the things Xid said. They wouldn’t learn.

“But I need to talk to you about your own behavior and what the punishment will be.”

“Punishment? Are you kidding me? Just because I grabbed him? That was nothing!”

“If I didn’t stop you, would it have remained nothing or were you going to hit him or push him? Perhaps chew him out for what he said but then hurt yourself or others in the process? You’re very powerful, Ben. You have to remember that when your feelings get in the way, it isn’t just others you put in danger, but yourself as well. What happens when you fly off the handle? You hurt people.”

Suddenly, the look on Rey’s face when he left comes to Ben’s mind. She looked concerned. He probably scared her.

He didn’t want to hurt her. Maybe Luke was right.

“Fine, okay. I understand.”

“And I hate to admit it but you are my nephew and I’m sure a lot of this trouble between you and the others comes because they think I’m playing favorites. If I don’t punish you, it might only make things harder. I think this is for the best.”

“You sound like a politician,” Ben groans at him.

“Well, politics can be a game and sometimes you have to play it, even if it’s just when keeping peace in a Jedi Academy.”

“So, what then? Transcriptions?” Ben just wants him to get on with it so he can go find Rey again. He’s already thinking of how to approach her. Maybe apologize for acting the way he did in her brief absence away from him.
“No. I saved that for your friends there,” he gestures to the door, implying Xid and Azmo. “Instead, I need you to do some things in preparation for parent’s night. Spruce the place up with Beex for the next few days.”

“What?!”

Luke holds up his hands. “Please, don’t argue. I’m not in the mood.”

“Don’t argue?” Ben repeats, flustered, trying to come up with an excuse. “But Rey and I have lessons to do. What is she supposed to do while I’m doing this?”

“She’s a very resourceful girl. I’m sure she’ll spend her time wisely. Maybe she’ll make some new friends. Join the rest of your classmates for once. She’s not bound to you at all times, you know.”

It wasn’t what Luke was suggesting that upset him, but rather how he said it. It made it sound like Ben, being her only close friend, was a bad thing.

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“It means that some time around someone else other than you might be good for her if this is how you react whenever other people get close. You get angry and you lash out.”

“I told you! They were insulting her, I was just–”

“You were going to hurt them, Ben. I know that look.”

Ben doesn’t even answer. If he does, he’ll just start swearing at his uncle and the list of chores would just grow longer.

It was all so fucking stupid.

But perhaps he should give Rey some space. Especially when he seemed to only be making things harder for her when he acted like this.

Rey had been waiting to see what kind of form Hux’s wrath would appear as ever since she pissed him off. Perhaps it has finally arrived. She noticed that Nourdi, Soldar, and Hux gave Azmo and Xid a warm welcome when they paraded back in the room. Shortly after, she noticed that Hux kept glancing at their table. Right at Iella, it seemed.

She knew they were up to something and she didn’t like it.

She thought Ben might trail in behind them eventually but he doesn’t.

So she tries to escape by finishing her food, sacrificing her more recent table manners in hope of making her classmates squirm in disgust. If they treated her like a savage then she would eat like one and earn herself some space in the process. So when her tray is clean, she moves to stand up but Dono reaches out and snatches her wrist. “No, stay.”

“I’m done eating,” she gestures to the tray, beyond annoyed and knowing this was all some sort of ploy to ridicule her. She just wished they would do it already so she could get on with her life.

“But we’re not done talking. Sit down,” Dono says this innocently enough but the grip on her wrist says otherwise. Rey bites her cheek and settles back on the bench, setting her tray down loudly.

Iella smirks, noticing how much this annoys Rey.
“So... Rey,” she starts, saying her name with a long drawl so it sounds much longer than it should. The impending words that followed were inclined to piss her off. “You’ve been here for a while now and the rest of us have just been dying to see some of your talents in action. We were hoping you would do us the honor of showing us what you and Ben have been working so hard on. Even on weekends, you two seem to find enough to study for the whole Academy.”

Rey doesn’t like where this is going. “I’ve just arrived here. I have a lot of catching up to do.”

“Oh, I don’t doubt it. But you know, there’s a lot more to learn from just books and little meditation lessons, unless of course, you haven’t done that yet.” Iella says this as condescending as she can. It’s extremely judgemental and similar to Xid and Azmo’s words from what they had been saying outside the temple. She wonders just how widespread this is and if everyone decided to give her and Ben a shit time.

“I don’t particularly think I need to advertise what happens in my lessons. I’m learning as well as I can,” Rey says, not wanting to delve too deep on her lessons or her training anyway.

She can see that Iella is prepared to say something back but then her attention moves over Rey’s head.

Rey spins around, hoping to see Ben standing behind her but seeing Boris and Osi standing there instead.

“What do you nerf herders want?” Iella asks, making Dono snicker.

Rey can’t believe the way they speak to other people. She thought people might be civilized beyond Jakku, especially in a place such as this that seems to value peace. Apparently, that was not the case with everyone.

Boris speaks first. She hadn’t heard him speak in a while and Rey is reminded at how deep his voice really is. “Nice to see you too, Iella. Sorry, but Master Luke has requested for Rey to come to his quarters. Asked us to escort her on account that some students have been getting into scuffs.”

Rey turns back to the two girls at the table, relieved that she has an excuse to leave and mildly enjoying the look of obvious vexation on their faces.

She finally rises from the bench and follows Boris and Osi out of the mess hall.

She doesn’t miss the glances between Hux and Iella though. Obviously, she had intervened with something they had been plotting and is glad to be out of their clutches for now.

When the three of them exit the mess hall, Rey makes way for Luke’s quarters but Osi calls her back. “Rey, wait,” she says rather hushed. “You don’t have to.”

Rey is confused. She thought perhaps she was called to Luke’s room to defend Ben’s standpoint. “But you said that Luke—”

“We made it up. It looked like you might have needed a little help and Iella and Dono can be a little…” Boris trails off shaking his head, “you know,” he says with a small chuckle.

“Oh, right,” Rey says, understanding. “That was actually very helpful. I was feeling a little stuck and...” Rey turns, walking back towards them. “...well, thank you.”

“Don’t mention it, Rey. We just felt bad it took us so long to get you out of that. We heard them talking about you and Ben earlier. We thought they might try to pull something.”
The walk out of the temple, making their way down the path. “You heard them talking about us?” Rey asks. Both of them nod. “What were they saying?”

Boris and Osi share a look that makes Rey think they don’t even want to say. Oni speaks up though after Boris shrugs. “They seemed to be putting something together. Something to make you feel bad. They called you some pretty harsh names, things I certainly would never say.”

Boris shakes his head and holds up his hand as if in an oath. “Me either.”

Rey gives a small laugh. “Yeah, well, they do seem to have a pretty colorful vocabulary and the few enough brain cells to act on pretty stupid ideas.”


“Yeah,” Boris grunts in agreement. “And Hux isn’t even really force sensitive. He’s all talk.”

Rey recalls Ben mentioning something like this before. Hux wasn’t particularly gifted in the force. “They don’t think I’m force sensitive either. I think they’re all trying to prove they’re better than me, or something like that. It sounds like something they would do.”

“Definitely,” says Osi.

And then a swift, “For sure,” from Boris.

Suddenly, she hears loud footsteps make their way down the hill but she doesn’t panic. She knows it’s Ben before she sees him. As if she could feel him returning to her.

She spins around, glad to see he’s out. She forgets her present company and rushes to meet him. “Ben! Are you okay?”

He shakes his head and gives a groan. “I’m on clean-up duty for parent’s night for the next few days and–” Ben seems to just realize the appearance of the other two.

“Oh! Hi, Boris. Hi, Osi.” Ben nods to them politely, more so than she expected from him. Especially since she knows he’s upset. But in his arrival, both Boris and Oni get a little skittish looking before they start to drift away.

Boris offers a small, “Yeah, hey.”

An awkward silence follows.

Osi finally breaks it but not exactly for the best. “Oh, I forgot. We’re supposed to catch up with Hevaj and Pim so we’ll catch you guys later.”

Rey knows a poor excuse when she hears one. Even if she hasn’t really been around them for very long. “Oh, okay. Well, thank you again for your help. Really, you saved me.”

Boris’ ear twitches a bit as he waves a hand. “No worries, Rey. We’ll talk to you later,” he says with a kind smile before he looks to Ben, but not without tensing up a bit. “See ya around, Ben.”

Rey notices how Ben’s shoulders sink a little as they flee.

He doesn’t speak until they’re out of earshot. “I told you people don’t like me. They’re scared of me.”
Rey’s heart sinks a bit when she notices how sad he sounds. “Ben...” she wants to tell him it isn’t true, but she saw how quiet they both got upon Ben’s arrival. Even them, as nice as they were, seemed to make things more difficult for Ben but they probably didn’t know any better. They probably didn’t know that it hurt Ben’s feelings the way it did.

He shakes his head, halting whatever excuse she was trying to make. “What did they help you with?”

“Oh, well, Iella and Dono were holding me captive at lunch. Boris and Osi were able to peel me away before they got any further with it.”

Ben bites his lip a bit before speaking again. “Was it around Hux and Soldar and the rest of them?” She can tell just saying their names upset him immensely.

“No, but it probably would have been. They were sitting at their own table today and asking me questions about our lessons together but I just deflected everything. I think they’re working with Hux to get back at me or something and I don’t trust them for a minute, not like any of that matters right now because I’ve been dying to know what happened to you.” She says, nudging him a little bit to make sure he was listening. He looked a little dazed again, though his eyes remained on her face. “What happened, Ben?”

He gives a sigh, closing his eyes, briefly. “Xid said,” he shakes his head again. “I can’t even say what he said, it made me so mad.” She hears his voice croak a little bit and she steps closer.

“Ben?”

“I’m sorry,” he says. His voice is so quiet and strained as if he’s holding back a sob or a scream.

She steps closer, settling her hand on his arm, trying to comfort him. “Why?”

“I didn’t...I mean, I shouldn’t have let it get to me but it did. I should have just taken a deep breath and waited for you like you said, but I just snapped and before I could even think, I just grabbed him.”

“Ben, they knew what they were doing. They were trying to upset you. Don’t be so hard on yourself. It’s not always easy to just ignore things,” she says, looking down, knowing she means her words in more ways than one. "You didn't hurt anybody."

Ben nods but doesn’t say anything.

So she asks another question. “Luke punished you? He wants you to prepare for when the parents arrive?”

He groans, finally speaking again. “Yeah. The chore list is a parsec long and I have to tend to it for the next few days.”

Rey’s mind catches up to what that means for them and gets a little panicked. “What about our lessons?”

Ben shakes his head again, looking to his feet. He’s obviously upset. “Luke suggested for you to join regular classes for the next few days until I get my act together and calm down.”

“Regular classes,” Rey repeats, slightly nervous. She’s never been in regular classes and all she can think about is being swarmed by their rude classmates who were obviously looking to start trouble for them.
He must notice because he moves to cover her hand that rests on his arm. Despite the nature of their conversation, it makes her heart speed up a little bit, relieved that the distance she thought was between them isn’t as vast as it feels in her mind.

“I know. It’s stupid and unfair and I’m not happy about any of it. Most of this is because Luke doesn’t want to look like he’s playing favorites because I’m his nephew.”

Rey scoffs.

“And...I think he wants you to make some other friends. He sounds a little disappointed that we spend so much time together.”

Rey’s jaw drops. “But that’s—” she stutters a moment just to give a small growl in frustration. “He was the one who put us together for lessons in the first place. Why is it now a problem?”

“He must have remembered that I lose my temper sometimes. He tries to isolate me when it happens so I don’t hurt anyone else,” the look of annoyance is mixed with shame, making him look rather defeated. “Not that it mattered much before because I was already isolated but I think he’s trying to over do it now. He probably thinks I would hurt you.”

“Ben, you wouldn’t,” Rey insists but he doesn’t look convinced.

He shakes his head, moving past the subject as if there was nothing left to say about it. “Listen, I’m going to go eat something before I get started but I guess I have to get going.” Ben looks over his shoulder to the receding figures of Boris and Osi. “Maybe you should join some of them for the afternoon. They’re not all like Hux, even if they seem to think I’m going to attack them every time I get near.”

Rey scoffs, thinking he sounds ridiculous but knowing that in a way, he was right. Not that he would attach them but it was clear that few others saw the kindness in Ben as she did. They thought he was dangerous. “Ben, I don’t—”

“No, really. You deserve some more nice people to spend time with because you’re kind and friendly and you should have more people around you to admire that. And maybe Luke is right,” he says quietly, unable to look at her. She waits for what he’ll say, wondering what Ben could possibly be referring to. “Maybe you shouldn’t be spending so much time with me,” he finally says and Rey thinks she could cry at how upset he sounds. Does he genuinely believe that? That she should be spending time with people that aren’t him?

Before she should say anything, Ben begins to turn back around for the temple. She reaches out to hold him back. “Wait, Ben,” she scrambles, trying to think of something to say so they wouldn’t leave things like this. “Maybe we should talk more about what happened with Xid and—”

“No,” he says quickly, his tone tense and he keeps marching away. “No, I really don’t feel like it.”

Rey jogs to catch up with him. “Just tell me what they said to you and maybe—”

“I don’t want to talk about it, Rey!” He says, looking down at her. She’s surprised at him but is also startled at how close he is. They’re back in that territory they had been in right before they kissed.

Too close, Rey knows.

She pulls back a little bit and Ben seems to have caught up with everything when he backs up a little too. “I-I didn’t mean,” he starts to apologize but his look of defeat continues and he just turns
to look at the temple. “Listen, we can talk about it later. But I have to go. Beex is going to pack away the lunch food before I get a chance to eat.”

He turned away, leaving Rey confused and slightly annoyed that he would just storm off like that. He seemed to think he deserved to be alone and stuck in this punishment and it was incredibly frustrating.

She looks to where Boris and Osi went, wondering if she was supposed to catch up with them now that she, apparently, didn’t have her usual lessons with Ben.

But even that sounded like too much to deal with.

It was clear that Ben didn’t want to let her in right now and her heart sank in her chest.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading if you made it this far. Next one should be done soon and we can see Rey take a spot in regular lessons. Hux and the other turds never completed their meddling nonsense so we'll see what happens when they do now that Rey is going to be integrated with the rest of the class.

I'm beginning to realize that the way I like to write may include way too much explaining and I'm sorry about that but I'm trying to stick to the formula that I started with. Thank you for being patient with me if you're keeping up with it.

We're getting somewhere, I just want it to all fall in line with how I've outlined their progression.
Okay, I wanted this one completed, like, over a week ago but it changed pretty massively like three times so I’ve been in the annoying midst of rearranging things which isn’t super exciting.

I think I got it this time, lol. I’m going to try to post it from my phone so there might be more mistakes than I realize but hopefully, it still makes sense. This is like all three or four versions hodgepodge together and I’ve kind of lost track of which one I decided to stick with but whatever.

It could be a wreck but I still hope you enjoy. The next one should be done soon (knock on wood).

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Hevaj, you’re next. Get ready for when Pim and Soldar are done.”

“Yes, Master Skywalker,” Hevaj nods, looking a little nervous.

Rey stood to the side, just trying to figure out where she fits in this organized chaos. It’s clear that everyone else is used to what’s happening and she's trying not to be obvious about how overwhelmed she is.

Or how much she wishes Ben was here. Even if she was still annoyed with him.

She expected him to come to her hut last night so they could talk but he never came and she never worked up the courage to march over to his. She had been self-conscious to initiate anything after he didn’t seem to want to talk about it earlier and she thought maybe it was best not to push it. Maybe Ben just needed some time and maybe she did too.

She had been disappointed that morning though when he was not only gone from his hut, but he had apparently woken up early to eat breakfast alone so he could get to work on the chores Luke needed him to do.

She tried not to think about it but that was easier said than done. Even the constant activity of the regular classes amongst the other dozen kids was not enough to distract her.

She lingers to the side as she watches them in combat training. Two students would spar in the middle. The first one to three points would then spar with the next person. And Soldar had been in the middle for the last seven students. Soldar was currently knocking Pim to the ground which then sent Hevaj to the middle.

Apparently, combat training was rare. At least with other students. Ben told her once that students practice with their lightsabers with simulator helmets and programs so if anything goes wrong they don’t accidentally slice off someone’s limbs. Supposedly this activity is a favorite amongst the other students as whoever wins at the end or has the most points earns some kind of bragging rights. But that didn’t really interest her.
At least, it wasn’t any kind of the attention that she would want, given how everyone cheering for Soldar was being extremely obnoxious. Although she isn’t the slightest bit surprised to see it’s Hux, Iella, Azmo, and all the rest of them. It was exhausting just to keep up with all their names.

There hadn’t been any developments since Iella and Dono pulled her to their table yesterday and she wanted to keep it that way.

But then again, she could swear some of them kept looking at her. Even now, in the intensity of all the cheering and sparring.

There’s a slight change in energy when Hevaj scores a point by knocking on Soldar’s calf. It is short lived though when Soldar gives a growl and spins around, knocking against Hevaj. It earns Soldar his third point in the match but it also makes Hevaj groan in pain as he doubles over.

“Three points! You’re out!” Soldar exclaims, throwing his arms up in the air in victory.

“Soldar!” Luke snaps, watching Hevaj for a moment to make sure he was okay as he limped back over to Pim and Un’i. “Show a little decorum or you’ll be removed from combat training.”

“Of course, Master. Apologies,” he holds a hand to his chest in mock sincerity. He spins the staff around a bit before planting into the ground by his feet as if it were a flag to mark his territory. “Now, who’s next?”

Luke gives a sigh, looking to his students. “Anyone want to volunteer and try to knock him off his ego? Force knows he needs it.”

Soldar huffs while his friends, particularly Azmo and Dono, peel into laughter at the comment. At least Luke was acknowledging it but Rey doesn’t know why they bothered continuing when it has obviously been getting enough out of hand. Rey didn't think it needed any more prodding.

But then Luke’s eyes land on Rey and she looks down, unsure of what that means. Surely he didn’t expect…

“Rey?” Luke’s voice asks out as if he could read her thoughts. “Would you like to give it a try? I’m sure we’ve all been looking forward to seeing what you can do.”

Everyone (and she’s not exaggerating because it really is everyone) turns to look at her and waits to see what she will do.

Rey nearly balks, thinking that if Luke was trying to gently integrate her into the regular flow of things, this was a rather abrasive way to do it.

Maybe that was on purpose though. Maybe he was trying to see if she would accept.

And even if it makes her heart pick up speed, she knows declining would probably be more damaging in the long run. It doesn’t leave her much choice.

She clears her throat. “Okay,” she manages, stepping forward. Hevaj gives her a kind but slightly pained smile as he passes her the staff.

Rey nearly bunks, thinking that if Luke was trying to gently integrate her into the regular flow of things, this was a rather abrasive way to do it.

She clears her throat. “Okay,” she manages, stepping forward. Hevaj gives her a kind but slightly pained smile as he passes her the staff.

Rey kicks off her boots at the edge of the circle, something she noticed everyone else had been doing and she was a student of observation if nothing else. The whispering intensifies at Soldar’s end. Dono’s miserable pitch making itself known.

Rey ignores it, knowing they’re all making fun of her anyway. Soldar struts forward with a smug
look on his face.

Luke clears his throat. “Alright, I would like a nice fair match. I’m looking at you, Soldar.”

Soldar scoffs. “I’m not going to hold back. If she gets scared she can leave but I’m not risking my spot. I have twenty-four points!”

Luke scoffs but doesn’t respond and Rey knows nothing has changed. She needs to step forward.

Xid spins the staff around in a showy display of foolish tricks that she thinks are meant to scare her, but they don’t. If anything, she has to refrain from rolling her eyes.

She knows a few little tricks of her own, but she thinks it’s best to hold off. She could have a larger advantage if Soldar isn’t expecting it.

She doesn’t add any flair to it but readies the staff in her hands as well as she can. Obviously, the lack of finesse amuses half of the audience and Rey tries to swallow back the doubt in her mind. She takes a deep breath, thinking of all those times she’s sparred with Ben.

It had been fun then. Light and nearly playful. They would tease each other with stupid banter that made her laugh until one of them gave in and they called it a match.

It wouldn’t be like that now, but the thought of a simpler time helps her breathe a little easier. It gives her the strength to step forward and do her best.

“All right, scavenger, let’s see what you got!” Soldar says as he strikes his staff through the air and tries to knock her off her feet but she spins her staff around, blocking his attempts and advancing forward until she’s knocked him back, hitting him on the arm and earning her the first point.

“Ohh,” the onlookers call out. Partly in a wince, partly in shock. Overall, surprised at her.

Soldar gets a grim look on his face and his jaw tightens in vexation.

She’s pissed him off and tries to hold back the smirk on her face at the thought. This might be a lot of fun after all.

If only Ben were here.

Ben is walking back upstairs to Luke’s quarters when he hears BX calling after him. “Master Solo, don’t forget the cleaning supplies. It will make the task much easier.”

“Yeah, I got them Beex,” he says, lifting the bucket up in his hand. “I’ll be back soon.”

“Be careful, Master Solo. I’d hate for you to fall.”

“I’ll be fine,” Ben insists, slightly rolling his eyes, wondering how the droid never seemed to pick up on his irritated tone.

He makes his way into Luke’s quarters, making for the window. He sets the bucket on the ledge for a moment so he could prepare himself. And to also just have a quiet minute alone for the first time all morning. Although he knew it was BX’s job to be enthusiastic about cleaning and culinary duties, it was exhausting. And the energy it takes to just go along with it and not complain is even more so. If he whines or makes any kind of fuss, he doesn’t doubt that Luke would be quick to add more chores on.
It was ridiculous.

He should be in the middle of lessons right now, most likely sitting on the beach watching Rey meditate or tie her hair back or teasing him about how she would best him in any kind of battle. It leaves him stuck wondering what Rey might be doing at that moment and his shoulders sink when he thinks of yesterday.

Ben doesn’t know how it’s all happened so fast. He wasn’t foolish enough to convince himself that he could control his emotions or could have kept himself from feeling the way he does, but he had at least always been good at keeping his distance, keeping as many people out as he can. For Rey, he had fallen, even when his heart knew it would only hurt him to do so. It seemed he wasn’t good at protecting himself after all. He wasn’t as closed off as he had thought himself capable of.

Because something had changed when he met Rey. She found her way in and now he never wanted her to leave.

And now, as he looks to the bucket of punishment at his side, Ben feels like he really messed up. Everything with Rey managed to get so complicated even though his feelings were certain. So, when Xid said what he did, it just made him snap.

Because in a way, excluding how vile Xid had phrased it, he was right. Rey has possessed him, body and soul. He’s gotten lost in the soft touch of her hands and the tenderness of her lips. The serenity of just being with her consumed him. It’s intoxicating and the thought that it was apparently obvious to most loathsome assholes the academy had to offer was unsettling.

Obviously, he was only making it harder for Rey when his apparent affections were keeping her from having a normal experience here. Even if training to become a Jedi seemed like the furthest things from a normal experience.

So, in his confused and rattled mind, he had pushed her away, thinking that it was the safest option.

But it only made the gaping void in his chest grow bigger. The guilt he carried from just leaving her there ate him alive all night. He said he would talk to her later but he never did. He felt too ashamed and he didn’t even know how to begin explaining himself when it would just be more cover stories.

It would just be more masks of the truth that he couldn’t stomach to keep down anymore. Not when he loved her the way he did.

But he couldn’t avoid her either. He doesn’t think he could handle that. He misses her.

Ben gives a big sigh, folding his head into his chest, trying to savor the moment of total silence before he lifts his leg over the windowsill and suspends the bucket in the air to follow him to the perch of scaffolding he was told to clean.

He carefully maneuvers himself to the right position, ensuring he won’t fall before examining the task before him and groaning when he sees the accumulation of bird shit that he needs to scrub off.

Of course, he had to do this, because the main concern parents must have is that their children are going to a school that’s so good, not even birds shit on it. “Fucking hell,” he mutters to himself.

He settles the bucket beside him with a wave of his hand, preparing himself when he hears a crowd of cheering and shouting.

*What the–*
It happens again a moment later, even louder this time and Ben cranes his neck to look down where it’s coming from but it’s further behind the temple. He looks to the bucket and then to the bird shit, knowing it wasn’t going anywhere and decides to carefully make his way across the scaffolding to see more clearly what was going on.

He rounds a corner to see everyone out at the area where they hold combat training, or at least the kind with bo staffs. He hides well enough so no one notices him but the air nearly expels from his lungs when he sees what all the commotion is about.

Rey is in the center, twirling and striking with a staff as beautifully as she always does. And not only is she sparring against Soldar, but she’s also winning.

A grin splits his face, his chest filling with pride at how well she’s doing. She’s even using some of the footwork and perversion tactics he taught her and it makes his cheeks heat up.

Soldar growls in refusal, knowing by now he was losing and he rushes forward to strike her down. Ben’s breath catches and he tenses, worried he would hurt her, but then she ducks, spinning nimbly on her feet until she rises behind him, throwing him off balance and knocking him off his feet.

He lands with a thud and a handful of students that don’t associate themselves with Soldar begin to cheer. She won the match. She beat Soldar.

Ben nearly claps too when he remembers he’s watching all of this from the secrecy of the roof, so he remains silent. But he does nothing to hide the smile on his face.

He tries to look closer, to see Rey’s face and even if he wished to be by her side, it made him feel good that she was doing okay and some of the other students were being kind to her.

But he notices her face. She’s smiling, but not the kind of smile she always gives him.

It doesn’t show her teeth or meet her eyes. Even from where he was standing on this roof, he could tell that much.

He watches as most of the other students disperse, seeing as Soldar’s reign must have ended with Rey’s victory. Boris and Osi nudge her on the arm, likely giving her praise. Ben sees her shrug in her usual modesty before looking back to the ground and picking up her boots.

She says something to them and they wait to the side as she moves to sit down on a log and put her shoes back on.

He watches her in longing, wishing he could be there beside her. Wishing he could sit next to her and tell her what a good job she did.

And then, her neck cranes up. She slowly turns around, looking over her shoulder and up at the roof. Her eyes land on him instantly as if she could feel him there and he panics.

She probably didn’t want him invading this moment where it seemed like she was finally reaching some semblance of normality around people that could give her that.

But she doesn’t look away. Instead, she looks back at him, the corners of her mouth growing into the smile he knows so well.

There was no way he could fight off the urge to smile back at her and despite the distance between them, not only from where they stand but also where they left things yesterday, it makes him feel better. Like things weren’t as messy as he thought they were.
She gives him a smug look before pretending to clean off imaginary dust from her fingernails from her sparring match.

He chuckles, shaking his head at her. And then Osi calls her name, waving her over. Ben doesn’t think anyone but Rey saw him but he ducks back anyway, in case they noticed where Rey had been looking.

He lingers long enough to see everyone walking back into the temple for lunch.

After that, he wants nothing more than to rush down and join Rey and try to work his way through some kind of apology and reconciliation. Even if he doesn’t know how to tamper down his feelings, he knows that no matter what happens, he wants to be around Rey.

Unfortunately, it would have to wait for later as he had a roof to clean and an uncle who probably wouldn’t let him into the mess hall if he tried.

As he reaches for the sponges in the bucket and moving to his knees, he begins to think of what he’ll say to Rey when he sees her next. If he hurries and gets everything done, maybe he could join her for dinner and try to explain himself.

The anxiety and planning he puts into the words flooding through his mind distract him enough from thinking too much about the fact that he was literally knee deep in bird shit.

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After lunch, everyone is permitted to individual study which apparently meant doing anything they wanted. Rey is surprised at how leisurely Luke tends to everyone else when it seemed like he was rather strict with Ben.

Boris and Osi had invited her to sit at their table where Hevaj, Pim, and Un’i eventually joined them as well. They were very friendly and they all took turns complimenting her on her victory over Soldar.

She had her back to Hux and Soldar’s table during lunch but she could feel their eyes burning into her. She knew she had now not only upset Hux, but now Iella, Dono, and Soldar to match. Surely, they were full-on despising her by now.

And yet, she couldn’t bring herself to care. She didn’t really care what they thought about her or whatever Xid and Azmo said to Ben yesterday. She only really wanted things to be like they were before.

She really just wanted to be with Ben.

And as nice and friendly as the other group had been, Rey felt like she needed some space. She doesn’t know why because everything had been fairly pleasant but she still found herself pretending to laugh at things and kind of confused as to what the general sense of humor. Maintaining a conversation that wasn’t awkward was difficult enough.

She had kept turning around, looking to the door and hoping Ben might come in.

She had seen him on the roof of all places and hope blossomed in her chest when he looked at her. They shared a small quiet moment but she would recognize his reluctant smile from a parsec away.

She was relieved that at least when they meet back up again, any tension from their previous conversation might be buffered by their brief connection outside.
Those thoughts had honestly kept her fairly distant from the conversations at lunch and the others probably picked up on it, realizing she was focused on something else.

So she excused herself after she finished eating, claiming she had some reading to catch up on. But when she arrived at the library, she could see Xid and Azmo taking up the main table, arguing and complaining about transcriptions.

She had gone to her hut after that, spending a while doing some reading that she figured she could catch up on. But after a few hours of that, she needed a change of scenery.

So, that’s how she found herself wandering off to the woods, aiming for the beach where she and Ben usually were at this time of day.

It’s strange to make the trip herself, after becoming so accustomed to Ben’s company and conversation. When she arrives at the shore, she felt a twinge of disappointment that Ben wasn’t there, even when she knew he was likely still working on his endless list of chores. She had no reason to expect him to be but she still wished for it.

Rey pulls out her sketchbook, working on another depiction of her favorite view on the entire planet. She plants herself on the beach, making quick lines before gradually moving on to finer details. It’s a little cloudier today and Rey wonders if it might rain. It seemed like it might but she was still getting used to reading the sky and trying to guess the weather.

She had gotten so used to endless heat and unbearable sunlight.

After a while, she takes a moment to stop and look at her drawing. She doesn’t like it as much as the other ones she’s done. It looks kind of empty and she realizes that her focal point, the main part of her drawing, is missing.

Ben isn’t in it.

She shakes her head at herself. Even her subconscious self was constantly looking for him in everything.

Lost in thought, she opens to one of her favorite pages. She wasn’t one to boast about her work, but she rather admired a spread she had done. On the left side of the page was Ben, nimbly moving his fingers to braid the stems of flowers together. On the right was Ben wearing the crown made of flowers after he completed it.

She always smiles at it. He’s got a funny look on his face as he wears the crown. He had outright refused to wear it at first, especially for the drawing. But all it took was for her to beg a little and he caved almost instantly and let her draw him as he always does.

He let her keep the flower crown after she finished the drawing. She had worn it for a while before pressing them snuggly in the pages of the back of the sketchbook so she could always keep them. She skips the pages ahead to find them, brushing her fingers gently past the petals.

She knows they’re just flowers, but it feels like so much more.

Everything with Ben tended to be like that. It wasn’t just swimming. It wasn’t just holding hands. It wasn’t just kissing.

It was all so much more and she wished he was sitting beside her now so she could lean against his shoulder and try to find a way to tell him that.
Except she’s alone and Ben isn’t here. She hopes he’ll be at dinner tonight so she could at least see him. Even if he isn’t at dinner, Rey figures she should head back anyway. Dinner would be served soon.

But then she hears voices coming from the forest. The loathsome whine of Dono’s voice making itself known.

She slams her sketchbook shut and scrambles to her feet. They’re coming from the path she takes back so she delves further into the forest in hopes of finding a hiding spot. She didn’t want to be caught alone this far from everyone with a bunch of assholes who were probably dying to confront her. Not that she couldn’t handle herself, but she didn’t think being outnumbered by a bunch of hot-headed and pompous idiots was going to work out well.

She makes her way through the trees as quietly as she can. She hears them laughing and talking and calling out her name.

“Oh, Rey! Come on out to play!” Dono calls in a sing-songy voice.

“Come on out, desert rat!” Hux bellows next.

_Fuck_, Rey thinks to herself. They’re definitely looking for her. She quickens her pace searching for any kind of sanctuary she could find.

She stays close to the coast (not wanting to get herself lost), although it seems that there’s no beach, but rather an abrupt drop into the water.

But then she walks too far and the forest stops. Now there’s just a large boulder at the end. There’s a dark opening in the middle and it looks like a cave. Rey knew better than to rush inside. Surely, that would be too obvious a hiding spot. Not to mention, she didn’t know what was in there. It could be anything.

She wanted to flee elsewhere, but she’s cornered herself. The path had gotten more narrow and if she turned around she would run into her hunting party.

“Fucking hell,” she mutters to herself. “This is so kriffing stupid.”

And it was.

“Are you _sure_ you saw her wander out here, Dono?” Armitage asks.

“Of course I am, Armie. I thought we would have found her by now or at least at that beach they always walk to.”

“Well, she probably heard your voice and went running,” Soldar accuses.

“Excuse me!?” Dono snaps. “We’ve all been calling for her. If she is hiding, that doesn’t make it my fault!”

“Shut up!” Nourdi shouts over them. “We’re never going to find her if you’re all fucking arguing. If you keep quiet, maybe we can sense her.”

“‘Sense her?’” Iella asks, aghast. “There’s nothing to sense. She’s as force sensitive as these fucking tree branches that keep smacking me in the face.”

Hux just shakes his head. He doesn’t know why he relies on these fools to help him with anything
if all they do is argue and never get anything done.

He supposes he should at least be grateful that they finally listened to him. They’re realizing for themselves what a chore this girl had become. It’s definitely put Soldar in a sour mood since she beat him in sparring earlier.

Of course, Soldar had to insist all afternoon that she never actually won because he still finished with twenty-four points and Rey only had three. One match did not win her victory.

Nourdi was quick to assure him he was right and it seemed to be the only thing that kept Soldar from going catatonic.

Still, Hux figured it was best to act on his mission while everyone was riled up too. He suggested they find Rey and let her know just how wasteful she is as an addition to the academy. Anything to knock her down and keep her there. Especially after her supposed triumph earlier that day.

She was getting too ahead of herself and she had only just arrived about two months ago. Armitage had been here for years and wasn’t about to be knocked further down to the likes of desert scrap.

Armitage looks down at the path before him, trying to navigate the complicated terrain of the forest and nearly tripping on a root when he notices a small purple flower on the ground. He leans down to pick it up and sees that it was perfectly flat. As if it had been pressed. He bites his lip, wondering what it could be when he looks further ahead, noticing that up ahead, there’s another one.

And another one.

A sneer grows on his face as he suspects they may lead them to their classmate. “Nourdi,” he calls ahead, pointing to the trail of small purple flowers. “See them?”

Nourdi gives a chuckle. “Oh, yeah. It’s gotta be her.” He snaps his fingers, trying to get the attention of the others.

They follow the trail of sparse petals and it leads them further into territory they rarely even approach. Armitage seldom even came into the forest. There certainly wasn’t anything of interest here for him.

Actually, that could be said for nearly everything on this pitiful planet.

He leads the way, guided by the flowers. His four companions walk beside him and they laugh about what they’ll do when they find her.

“I think we should scare her,” says Nourdi.

“Oh, we’ll definitely scare her,” Iella assures him. “The question is how? I don’t think just screaming at her is going to do much.”

“Well, do what you want but I’m sure as kriff going to give her a piece of my mind about what happened today,” Soldar says, obviously distraught. “She needs to know she didn’t win. We have a point system for a reason.”

“Fuck, Soldar, we know. You’ve gone over it a thousand times. Please spare us another description of the point system until she’s actually around to hear it,” Nourdi asks, rolling his eyes.

“You know what, Nourdi? You’re not the one who got knocked on his ass by a girl who probably
weights ninety pounds.”

That makes Dono laugh. “I know. She’s like a twig.”

They keep marching forward. Hux hasn’t come across a flower in a while but apparently, they don’t need it.

Instead, he sees the girl up ahead and grins. She has nowhere else to run.

Rey heard them holler and cheer when they catch sight of her.

She’s stuck and there’s nowhere else to go.

“Well, if it isn’t a wild Rey,” Hux says with a smirk. “Careful everyone, they’ve been known to bite.”

Laughter rings out and Rey sees all of them advance. Five of them, she counts.

“What do you want?” she asks, refusing to drop her guard. She wouldn’t be intimidated by them.

“What do we want?” Hux scratches his chin. “Well, for starters, I would very much like to express my absolute abhorrence at your manners. Obviously, you’ve never been equipped with what it takes to be a functional person in society.”

“Oh, and this is what you consider appropriate manners? Chasing me down in the forest to yell at me?”

Hux seems to ignore her statement and just continues on. “Not to mention how I feel the need to pity you for your taste in tutors. Honestly, if you enjoy spending your time with the likes of Ben Solo, you really are a hopeless case.”

Rey bites back her rage. All they ever seemed to talk about was how much they hated Ben. “If you think I’m a waste, then why bother telling me what is or isn’t worth my time?”

Soldar steps forward. “Because for such an insignificant little desert rat, you seem to not grasp what your place is here.”

Rey scoffs. “And what might that be?”

Dono shrieks in laughter, excited at what comes next.

Hux gives a quick scoff of his own before stepping closer and his posse follows, closing in on her as well. Enough that she begins to cross the threshold of the cave. This doesn’t deter them in the slightest though and Hux continues with his speech.

“You’re a worthless little scavenger who doesn’t belong here. You don’t have what it takes to even learn among us or pretend to possess the same greatness that runs through our veins. You will never be anything more than scrap that someone probably left for dead on a worthless planet.”

There’s a traitorous voice in the back of her head that whispers, he’s right. But she tucks it away. She wasn’t going to listen to anything this prick had to say. Just because she was left behind didn’t make her garbage or scrap or that she was meant to be alone.

You’re not alone anymore, Rey. Ben told her that.
Still, it doesn’t change the fact that their words are hurtful.

Hux delivers his rant with his arms crossed, stepping closer and closer until Rey finds that she’s stepped into a small tidal pool. The small waves crash against the back of her legs but that seems to escape the rest of their notice.

The other four behind Hux are mocking his stance and keeping their arms crossed as well as maintaining matching sneers on their faces.

“And as for whatever Solo has been trying to teach you, I urge you to realize that he’s only humoring you. He’s only putting on the ruse to train you so he can get out of regular classes where he is nothing but a disappointment to his uncle. But since you seem to think of him as your friend, I can only assume it’s because pathetic souls stick together, don’t they?”

Hux turns to smirk at his friends, all reveling in his words he’s probably been practicing since she drew his face on the ass of a bantha.

Rey feels her rage rise within her as quickly as the water rushing in with the tide, now just beneath her knees, soaking the ends of her pants. But that was the furthest thing from her mind at that moment.

“So, that is your purpose in coming here? You track me down to the forest to insult me?” Rey’s voice carries louder with the aid of the cave’s acoustics. “I have as much right to be here as any of you and I’m not just going to stand here while you try to tell me what a waste of space I am!” Rey steps forward, the water splashing with the rise of her legs.

Hux gives a small chuckle, “Is that so? If you’re so powerful and Solo’s managed to get anything into that primitive skull of yours then why don’t you show us?”

Everyone laughs at that. The concept too ridiculous for them to accept.

Nourdi presents himself closest to her, “Yeah, Rey,” he says, hardly able to breathe from his hysterics. “Push me back! Show us what Solo’s been teaching you!”

“Yeah, come on!” Soldar screams, crowding her. “What are you afraid of?!”

Rey pulls herself back, trying to get away from them. Their voices driving her further up a wall.

There’s a part of her that wants to do what they’re asking. She wants to show them what she can do and get them off her ass and as far from her as possible.

But as she feels herself shaking with fury and anger, she is suddenly reminded of how she felt that day on Jakku. The day she killed that man. And Rey doesn’t trust herself not to hurt them in that same way. Because as much as she can’t stand them, she certainly doesn’t want to kill them or hurt them in any way.

If she did hurt them, she has nowhere else to go. And in the brief time she’s spent in this place, there’s too much she could lose.

Excluding, of course, the current company of the total shitheads in front of her.

When she doesn’t do anything, they cross their arms and twist their mouths in a smug smirk. They’re waiting.

“I don’t need to prove anything to you!” Rey shouts at them.
They aren't sure what to make of her denial, so they stay quiet, waiting to see what Hux will do. But then, Hux gives a small chuckle, “Look, everyone. The desert rat makes another desperate excuse. Awfully naive, isn’t she? That or she takes us for total fools.”

“How fucking stupid do you think we are?” Iella yells at her. Rey is about to answer that when suddenly Soldar speaks up again.

“Uh oh. Back up everybody.” He laughs, obviously the charade of humiliating her not relenting. “She’s got that same crazy look in her eyes from when we spared earlier. I only lost because I was worried she would take it too far. It was easier to just let her win.”

Soldar’s comment makes some of the others scoff, likely noticing the desperate excuse for what it was, but Hux just nods in agreement. Perhaps agreeing with him for the benefit of ganging up on her. “Yes, you do seem to have a point there, Soldar. She seems to have no grasp on how to rationally handle a situation.”

Rey’s brows shot up in accusation. “Oh, and you consider stalking me out in the woods and cornering me like this is rational?” Rey asks incredulously, gesturing to the cave around her and the water splashing her legs.

“I consider it to be the last option available since you seem to be making it rather difficult. You need to understand that your behavior will not be tolerated. Your lack of manners obviously has not been helped since you’ve been spending all your time with Solo. And I suppose I could think about showing you mercy if were to apologize to us for your actions. If you’re smart, you won’t make this harder on yourself.”

Apoloizing? Was he kriffing mad?

“What would apologizing even do? You’re still going to treat me and Ben like shit no matter what. So, I think I’ll keep my dignity and just tell you all to fuck off.” Rey swats the air with her hand towards the exit.

Hux’s hands uncross to settle on his hips, blocking her path. “You know, you may think you’re all tough but you should really be more careful. I don’t know if you noticed but this place is for people who are training to progress their powers. Powers that, by the looks of it, you don’t have. You never know what we may be capable of.”

Rey could laugh at that. He prides himself in pretending he was as powerful as everyone else. The dynamics of his posse confusing her further. Surely they would have noticed by now that Hux wasn’t equipped with the skills as well as anyone else at the academy. The very thing the rest of them were mocking her for.

Then again, she looks to Dono twirling her hair with her fingers and Rey realizes that it may have escaped their notice after all. They were all pretty moronic.

Iella steps closer, stepping over the rocks to stand before Rey. “You can’t just deflect everything. Sooner or later everyone will realize that you’re not supposed to be here.”

“Just because I don’t advertise everything doesn’t mean that I’m not meant to be here. I don’t have to prove anything to you assholes. Besides, even if I did, that wouldn’t change anything. Ben is more powerful than any of you and you still treat him like shit. All for no reason.” Rey feels herself growing angrier and angrier when they just scoff at her. She doesn’t know why she bothers even making her point. They obviously weren’t listening. “Oh, fuck this. I’m leaving.”
Rey is about to stomp forward through the water, to at least attempt in clearing a path of her own if they weren’t going to let her through.

But then suddenly, she feels something strange. Her skin prickles with goosebumps and she shivers. She’s felt something like this before. Like a warning. It was like she knew there was something else here but Rey couldn’t see what.

Her stomach flips with uncertainty as she tries to look further into the darkness of the cave but there was nothing there.

Clearly, no one else seems to recognize the sudden change because they all remain where they are.

Dono laughs at her, stepping closer too. “You’re not going anywhere. We’re going to...What are we going to do again?” she looks to Iella with a lost look on her face.

“Dono, honestly, you’re such a~” Iella starts but stops when suddenly a horrible noise echoes out from behind Rey, from further inside the cave. A screech or a growl echoes out and Rey knew that whatever it was, it was something large enough to need to run from.

Suddenly, Soldar screams out in fear. “What’s happening? What was that?” Soldar grabs a hold of Nourdi, shaking him.

“How the fuck should I know!”

Rey ignores their nagging, knowing that whatever it was, they needed to get out of the cave.

“We need to go!” Rey points back out to the exit where the light of day could still be seen on the slight reflections from the wet rocks. None of them seem to pay her any attention though because they just stay put, blocking her way out, while they stare at the other end of the cave.

Another screech hollers out and slowly, a large creature rises from the water that has flooded in from the other side of the cave. Rey’s mind connects the dots. This must be its home out of the water and they were right in the middle of it.

Fuck.

“What is that thing?” Dono screams.

“Who cares, let’s get the fuck out of here!” yells Soldar.

Finally, something they can agree on.

They all rush for the exit which takes longer than it should on the rocky and uneven cave floor. She hears the hum of several lightsabers ignite. Some of them were starting to slice through the rocks, clearing the path or knocking more rocks down to send flying back to the creature chasing them.

Iella strikes down a rock with her saber and spins around to attack the beast with. It travels as fast as a plasma beam and it aims for the monster but sure enough, Iella misses and it hits Rey hard in the leg, sending her crashing to the ground.

Rey tries to catch herself on her hands but the rocky floor practically engraves itself into her palms and she groans out in pain.

Iella either doesn’t notice or just flat out ignores it because she turns back around, speeding for the
The only one that seemed to notice was Hux. He looked over his shoulder for a quick moment, seeing that she fell and needed help getting up. But as soon as they meet eyes, she sees a sinister gleam waiting there and he spins back around, running faster than before. He mentions nothing to the others and never takes a second look back, knowing he was leaving her there to be found by the monster.

He was leaving her to die.

_Fuck. Fuck. Fuck._

Rey rises up as much as she can, blood rushing past her ears, but not loud enough to block out the terrifying snarls coming from behind her. Rey tries to move, heading for the exit but it’s too late.

She sees a large set of claws curl around the corner and the creature reveals itself once again. It doesn’t actually look too fast or equipped for moving quickly so she takes the time to think as well as her fear-driven mind could manage.

If she could at least stop it, then she didn't care what happened. If it meant she had to crawl out of this cave on her arms she would do it. As long as it left her alive.

Quickly, she tries to even her breathing. She tries to gather the energy within herself that she knows lives inside her heart and mind.

And she finds it.

It’s frantic and scared, much like it was before, but this time she knows what it is and she harnesses it as best she can to direct it where she needs it.

She holds out her hand, her palm facing the ceiling before curling her fingers and pulling her arm back down.

With the fall of her arm, the roof crumbles and lands on the back of the creature. It roars out in pain before it falls to the ground, much like Rey did when Iella’s rock hit her leg. Except this animal is much larger and doesn’t have long enough arms or hands to stop its impending impact. Rey watches as it crashes to the ground with such a massive thud that it shakes the whole cave, sending the other rocks on the ceiling to plummet down.

And before Rey could stop it, one strikes her on the head and everything goes black.

Chapter End Notes

ASDFGHJKL

The creature from the cave is meant to be a Marmaw. there's not that much information on it from what I can tell but this is what it looks like...
[Straight from Wookieepedia: "Marmaw were reptilian marine predators native to the coasts of Almar. The marmaw was a huge-mouthed shore dweller, with teeth that formed in 20 to 30 bud rows throughout its mouth and throat and developed as they migrated toward the edge of its mouth. Outer marmaw teeth were frequently lost and were quickly replaced by teeth growing in behind them. The blade-shaped final teeth were large enough to grasp its prey, which included land and sea creatures. Marmaws had both lungs and gills, although they had to spend at least three hours per day in water to avoid dehydration."

I know they aren't on "Almar" but whatever, it's fanfiction, I tried.]
Ben was restless.

After he realized he missed the chance to eat with Rey at lunch he was adamant to be finished with all of his chores so he could join her for dinner.

He’s been practicing all day of what he would say to her and how he might try to explain himself for how he acted. Not that Rey expected that from him but he wanted to. He felt like he owed her that.

He knows he’s not overly adept at expressing himself, at least not with people. He could write pages and pages about his inner torment and conflicted feelings, but when it came to actually communicating with people, he obviously lacked the patience to convey what he really wanted.

Rey had been the first person he could actually talk to and not get nervous around. It was so liberating. And then, when the truth of his feelings became more clear to him, that transparency they shared had faltered.

And Ben didn’t want it to be like that. He wanted things to go back to the way they were. He wanted her to know how much her friendship meant to him. He would start at friendship and go from there. He couldn’t push the borders of their already delicate situation.

After all, if the likes of Xid and Azmo could deduce how highly he cares for Rey, he obviously needed to keep himself in check.

When the clouds rolled in, Ben’s outdoor chores were put on hold in case the storm started early. BX told him to climb down, not wanting him to get electrocuted and then dismissed him, unbeknownst to Luke.

He knew that Rey was in her hut when he came down from the temple, but he walked straight to his own, knowing he wasn’t quite prepared.

Instead, he took a shower. He was desperate for one after his work on the roof.

After, he retreated to the sanctuary of his desk and wrote for a while, trying to get down the things that he had been speaking to himself in his solitude. Trying to work out how to approach Rey.

His words were messy and scrambled and nowhere near as eloquent as what his usual passages were like but it was the best he could do with the limited time he had.

He tries to express how much she means to him and how she makes him want to be better. How she’s taught him about how to listen and how to be heard. How he wants to be the person that she deserves to be friends with if nothing more.
He scratches out the things that reveal too much but that happens a lot. The whole front side was unusable. He manages to get to some progress on the back though as he writes so frantically, it makes his hand cramp.

Frustrated and tired of looking over it, Ben ripped out the page from his journal, folding it and stuffing it in his tunic pocket in case he needed to glance at it later.

He walks out, headed for her hut but realizes she isn’t there. So, considering the dinner bell would ring out at any moment, he makes his way up to the temple. He wanted to get there early so he was already there when Rey came in.

As soon as he steps inside the temple, the bell rings out and Ben makes his way for the mess hall. He sees BX behind the counter, doing the final touches in the kitchen before anyone else arrived.

“Master Solo! Hello, again. You’re early this evening.”

Ben grabs a tray. “Yeah, I umm... I’m pretty hungry.” Ben figures that’s the most sensible answer to give, even if it was only half true.

“Well, I’m not surprised. You were hard at work today and you’ve more than deserved a nice warm meal.”

“Thanks, Beex,” he tells the droid as he sets a plate on his tray and grabs some sides. “Everything looks great.”

Ben moves over to the table he and Rey usually sit, sitting on the bench and angling himself so he could see the door. He looks into the warped reflection of his spoon and nervously runs a hand through his hair that’s still a little damp, trying to right it as well as he can.

Pim and Un’i walk into the mess first. A few minutes later, Boris, Hevaj, and Osi arrive. They grab food and retreat to a table, all the while continuing their conversation about something that happened in a holo they had been watching.

Luke walks in next. Ben can tell he makes an effort not to look at him because he stares intently at BX as he strikes up a conversation, asking about what kind of menu he had planned for parent’s night.

Ben doesn’t really pay it any attention. Instead, he goes over the lines in his head that hopefully match up to the words he had written on the paper that’s still in his pocket.

It burns a hole in his side as he debates whether or not he should glance at it once more. He decides against it, knowing that this was Rey he was dealing with. He shouldn’t be so nervous and his words wouldn’t have the same effect if they sounded recited. It was probably best to just speak from the heart.

But that could be dangerous.

Before he could convince himself that he should look at the letter anyway, Ben hears more footsteps making their way down the hall. He looks up, preparing himself to see her face but then Xid and Azmo stroll in. It vexed him greatly.

Ben turns away, pushing the food on his plate until he was sure they weren’t looking anymore. They had been in the library all afternoon. Their punishment had been transcriptions which couldn’t be as near as bad as the number of things Luke was having Ben do. They move over to their table but the rest of their usual company hasn’t arrived yet.
Ben looks to the chrono above the doors. He frowns when he realizes that it was over fifteen minutes into the dinner service. Not only was it rare for all five of those assholes to be this late (especially Soldar), but Rey hasn’t arrived yet either.

He had thought his nerves were making it seem longer than it actually was but evidently not/

Rey wasn’t in her hut. He had checked there before he walked up to the temple. So, maybe she was at the beach. But even if she was, it wouldn’t take this long for her to walk back.

Ben takes another glance at the other tables, checking to make sure he hadn’t missed her or if she was sitting with Boris and Osi or something but she wasn’t.

Rey hasn’t come to dinner.

Something stirs in his gut. This doesn’t feel right.

He thinks of what she had mentioned yesterday. Iella and Dono were giving her a hard time and now none of the usual assholes, except for Xid and Azmo, had arrived. What if they had tried to confront Rey and she was all alone with them?

Just thinking about them and what they might do makes him curl his fists and want to–

*No. Breathe.* This all started because he couldn’t keep himself in check when he got too impulsive. He needed to be smart and come to a more constructive conclusion.

So, he takes a deep breath and closes his eyes. This was hardly the place to meditate but he focuses enough to find a shred of focus. Enough to try and reach out to her. He was familiar enough with her signature to know how to look for it.

But as he searches for her, he is confused at what he finds. He can’t really feel Rey. She feels dim and muddled. Almost like she was asleep but that wasn’t quite it.

It almost felt...pained.

Ben’s eyes shoot open and he jolts up, the bench screeching on the floor at his swift movement. The sound in the quiet mess hall immediately directs all attention to him as he stands there, his fists clenched, feeling frantic.

*Where was she? Was she hurt? What was going on? Did Hux and the others do something to her?*

He could feel his fingernails digging into his palms. He needed to get to her, but her signature felt so strange, he couldn’t follow it. It was too weak for him to find.

Something was definitely wrong with her.

He needed to get to her. Anything to keep her from feeling like this. The more he tries to channel the energy and track it down, the more it fills him with dread. Any kind of appetite he may have had before vanishes instantly.

He stumbles forward, aiming for the door but then he feels a hand on his shoulder spinning him around.


“Ben, where you going?” His tone sounds annoyed. The one he uses when he’s not in the mood to deal with him. “If you’re finished with your food, you need to clean up your table and–”
Ben cuts him off, hardly even hearing the directions that were meant for a five-year-old.

“S-Something wrong. I think Rey is hurt,” he manages.

Luke’s brow furrows. “What?” He does a quick glance around the room as if looking for her but settles his attention back on Ben when he sees she isn’t there. “Where is she?”

“I don’t know,” Ben thinks he might be shaking.

“Then why do you think she’s hurt?”

“I…” Ben settles a hand to his head. “I can’t feel her. She feels dim. I think…” Ben lets out a small groan in frustration. He wasn’t going to be asked a bunch of questions by his uncle when Rey could be in danger. “No, I know something is wrong. Rey is in danger. We need to find her!”

Luke nods, looking around the mess hall. Everything has gone quiet and everyone was already looking at them, listening to their conversation. “Who saw her last? Where was she?”

And then, right as Luke asks the question, a cluster of figures emerge in the doorway.

Hux, Soldar, Iella, Dono, and Nourdi.

But not Rey.

Panic spreads through his chest. Ben is about to charge forward and ask them where she was when Luke’s grip on his shoulder tightened, keeping him where he is. A silent demand to not get involved.

Instead, Luke looks to them and asks, “Where have you been?”

The group glances at each other, not saying anything. It seems they’ve agreed not to speak about it but they didn’t settle on a cover story.

Ben’s teeth grind in his fury.

When they don’t answer, Luke steps closer to them. “I asked you a question. Where were you?”

Hux puts his hands in his pockets, shrugging. “We were playing sabacc in my hut. We had to finish the game. It was very intense.”

Ben doesn’t believe it for a second. He takes a moment to look them over a little more. All of them had thick mud on their boots and their pants were wet up to their shins.

Luke notices this too and crosses his arms, pacing in front of them. “One of my students is missing and you’re really going to lie to me? I would think you should know better, Armitage.”

They all turn to look at each other in surprise but Ben doubts that Rey’s disappearance is news to them. If anything, they are surprised that Luke knows about it. He knows they are lying.

Dono clears her throat. “I, umm…I saw her go into the woods a while ago. She might be there still.”

She immediately looks down, trying to offer something but not the whole truth. She doesn’t want to expose her involvement but she doesn’t seem to realize she already has. Along with the other four of them standing there.

Hux seems to realize what she’s done because he glares at her, totally pissed.
Luke puts his hands on his hips. “Is that all you want to tell me?’”

None of them say anything.

Luke’s voice rises a little more. “If you have any information about what happened to Rey, I suggest you tell me now.”

Hux gives a sigh. “Dono said she saw her going out to the forest. We went after her to escort her back to dinner but we didn’t find her. Not even at the beach,” Hux looks directly at Ben when he mentions the shore where they train. “She’s probably still out there somewhere,” Hux offers like it’s helpful. He pulls his hands out of his pockets then and Ben’s attention shifts to the small purple petals that float to the ground.

Fire burns in his chest as he recognizes them for what they were.

Ben marches forward, pointing to the evidence on the floor. “Those were Rey’s!” He’s about to charge forward and grab Hux by the collar when Luke stands as a barrier. “Rey had those flowers in her sketchbook.”

“There’s thousands of flowers in the forest, Solo. What makes you think these ones belong to the scavenger?”

“As if you’re the kind of person to carry around pressed flowers in your pocket, you prick!” spit flies from Ben’s lips. Rage taking over any lingering sense of composure he may have had.

“Ben! Calm down!” Luke warns him before turning back the group. “Now, I’m only going to ask you one more time. Rey may be in danger. If we find her and I discover you’re purposely concealing information to cover your asses, you don’t even want to imagine what the punishment will be. Now, I suggest somebody speaks up right now!”

Luke never screams. At least not to other people and especially not like that. It makes Dono flinch and she shrinks into herself before breaking into loud, unintelligible wails. She’s spewing words but no one knows what she’s saying.

“Dono, we can’t understand you,” Luke says, somehow managing to stay calm in the midst of a possible confession. Ben lingers, hoping to hear where Rey might be. It’s the only thing keeping him from sprinting out into the woods and searching himself.

Dono sniffles once more. “It’s not my fault. How was I supposed to know what was out there?” She pouts.


Soldar gives a sigh. “She means the cave. We found Rey in the cave…”

*A cave! A cave?* Rey is in a fucking cave and he was just standing here? He struggles to get past Luke but he holds him back still, waiting for what Soldar was going to say.

“...but then something else...found us,” Soldar finishes.

“What?” Ben exclaims but everyone seems to be ignoring him.


Nourdi speaks up. “Some kind of water creature. It was huge.”
Ben has heard enough. His mind has jumped to a thousand conclusions and he doesn’t like any of them. Half of them are plausible suspicions of the five people before him and why Rey was in this situation in the first place. She wouldn’t go anywhere with them willingly. But his thoughts settle for only one objective.

Find Rey first. The rest comes later.

“This cave,” he says. Eyes look to him, startled at the weight of his tone. “Where is it?”

They turn to look at each other, shrugging. “Uhh, it’s along the coast, kind of, but...I don’t know, we found her out there and-“

Luke holds up his hand, “Nevermind. You’ll have to show us instead. You will lead us straight there and when we get back the six of us are going to have a very long discussion about your behavior. Understood?”

“Yes, Master Skywalker,” they say in unison, their heads down.

“Good,” Luke says before turning to the rest of the students. “Now everybody out and follow them. We’re going to find Rey.”

Hux looks beyond annoyed that he was going to have to run through the forest again but Ben could have grabbed him by the collar and dragged him if that’s what it took.

He was going to find Rey no matter what.

They all rush outside. Thunder begins to rumble in the sky above and the light patter of rain begins to fall.

Ben runs, keeping in range of Soldar and Nourdi. They should be running faster but still, his heart is beating out of his chest.

He’s terrified. He doesn’t think he’s ever been this afraid except for when he chased after Rey in her memories. And technically that didn’t even happen to him. He just saw it as it had happened to her.

The thought that she may be in fear or pain strikes him deep.

Tears blurred his vision, Ben knows it isn’t the rain. There are sobs that threaten to escape from his throat but he swallows them down, devoting everything he has to stride forward. Putting one leg in front of the other.

He had to find her. She had to be okay.

He doesn’t know what he would do if she wasn’t.

Rey stirs in a groggy haze.

*Why does everything hurt?*

Her ears are plugged and ringing. She could feel the warm and sticky trail of blood trickle down her forehead.

And as she tries to bring a hand to her head, to attempt to soothe the throbbing pain, she sees the blood and rocks embedded in her palms.
Everything floods back at once.

Hux and the others had chased her out here. They ended up in this cave and that creature—

*The creature!* What happened to it? She had tried to crush it, to keep it from getting closer since she couldn't move. The impact of the rock Iella hurled at her, be it on purpose or not, had crippled her for the time being.

She had to get out of here. But first things first, where did the creature go?

Slowly, Rey’s hearing returns to normal and she can make out the sound of strained breathing. She’s relieved to find out it isn’t her own, as it sounds too deep and raspy but also weak and dry.

Rey gently tries to rise as well as she can and the rocks that had landed on her body fall to the ground, making herself known.

But as she sits up, she sees the creature wedged beneath the rock she summoned upon him. The strained breathing belonged to him. His gills flared and desperate for water. He couldn’t move back down to the ocean though. He was stuck.

Rey could escape right now. Albeit, she would have to crawl out and by the looks of it, a lot more rocks would need to be moved. The way out looked blocked in more ways than one.

But she had to do it. She had to get out. Of all the times she could have died in her life, she wouldn’t let it be now. Not after how far she’s come.

Not after all that has changed.

Ben comes to mind, as he often does.

Rey manages to maneuver herself a few feet, stopping to evaluate the new wall of rocks blocking her way. But then the strained breaths of the beast evolve into near whines.

It sounds like he’s crying.

Rey halts her efforts, trying to ignore it and coming up short. She shouldn’t turn back, she knows. The thing had tried to kill her. It was a large and likely hungry animal and she was just the next meal.

But to leave it behind, in pain...to die?

Rey’s stomach turns.

She’s been left behind before. Even now. Hux knew she was on the ground and that she wasn’t able to run. He took one look at her and fled with all the others.

Rey knew what it was like. She didn’t think she could ever have the strength to leave anyone behind. Even if that meant helping the massive animal currently dying behind her.

Slowly, she turns back around, looking over her shoulder. The creature is looking at her, it’s eyes drooped and lazy.

“I must be fucking insane,” she mutters to herself, trying to pull her way a little closer to where it was stuck.

She hears thunder beyond the cave and the waves further down the tunnels seem louder than
before. The tide must be rising. If she could lift the rubble enough, the creature could manage to get itself down to the water and back to the sea.

Settling herself as comfortably as she could she sits up. She isn’t able to cross her legs due to the wound on her thigh which she has decided to ignore for the time being. She knows if she looks at it too closely, she may start to panic about the logistics of getting back to the temple.

Rey takes a deep breath, closing her eyes and trying to find a state of which she can feel the power within her. It’s calmer than it was before, however long ago it was that she had brought down the rocks previously.

It could have been ten minutes. It could have been hours.

The creature gives another long whine, obviously uncomfortable.

Rey takes a long look at him before closing her eyes again.

_In. Out. In. Out._ Long and steady breaths until she can hear the hum of the force outweigh the sound of anything else.

She takes in the cave around her. The obstacle that entraps her. The creature crushed beneath the rubble. The rising tide. The thunder and storm outside.

Chaos it seems, but Rey trudges forward, trying to find a way to find her place. To save herself and this animal who had only meant to protect its home.

She will do the best she can to fix it.

They’ve run so far. Already Ben is worried about getting her back in case she was hurt.

Everyone is calling out her name just in case she got out but he keeps striving for the cave. The closer he gets to her, the more he can feel from her.

Admittedly, he’s rather frantic so he has a hard time telling what is happening with her exactly. Unfortunately, it is an endless stream of “what if’s” that plague him now. None of which he was even remotely prepared for.

But he would do whatever it took if it kept Rey safe. It was the very reason he wasn’t screaming and fighting Hux or Soldar or any of the other people responsible for this. What came first was finding Rey.

And even after they found her, he knew he shouldn’t give into those thoughts. He shouldn’t start any more fights. It was because of his impulsive behavior and aggressive nature that started this mess in the first place.

If he hadn’t grabbed Xid yesterday, he never would have been sentenced with the endless list of chores and Rey wouldn’t have been alone for this.

If they had been together, this probably wouldn’t have happened.

Guilt floods him and a sob nearly escaped him but he keeps it down. Trying to school himself as well as he can with everyone around.

Nourdi points forward but it’s getting darker and the storm is slowing the rest of the search party down. “It’s at the edge of the cliff and leads down to the water,” Nourdi explains.
“Okay, but what—” Ben is about to ask about the creature they had mentioned when suddenly, Rey energy slams into him like a tidal wave. He gasps in surprise and by the looks of it, even Nourdi can feel it.

“Whoa, what the fuck was that?” he asks, slowing down and looking all around them.

Ben holds a hand to his chest. “It...It was Rey. I can feel her.”

“But she’s not force sensitive,” Nourdi scoffs.

Ben clenches his jaw, choosing to ignore it. “Where is it? How far from here?”

Nourdi is about to answer when everyone catches up to them, they all seem startled as well, most likely sensing what he had. Ben takes another step closer to him. “Where, Nourdi?!”

“It’s—”

“Wait, there! Look!” Boris bellows out and points in the distance. Ben snaps his head to see but it’s too dark. But Boris had better eyesight at night and he trusts him enough to know he sees something.

Ben rushes in the direction where Boris had pointed, as does everyone else. They arrive at a rocky formation and sure enough, there’s an opening within it, revealing a large dark cave.

Ben ignites his lightsaber, casting a blue glow to guide his way as he rushes inside. Several others flood in after him, his uncle included.

“Rey!” he calls out but all he hears in return is the low rumble of what can only be the creature they mentioned.

He panics at first but he can still feel that overwhelming rush of energy that feels so distinctly Rey.

But when they round the corner, there’s a wall of rocks blocking the way. That is until they begin to tremble as if they might fall but they rise up instead, levitating in the air.

“Rey,” Ben whispers to himself. She was doing this. All of this was her.

He pushes himself through the floating rocks to make his way through the cave and freezes when he finally catches sight of her.

She’s on the cave floor with a hand outreached towards a massive creature he’s never seen the likes of before. It’s crushed beneath some rubble and he thinks she’s trying to crush it further, but then the rocks upon its back lift up too.

She’s not trying to kill it, she’s trying to save it.

The rocks move away and she lowers them away from the animal. It growls a little and slowly brings itself up to its arms so that can crawl away. It gives a loud snort through the nose and bobs its head as if it was nodding to Rey as it turned around and headed for the incoming tide that led into the cave.

Ben dives forward, deactivating his lightsaber and dropping it to the floor as he falls beside her, pulling her into his arms and hugging her tightly.

He couldn’t care less that everyone was standing behind him and seeing for themselves how frightened he had been. He holds her closely, trying as well as he can to keep the sobs he’s housed
in his throat where they are.

She holds him tightly too. He can hear her sniffling a little and he pulls back to look at her face. He sees blood dripping from her hairline and there’s a bruise forming on her cheekbone. He holds her face gently with his palm. “Are you okay?” he asks quietly.

She gives a nod but her eyes fall, looking down. He winces as he looks at the wound on her leg. Something cut through the fabric of her pants, revealing a horrible looking gash. It’s bruised around the edges and looks like she’s been hit, hard.

Ben spins around, acknowledging their audience, looking straight at his uncle. “We need to get her to the medic!”

Luke looks at the students. “Alright, I need a party to hurry back and tell Two-OneBee to prepare a space for her.” At least four of them agree and rush back out of the cave. “Rey, can you stand?” Luke asks her.

Rey tries to make an effort to see if she could but she hisses in pain when the wound on her leg starts bleeding again. “No, no, don’t move. You’ll hurt yourself,” he tells her.

“But I–”

Ben pulls off her satchel and settles it on his own shoulders. She looks to him a little confused but he just leans closer. “It’s okay. I’ll carry you. Just try to stay awake, okay? You could have a concussion,” he tells her, looking at the wounds on her head. With an arm beneath her legs and another behind her back, he stands up and turns around. Everyone clears the way for them to get by and Ben tries not to think too much about it when Rey's head nestles against his shoulder and her arm hooked around his neck.

She’s okay. She’s bleeding and exhausted but she’s going to be okay.

And she’s back in his arms. “I got you,” he says softly, mostly for himself. Maybe to reassure himself she was there and he had a hold of her. She’s so light but she fits against him perfectly and he would carry her as far as they needed to go, rain be damned.

The remaining students crowd them on the way back, dedicated to keeping Rey awake by asking her questions. His uncle walks in step beside him, keeping an eye on her too.

Her display was pretty extraordinary and Ben thinks his uncle might still be processing everything. It will all be clearer when they hear Rey’s side of the story.

Ben stays silent but knows that when the time comes, they will have plenty of time to talk. To both his uncle and Rey. For now, he just needed to get her back to the temple and from there everything would work out.

They enter the med bay and Ben takes her over to an exam table where the med droid is already waiting for her. “Master Solo, place her here.”

Ben gently lays her back on the table but when he backs away she snatches his hand, holding it tightly. “Don’t go,” she breathes out.

2-1B made the other students scatter off and give her some space which admittedly she is grateful for. But she didn’t want Ben to leave. She wanted him here with her.
When she takes his hand, the look he gives her could make her cry. He looks genuinely surprised and he quickly grabs on, covering her hand with both of his, nodding quickly. “I won’t.”

“Madam Rey, can you sit up for me?” the droid asks her. “Oh, and Master Solo, if you insist on staying with us, can you please remove your outer tunic. It’s dripping all over my exam table.

“Oh, okay. Sorry.” Ben pulls his hand away to shrug out of the tunic. It was drenched as well and Rey wonders if her drawings are ruined, not that it’s her main concern at the moment. Ben sets it aside along with the wet tunic and laying it over another exam table to dry, leaving him in a very tight and wet black shirt underneath. He instantly grabs hold of her hand again and helps her sit up when she struggles.

The movement actually leaves her a little dizzy and she knows it probably goes beyond just feeling the warmth of his palm flat against her back or her waist.

2-1B starts to examine the wounds on her head. She looks around the room, finding it empty except for them. Luke must have left with the others.

Rey is relieved, glad that it was just her and Ben.

Her concentration falters when 2-1B shines a light in her eye. “Alright now, did you fall unconscious after you received the blow to the head?”

“Yeah...I don’t know for how long though,” she tells him. The pain of her leg is much more intense than before and she would prefer if he would tend to that instead.

“Are you experiencing any pressure in your head? Severe headaches? Ringing in your ears?”

“Umm...I mean, they were ringing when I first woke back up but not now. I’m kinda dizzy though and I’m feeling kind of tired.”

The droid whirs and fiddles with some controls and suddenly a tank on the other side of the room starts to fill up with something. Thick yellow looking liquid, similar to what she had seen from the patches she and Ben stole to mend the blisters on his knuckles.

But was she supposed to get inside of that thing? She wasn’t sure she liked that idea.

“Madam Rey, given the wounds on your leg and your likely concussion, I would prefer you to spend some time in the bacta tank. I know from the brief time we spoke earlier that you’ve never received medical attention before but I assure you this is all very routine,” the droid tells her rather casually while he goes to prepare a collection of other things for her.

She must be gripping Ben’s hand too tightly because he tries to comfort her, running his thumbs past the back of her hand. “Hey,” she hears him whisper. “It’s okay. It’s not as scary as it looks.” She loosens her grip only slightly, trying to take a deep breath. “Certainly not as scary as that thing that was with you in the cave,” he says next with a baffled look on his face and she chuckles a little.

He gives a small laugh too before stepping closer. “And you definitely won’t be as scared as I was when I realized something had happened to you.”

Rey looks to him then, her eyes finding his. She can tell there’s a lot more he wants to say but it seems like there’s something holding him back. “You...you could sense it?”

Ben nods, suddenly his eyes looking glazed in the harsh lighting of the med bay. Unshed tears, she
knows. “I waited for you at dinner, but when you didn’t come, I reached out and...I mean, it must have been when you were knocked out but I panicked. I thought...” he takes a shaky breath, attempting to even it. “I thought you were dying or something.”

A single tear falls down his cheek and Rey lifts her other hand to wipe it from his cheek. “It’s over now. I’m fine.”

“I know,” he says, reaching up to hold her wrist, keeping her hand where it was. Her heart picks up a little at the gesture. “But it still made me...” he sighs, shaking his head. “Rey, I’ve thought a lot about what I would say to you when I saw you next but I think if anything, this has made me realize that I can’t...” he lifts his head, looking earnestly into her eyes. Rey thinks she may have stopped breathing. His words filled her with so much hope. Probably too much, but she can’t help but wonder what he means. “I can’t pretend that I don’t feel the way I do. Not when–”

“Madam Rey, I’m all set for you. I can take it from here, Master Solo,” 2-1B interrupts.

Rey could have clobbered the machine. Ben was in the middle of telling her something that she very much wanted to hear. Needed to hear.

“No,” Ben steps even closer, the hand on her back pulling her even more against him. The heat of his body returning. “I–I can stay with her. I mean, at least until she’s in and–”

“Master Solo!” the droid exclaims in shock. “Madam Rey will only be clad in her basics and I seriously doubt she would approve you see her in that way.”

Rey represses a smirk and looks to Ben, knowing he was thinking the same thing. They had been in their basics in front of each other before but they couldn’t tell the droid that. Besides, they could always talk later. "It's okay. I'll be fine."

“Okay, then. I, uh...I guess I’ll see you later then. I’ll be in as soon as he lets me. We can talk later,” he whispers when he leans closer and her skin reacts instantly, goosebumps spreading across her flesh.

She relishes it all she can before he steps away, heading for the door. 2-1B wheels her over to the bacta tank.

The droid cuts off her tattered tunic, undershirt, and pants, leaving her in just underwear and a breast band.

She does as the droid says, eventually finding herself submerged in the tank of a strange liquid that is meant to heal her aching wounds.

It sounded too good to be true but even the miracle of advanced medicine wasn’t enough to distract her. All she could think about was what Ben had been saying. He had been getting to something and she was driven mad just thinking about it.

Ben leaves the med bay. He’s still dripping but he could hardly be bothered. All that mattered was that Rey was going to be okay and soon he would be able to speak to her without interruptions.

So he just moves to the small bench in front of the medbay. He will wait as long as he needs to until 2-1B tells him he can come back in.

He remains hunched over in his chair for a long while before he hears the familiar whirring of BX. “Master Solo!” he exclaims, rushing over to where Ben was sitting. “I hoped to find you here.
Some of the other students told me about what happened to Madam Rey. What is her condition?”

Ben gives a sigh, running a hand past his face. “She’s got a pretty severe leg wound and some head injuries. OneBee thought it would be best for her to spend some time in the bacta tank. She’s going to be okay.”

Saying the words out loud is actually very helpful and Ben takes a deep breath, trying to remind himself of that.

BX shakes his head. “What a miracle that you knew something was wrong. If she hadn’t been found...well, I don’t even want to think of what could’ve happened to her.”

“Neither do I.”

BX whirs for another moment, just looking at Ben. He frowns in confusion. “What, Beex?”

“Master Solo, you’re soaked. Likely starving as well. Why don’t you come with me and we can get you fixed up too.”

Ben shakes his head. “No, I can’t leave. I told Rey I would be here when she wakes up. I don’t want her to be alone.”

“Well, you’ll be no use if you catch a frightful cold in your wet clothes. All on an empty stomach.”

“But she’s...” he turns back to look at the sealed med bay doors. “She’s still...”

“She won’t be out for hours if what you’ve told me is true, the state of her injuries will require her to stay in longer. Besides, once we get you settled and fed, you’re welcome to hurry back and wait here.”

Ben gives a sigh, knowing the droid was right. If he were to get sick waiting out here then he supposed that certainly is no help to Rey. “Okay, Beex.”

The droid seems relieved. “Thank you, Master Solo. I know it’s difficult. When one cares for others as much as I know you care for Madam Rey, they can neglect their own needs from time to time.”

Ben doesn’t respond to that. He doesn’t know how.

Luke paces with his arms crossed in front of his five students responsible for Rey’s current condition. They all stand with their heads down. All except Dono who was crying into her hands.

But crying wasn’t going to do her any good.

“I’m honestly baffled of what to do here,” he tells them. “I haven’t even heard Rey’s side fo the story yet and if I’m being honest, I’m not sure I want to. I’m already outraged that you openly lied to me directly about your whereabouts and the severity of Rey’s condition, but then after finding her...” Luke scoffs, just shaking his head. He’s trying to decide how to deal with them, or even look at them right now.

“Not only was she in need of immediate medical attention, but there was a massive creature that easily could have killed her which you all saw for yourselves the first time you were in there. Now, I have my suspicions of how Rey ended up in that cave in the first place but we’ll talk about that after I speak with Rey. I have a bigger problem though. A bigger problem that even if you hadn’t
lied to me, I would still be punishing you for your disgraceful behavior.”

Luke looks down the line of them, waiting to see if he’s actually getting through to them. This group had always been particularly difficult to deal with but they were essentially harmless. He didn’t know they would actually endanger one of the other students. Not physically.

“Do any of you know what I’m talking about?”

They all look to him with nervous eyes. Apparently, they don’t.

Luke gives a sigh. “Would everyone please look to the weapon clipped to their belts.” They do. “What does that look like?”

Nobody says anything at first, perhaps thinking he was messing with them. He was far past messing around. “I asked you a question!”

“A lightsaber,” Armitage mumbles.

“That’s right, Armitage. A lightsaber. So how come Rey, the only student here without a lightsaber but certainly not the only one in the cave, found herself stuck and nearly killed by that massive creature out there? How is it that she got left behind? If you were really applying your training and working to be effective Jedi, you would have assisted her. Not that she needed it. Not after what I just saw. It seems Rey is applying her lessons just fine. More so than any of you have ever displayed to me. And she’s only been here short of two months!”

“Master Skywalker–” Iella starts, but Luke holds up his hand.

“Do you wanna know what I think? Because as despicable as I think it is, I know you all left her there. You knew she was at a disadvantage. You chased her in there and when that thing presented itself, you all just saved yourselves.”

“She fell behind and we didn’t notice until we left the cave, Master Skywalker,” Iella tells him as if that’s meant to defend her.

“Oh?” Luke starts. “One of you must have seen her get trapped? Which doesn’t even matter, I know you won’t tell me if you did. But surely you noticed on the run back. Even if you didn’t, when you all arrived back at the temple, you lied to me and no one said anything of Rey’s disappearance. Hell, if Ben hadn’t noticed that something was wrong, and we didn’t know Rey was in danger, I doubt any of you would have said anything at all and Rey would probably still be out there, crawling back here on her arms through the kriffing storm!”

Luke backs away, moving to sit down at his desk, running a hand past his face. “As far as punishments go, I’m too tired to think of anything worthy of your behavior but I can already tell you that all of you will be taking over Ben’s current chores, that’s only the beginning though. We will talk about this more in the morning.”

“Yes, Master Skywalker,” they say in unison but he thinks some voices are missing. They seem to take that as a cue to leave and he snaps at them to remain where they are.

“You will leave when I excuse you.” Luke waits a minute, deciding on his next move. “Before you go, I want each of you to step forward and place your lightsaber on my desk.”

Some of them start to protest, ready to argue but Luke holds up his hand. “If you’re not going to use it when you should or how you should, you don’t need to be carrying it around after all. So, I suggest none of you take any more field trips into the forest now that we know there’s a massive
man-eating creature dwelling there. But then again…” Luke represses a smirk. “Rey seemed to manage better than any of you without one. Maybe this will teach you to not be so dependent on a weapon and start paying more attention to our lessons.”

One by one, they step forward, unclipping their lightsabers and placing them on the edge of the desk. When Armitage steps up he waits to set his down, trying to hold on to it for as long as he can. “When will we be getting them back?”

Luke’s eyebrows raise into his hairline. “Of all the questions you could ask me right now, that had to be the worst one. That shouldn’t be your concern right now. If anything, you should all start working on your apology to Rey or how you’re all going to have to tell your parents what happened when they visit us in a matter of days.”

That makes Armitage’s face flush pale. Good.

Luke isn’t in the mood to say anything else, so he waves a hand towards the door and opens it. They all look to him, waiting until he nods. “You’re excused. Go eat dinner and then straight to bed. I suggest you all get some rest. You’re going to need it.”

Luke waits until they all file out before groaning to himself and slumping back in his chair, holding a hand to his forehead, attempting to ease the ache. These kids were killing him.

After a long moment, longer than he should have allowed himself, he sits up and looks to the row of lightsabers on his desk. He would need to place them somewhere for safe keeping. He didn’t want any of them trying to steal them back. Stealing seemed to pale in comparison to what they had actually done so he wouldn’t put it past them.

Luke summons one to his hands looking at it closely, an idea forming abruptly in his head and Luke decides that before anything else, he has to make a call.

Chapter End Notes

I did that thing again where I write, like, a super long chapter and then I realize that I’d rather update it in separate parts because it’s too much for one sitting...so I'll have the next one up soon. I'm tightening up the screws.

Thanks for reading<3!!
Ben is sitting on a counter in the kitchen talking to BX in his dry clothes. He’s eating a sandwich that BX made fresh for him and told him that he would be happy to make another for Rey when she’s clear of the med bay.

Ben thanks him, grateful for how courteous he was being, even if he was always like that. It was just nice to know that he cared for Rey’s wellbeing in a way Ben could appreciate and relate to.

When Ben finishes his plate, he asks BX if he can help him with the dishes, noticing that it was stacked a little higher than usual.

“Master Solo, you are too kind. Are you sure you wouldn’t prefer to go wait for Madam Rey’s treatment to be completed?”

Ben had thought about that, but he knows he’ll just drive himself crazy sitting there and she wouldn’t be done for a long time. He figured he could at least help the droid do the dishes.

And then the mess hall doors open again, revealing Hux, Soldar, Dono, Iella, and Nourdi.

Ben grits his teeth but hides behind the walls of the kitchen so they don’t see him, staying in front of the sink.

“Perhaps you can tend to the dishes, after all, Master Solo. I suppose I should whip something up for them since they didn’t have dinner. Just stay here, I’m sure they’ll be leaving soon. I think it would be best if there were no more incidents this evening,” the droid says but seems to be waiting to make sure that Ben wasn’t going to start anything.

“I know, Beex. I’ll stay back here. I don’t want to start anything either.”

“Thank you, Master Solo.”

The droid leaves and Ben tries to focus on the dishes, turning on the water high enough that it tunes out any noise from the other room. He doesn’t want to hear their voices or anything else from them.

He nearly panics when he runs out of dishes a while later and he can almost hear Hux’s voice over the flow of water. But then the back door to the kitchen opens, revealing his uncle.

“Hey,” he says to Ben, more casually than he had been expecting. Ben just nods in reply, unsure what to make of it. “Want to run an errand with me?” Luke asks him, nodding down the box he’s holding against his side. “I have something I want to talk to you about.”

That could mean anything. Suddenly, all Ben could think about was how desperately Ben had reached for Rey when he found her in the cave. Was he going to be reprimanded for hugging her? He hesitates but then his uncle gives a small chuckle.

“You’re not in trouble, Ben.”

Slowly, Ben follows after him and they make their way to a set of stairs that leads to a basement

**Strong and Amazing and Beautiful**
beneath the temple. No one ever came down here. Luke’s vault was down here and suddenly Ben really wonders what’s in the box. “What are we doing?”

Luke sighs. “I confiscated their lightsabers. They’re going to remain down here until I believe they can have them back, whenever that might be.”

Ben is surprised at this. That was actually a pretty fitting punishment for those assholes and he’s relieved that Luke is handling this as seriously as he needed to.

Luke takes one of the lightsabers out of the box, holding it up. “This is actually what I wanted to talk to you about.”

Ben is lost. Was he referring to his own lightsaber? Was he going to confiscate his too?

“You were right,” Luke says lowly and Ben thinks his brain might have exploded. Surely his uncle would never say such a thing to him.

“W-What?” he asks dumbfounded.

Luke places the lightsaber back in the box before setting it down beside the vault. “You were right, Ben. I should have listened to you before but I just wrote you off and I’m sorry about that.”

“About what?”

“About Rey.”

Ben gulps, nervous of where he was going with this.

“When you came to me and told me she was ready for a lightsaber, I turned you away, insisting it was too soon and she wasn’t ready.”

*Oh. That.* Ben realizes what he’s talking about and catches up, able to breathe a little easier.

“I had assumed rather than listened to the details you had told me about and I thought that she hadn’t been here long enough to bear the responsibility of this weapon. But if anything, I think this evening’s events have proved that out of everyone in this temple, she may be the most deserving of it.”

“She is,” Ben breathes out quickly.

“And what I saw in the cave...Not only did she levitate those rocks but she exhibited the instinctual traits of the Jedi. More so than I’ve ever seen from anyone here. She acted selflessly. That creature could have killed her, but when it could have died, she put the animal’s needs before her own. She let it be free before she concerned herself with her own wounds. And as amazing as it was, it was extremely dangerous. I can only imagine that if she had a lightsaber, perhaps none of that would have happened in the first place. I should have listened to you earlier and I’m sorry I didn’t trust your insight.”

Ben nods, unsure what to say to that. Finally, he thinks of something. “Does this mean she can make her own now?”

Luke gives a small chuckle. “I thought you might ask that.” He steps over patting him on the shoulder. “I just spoke with Chewie. He said he’s on his way to take you and Rey to Ilum. You can leave when he gets here, given that Rey’s feeling okay.”
“Really?” Ben asks him as if in disbelief. “What about the chores? If we leave tomorrow then I won’t have them done by parent’s night.”

“Don’t worry about that anymore. I think you learned your lesson well enough by scrubbing shit all day. I’ve left the rest to a new collection of geniuses,” Luke says sarcastically, gesturing up the stairs to the assholes probably still eating dinner.

Ben feels a smile dare to breach his face and his uncle chuckles again. “Yes, I know. Sorry if you’re disappointed but you can always help Beex with the dishes if you’re so inclined to do manual labor.”

Ben nods and finds himself filled with gratitude he rarely feels in regards to his uncle. “Thank you, Luke.”

“Don’t mention it, kid. If anything, I should be thanking you. You knew to search for Rey when no one else did. You’ve obviously taught her very well and you’re very attentive to her in a way I didn’t expect from you. I think you would make an excellent teacher one day.”

Ben just nods at that, thinking that teaching was not something he saw for himself, at least not as a Jedi. But Luke doesn’t need to know that. So he smiles and nods before Luke gives him a final pat on the back.

Rey rises up from the tank, coughing and sputtering as she pulls out the breathing tubes. 2-1B is waiting there, “Easy now, Madam Rey. You’ll feel out of sorts for a moment and your eyesight will seem very blurred but I assure you this is all normal. I’m going to put a towel around you now.”

She feels a warm fabric wrap around her shoulders and she grabs a hold of it, pushing the hair out of her face, stuck to her skin.

“You’ll need to rinse off. When your vision starts to restore I’ll direct you to the bathing station.”

Rey blinks and rubs at her eyes. “I think it’s getting better.”

“Alright, well right this way, Madam Rey. I must say you did very well. I know it can be intimidating for first-time users but you handled it marvelously.”

2-1B presses a few buttons on a tablet, starting the shower at a precise temperature. He leaves her then, giving her privacy and telling her to notify him when she steps out so he can bandage the remaining damage on her thigh before she gets dressed.

She walks under the spray, standing as easily as she always does. There’s still a lingering ache in her leg but the wounds are for the most part closed. She looks at it closely. It’s still red and bruised but the gash looks sealed. The bacta tank wasn’t as scary as she thought it would be but she’s glad to be out and breathing normally.

She scrubs it out of her hair and off her skin. As helpful as bacta was, it didn’t smell very nice so she takes a longer shower than she usually permits herself but she justifies the use of water so that she doesn’t smell weird. She knew it would drive her crazy when she was trying to fall asleep.

When her fingers are pruned and her skin is turned pink from the warm spray, she figures she’s as clean as she’s going to get and turns off the water.

She dries off as well as she can, putting on a clean pair of basics. There’s no breast band so she just
settles for one of the undershirts. She waits to put on pants though so 2-1B can bandage her thigh. He appears once again, directing her to sit on an exam table and Rey takes a moment to look around the med bay.

Her eyes have improved slightly but she’s still not able to read the chrono on the wall.

“What time is it Beex? How long was I in there?”

The droid whirs, fiddling with the controls of the shower so it’s the right temperature. “Well, the wounds on your leg were rather extensive and as you can see they are not completely healed but it’s good to let the human body heal naturally once you get to a certain point. Still, I was more comfortable prolonging the treatment if it meant closing the more sensitive areas. The entire process was about six hours.”

“Six hours?!“ Rey exclaims. “What is it? Like, two in the morning?”

“Just about, but don’t be concerned about the time. The main priority is that you are healthy and well. I’m sure if you are tired Master Skywalker will understand if you need more rest. I know Master Solo will probably need it.”

Rey perks at the mention of his name. “Ben?”

“Yes, he’s been sitting outside for almost the complete duration of your treatment. I told him to get some rest at one point but he tends to be rather stubborn. He paces, you know.”

Rey shouldn’t smile the way she does. It was careless of Ben to be so concerned especially when he knew it was going to take hours. But to know he had stayed as close as 2-1B would let him was extremely endearing and her chest flutters.

“Can you send him in when I get dressed?”

“Of course, Madam Rey. I’m surprised he hasn’t barged in on his own accord.”

Rey laughs at that, knowing not to put it past him. The droid finishes wrapping her leg and leaves her to get dressed. He left a pile of clean clothes out for her as well as her bag and Ben’s tunic he made him remove. It looks like he’s dried them while she was in the bacta tank and she admires the droid’s thoughtfulness.

Rey gets dressed before moving to her bag. The pages of her sketchbook were wrinkled and a little warped but the drawings were okay it seemed. And it was still functional for future use and she’s extremely relieved. Even if she got a different sketchbook, it wouldn’t be the same as this one. The one that Ben had given her and was filled with drawings of him.

She sets it back down, looking then to Ben’s tunic.

She picks it up, finding it warm and dry. She wished he could have stayed but she understands why he had to go. 2-1B certainly wouldn’t allow it.

Admiring the softness of his tunic, she lifts it to her face. It smells like Ben and she holds it closer, pressing her face against the fabric.

When she does, she hears something strange. A crinkling noise. She frowns, holding out the tunic in front of her but then a folded piece of paper falls out of the pocket. She bends over, picking it up and taking a look at it. It’s torn at the edges like he had ripped it out of his journal.
Her eyes are still not cooperating as well as she would like them too so she can’t read it really. She can tell that it’s covered in writing though there are darker areas where he must have crossed things out.

She squints, trying to see it better when suddenly she hears the door slide open.

“Rey?” she hears him say.

She spins around with his tunic and his paper in her hands and instantly sees the shape of him standing there.

“Ben!”

Ben steps a little closer, finally coming into focus but she notices his face is a little red and he’s staring at her hands. Rey looks down, realizing he was looking at his tunic and the paper.

“Oh, I’m sorry. Here,” she passes it to him.

He takes them. “Did you read this?” he asks her.

Rey shakes her head. “No, I still can’t see very well everything is kind of blurry. It fell out of the pocket and I picked it up but I swear I didn’t–”

“No, that’s no–Rey, I wouldn’t be upset if you did read it,” he says, setting the tunic on the table but unfolding the paper. “This is all about you.”

“Me?” Rey looks to him confused.

Ben nods and brings his face close enough that all of his features are clear. The earnestly in his eyes nearly bowls her down. “Rey, ever since yesterday, I’ve been thinking about what I would say to you because I was trying to think of a way to explain why I acted the way I did and why I grabbed Xid–”

Rey shakes her head. “Ben, you don’t have to explain. It’s okay.”

“I know I don’t have to and honestly, now isn’t the best time because there’s so much more we need to talk about but If I try to summarize it, I just wanted to tell you that I shouldn’t have pushed you away and cut you off like that. I know I’m not good with people but it’s different with you. I want to be a good person around you, or I guess, I just want to be the kind of person that you deserve to be around.

“I have a lot of self-doubt about that. I’m not like other people and I don’t know why I am the way I am. I guess there’s a lot I’m still trying to not be confused about but if there’s one thing I know for sure, it’s that I care about you very much and I don’t want to jeopardize our relationship just because I was being stupid.”

Rey doesn’t even know what to say, so she launches forward, wrapping her arms around him. “It’s okay, Ben. I like you the way you are...because you are a good person.”

Ben gives a small chuckle that she can hear with his face so close to her ear. When they pull away a moment later, she thinks he might be blushing.

His gaze then travels up to examine her head and her cheek. He gives a small smile, looking relieved. “Everything looks good. How does your leg feel?” Ben asks, changing the subject.
“Better. Two-onebee bandaged it up for me and said it will heal the rest of the way naturally.”

Ben chews at his cheek for a moment. “How did it happen?” he asks her, his voice low. “Was it them?” he asks.

Rey can tell he’s trying to stay composed but she can see how his jaw tightens. She wonders if she should reveal all the details to him, knowing he’ll be upset to hear what the others had said to her before the creature arrived. But then again, she knows he’s trying to make an effort at not letting these things get to him.

She takes a deep breath, “They chased me out there, out to that cave. I didn’t go in at first but they kind of cornered me.”

Ben’s hands wrap around her arms. Gently taking hold of her but his eyes filled with concern. “What did they do to you?”

Rey has to refrain from reaching up and touching his face, attempting to ease the lines formed from his worry. “They said some things. Well, a lot of things but that doesn’t make it true. And as for what happened, I’m just glad it’s over.” She thought it was best to just leave it at that.

“Rey,” Ben takes a deep breath. “I won’t go running to tattle on them or say anything to Luke if you don’t want me to, I just want you to know you can tell me things. I’m not going to freak out. Obviously, that seems to get me nowhere. But I think you should talk about this. I don’t want you to deal with it on your own.”

Rey knew that if this had happened to Ben, she would want him to talk to her. And in a way, they were in a similar situation yesterday. So, Rey could either insist to leave it be, or she could tell him what happened and try to process what had happened instead of pretending everything was fine.

She takes a deep breath, “Okay,” she tells him and he looks like a weight has lifted off his shoulders. She grabs his hand and pulls over to sit with her on the exam table.

“Ben, I know you always say that you don’t know how to deal with people or that you think I deserve to be around people like Boris or Osi, and yes, you’re right, they are nice. They’re really nice, and I did hang out with them and Pim and Hevaj and Un’i but it’s different. It’s not like when I’m with you. I don’t know how to describe it but it almost feels like I’m acting. Like, I have to pretend I’m having a good time or I have to pretend I’m being nice and I don’t know what that means. I don’t know why I didn’t enjoy it like I was supposed to but I didn’t so I just left.”

“You left?” he asks confused.

“I just went to my hut for a while but then I felt like I was going stir crazy so I walked over to the beach to draw a little bit but then I heard them coming and I just figured it would be best to avoid it but they chased me down and I ended up cornered outside that cave. They told me I wasn’t force sensitive and when I tried to stand up to them they just found another way to cut me down.”

Rey didn’t think it would make her upset but as she speaks to him, she feels her throat start to ache and she realizes she’s trying not to cry.

She sniffs, trying to compose herself, not wanting to get all worked up. Ben keeps hold of her hands, running his thumbs past her knuckles.

She groans. “It’s so stupid. I know it wasn’t true. I know if I paid any attention to their words you would tell me I’m being ridiculous but…it still—”
“It still hurts,” he finishes for her. “I know it does.”

He was right. “It still hurts,” she repeats. “And when I tried to tell them that I did belong here, they started shouting at me, telling me to prove it. To push them back, to prove I was force sensitive.” A tear rolls down her cheek but she keeps the sobs down, closing her eyes tight. The ones that are trying to break out of her throat.

“Rey,” she hears him breathe out but she tries to keep going. If she even looks at him she knows she will lose it.

“And there was a part of me that thought about doing what they were asking. About pushing them back or doing anything to just get them the fuck away from me but I knew I was angry and I didn’t trust myself not to...not to–”

Ben holds her hands tighter, pulling her closer to him and very quietly, she hears him whisper. She didn’t even have to say it, she knows Ben understands. “You were thinking of that man?” he asks but it wasn’t really a question. “You were afraid it might happen the way it did before?”

Rey opens her eyes, the blur no longer from the bacta but instead from her tears. Still, she can see well enough to know that Ben is crying too. She nods, her lip is trembling and the sobs she had been hiding in her throat begin to release themselves. Without another word, Ben pulls her forward until she’s practically in his lap. Her face presses into his collar and she holds him tight, her tears falling all over his previously dry tunic.

His hands run past her back and through her hair, trying to comfort her, and they do.

It’s so much harder to talk about than she thought it would be. And she had been worried about telling Ben because she thought he would get too angry. But she was wrong.

He was the one who understood. He always did. Maybe she had just been making excuses to not discuss it with him so she wouldn’t have to admit how upsetting it had really been.

“I’m sorry, Rey,” he whispers, his lips brushed against her temple. “I’m so sorry.”

Rey doesn’t know how long they stay like that but when she pulls away, it doesn’t feel long enough. It’s amazing how his arms always seem to feel more like a home than anything else she’s ever experienced.

She doesn’t move very far, just enough to wipe at her face and see his own. He has tracks on his face too but he doesn’t attempt to rid of them. He just waits, ready for whatever else she was about to say and had she not already known how much she loved him, she would be definite of it now.

“I...um, I gave them a piece of my mind, not that they were listening but it was right before I tried to leave the final time that I sensed something was wrong.”

“The creature?”

Rey nods. “It rose out of the water and came barreling towards us. Some of them ignited their lightsabers, slicing through rocks and sending them flying back at the animal to slow him down. Iella struck one down but when she went to shoot it at the creature–”

“She shot it at your leg, instead,” Ben nods, catching on to what happened. He shakes his head, upset. “Did she see it? Did she know she hit you?”
Rey just shrugs. “I don’t know. If she did, it obviously didn’t make a difference. Hux spun around when he heard me fall but he just kept running.”

Ben takes a sharp breath at that news. “That fucking prick,” he shakes his head.

“Ben.”

“No, I know. I know, it’s just… I guess I shouldn’t be surprised. But they all thought you weren’t force sensitive at the time. In his mind, he was leaving you to die.”

“I know, Ben. But I didn’t.”

Ben gives a firm nod, reaching back for her hands. “Did they crush the monster?”

Rey shakes her head. “No. I did that.”

“But when we got there—”

“I know, but when my leg got hit, I couldn’t move and it was coming right for me. I did the first thing I could think of, trying to slow it down but when the rocks fell on him, he crashed down and the tremor made a bunch of other shit fall. A part of the cave fell on my head and I got knocked out.”

Ben winces, squeezing her hands, even though the wounds had been healed. “Fuck, Rey. That’s horrible.” He takes another look at her head just to make sure. His large hands brushing past her face, urging her to lean forward so he could make sure. “But, when we got there, you were trying to save it,” Ben asks her a moment later, sounding confused.

Rey nods, “When I woke up, it was still crushed and it was having a hard time breathing. I thought about leaving but...I don’t know, I didn’t think I could just leave it there to die after...well, after everything. I just thought if I could help him, then it wouldn’t make me like them.”

She looks down and Ben is confused at first. He thought maybe she was referring to Hux but after a moment longer, he realizes she was referring to something else.

She was talking about her parents.

Ben shakes his head, keeping a gentle hold on her face, his thumbs brushing past her cheeks. “You could never be like them, Rey. You know that, don’t you?”

She doesn't answer.

“Rey, you’re not like them,” he tells her but Rey just shrugs, feeling unsure. Ben leans closer though and the attention catches on his lips for a brief moment. "You’re strong and amazing and...” she hears him swallow, "...beautiful.”

She thinks he must have said it by accident, but his eyes show no sign of a misstep. He meant his words. And as much as she tries to disregard them, to pretend that no matter what she wanted, it was meant to be platonic, she feels her heart pick up as his hands remain tethered to her face.

“Ben?” He doesn’t flinch when she grabs his wrists to keep his hands where they are. Staying as close as she can.

“Rey,” he whispers softly. “I wanted to—”

Ben gets cut off when they hear loud talking on the other side of the door and Ben gives a groan,
his hands falling from her face into his lap. The door slides open and BX comes rushing in.

“Madam Rey!” the droid speeds over with a tray of food. “Two-Onebee notified me that you were awake and I whipped something up as fast as I could. I know you haven’t eaten since lunch and you must be starving.”

Rey gives a small chuckle as the droid presents her with a sandwich. “Thank you, Beex. You really shouldn’t have,” she says with a small smirk aimed at Ben and he throws back one of his own. The droid had barged in during a rather pivotal moment and Rey desperately wanted to see where it had been going and what he would do.

But it seemed like it would have to wait which seemed to be a reoccurring theme.

“Of course I had to, Madam Rey,” the droid exclaims, sounding almost shocked at her passiveness. “I never want any of the students to go hungry, especially considering what a difficult evening you’ve had.”

“Well, thank you, Beex. That’s very kind of you.” Rey picks up one side of the sandwich and takes a bite. She wasn’t as hungry as she should be but she knew the droid was right. She should eat something. Besides, she didn’t want to offend him by not eating it. He had been so thoughtful. Rey had to remind herself that he was a droid.

“Think nothing of it. You’re a pleasure to cook for. You seem to like everything.” Rey laughs at that. He wasn’t wrong. She didn’t turn away any food. To her, all of it was perfect, beyond anything she could have imagined after a life eating portions.

The droid spins to look at Ben again. “Oh, and Master Solo. Thank you again for helping me with the dishes.”

“No problem, Beex,” Ben says, moving off the exam table to stand but remains close, leaning against it to give Rey space to eat.

“I must say, I was very worried once Master Ben realized you were missing. He was most insistent to find you once he knew something was off. He was so concerned about you.”

“Okay, Beex, she gets it. I was a total wreck, thank you,” Ben tells the droid, looking a little embarrassed. Rey laughs with a full mouth of food as Ben shakes his head, offering her a mock glare.

BX apologizes if he overstepped something but quickly changes the subject. He seemed to have an almost concerning amount of enthusiasm, or perhaps he was always like that and Rey was just tired. It was, after all, pretty late.

She tunes back in at some point, setting down her food, finished for now. “Two-Onebee told me that your wounds responded very well to the treatment. I suppose now you’ll be ready for your journey tomorrow.”

Journey? “What journey?”

“Beex!” Ben snaps at the droid. “I didn’t tell her yet.”

“Tell me what?” Rey looks to them confused.

“Oh, my apologies, Master Solo. Luke told me you two would be departing and I–”
“Beex!” Ben snaps again.

“Well, you really should tell her, Master Solo. It’s the most wonderful news and I think she could use some good news after everything,” the droid urges.

“Tell me what?” Rey repeats herself and it seems like Ben heard her this time.

“I was going to tell you but we were talking and…” his cheeks blush suddenly and he looks to his feet. “I guess I got distracted.”

Rey knows exactly what he means but is still riddled with curiosity. “What is it?”

He looks up, a smile forming on his face. “Luke gave us permission to go to Ilum.”

Rey is baffled for a moment trying to connect the dots but realizing it a moment later. “You mean...?”

He nods. “He’s agreed that you’re ready for your own lightsaber.”

Rey’s jaw drops. “Really?!”

Ben looks like he’s about to say something when BX cuts in. “Yes, Madam Rey! Oh, I’m so excited for you. I already spoke to Master Luke, I will have meals prepared to take with you by the time you leave. In fact…” the droid seems to recall the time. “If you’re finished with your food, I’m afraid I must insist you both go to bed this instant. You need a fair amount of sleep, especially after the day you’ve had. You must both be exhausted.”

BX is right, she is exhausted and she’s sure Ben is too. It sounds like he’s been waiting outside for so long and his day of chores probably left him tired enough.

They abide by the droid’s suggestion and head down to the huts.

On the way down, Ben reaches for her hand as they walk alongside each other.

They’re too tired to say anything else, or maybe there isn’t anything left to say. But it doesn’t matter because Rey doesn’t let go anyway.

Armitage hadn’t been able to go to sleep. He was busy cursing all of his supposed peers and how horribly they ruined everything. This was why people could not be relied on, he thinks to himself.

None of them seemed to possess the talent of subtlety or proper manipulation. It made it too difficult to execute anything without their idiotic bumbling.

And now he would have to suffer the consequences. When Brendol comes for parents night and finds him not only without his lightsaber but how the new girl had far surpassed him, he would only make a point of how pathetic he was.

There was no avoiding it. The next few weeks were going to be hell for him.

But Armitage wasn’t going to let this interrupt his trajectory. So what if the girl was force sensitive? Solo was more attuned to the force than any of them and he could still find ways to get to him.

He turns in his cot, muttering to himself of all the ways he plans to ascend once the time comes, but he can’t quite think of anything substantial.
He was still too distraught over the turn of events.

As much as he tried to not let it bug him, the thought of that girl getting attention from Luke makes him want to scream.

But just then he hears footsteps outside his hut and he sits up from his bed, looking out the small window. Rey and Solo were walking down the path from the temple, their hands entwined.

Armitage scowls. This was another area of concern. What the fuck was that all about? They were so close, so protective of each other. It was almost like they-

Suddenly, Armitage connects the dots.

And perhaps he is not as desperate for a new plan as he thought. He had known that Solo held something akin to caring for the girl, but his tantrum in the mess hall was near ballistic. And then when they found her in the cave, he fell to his knees and wrapped his arms around her.

Much closer than they should be allowed to do but Luke seems to have overlooked that.

And looking at them now, he realizes that Solo must have been waiting all night for that stupid med droid to release her.

And now they were holding hands.

Surely, it couldn’t be that easy.

Chapter End Notes

BX-778: Culinary droid, babysitter, cute robo-boy, and official cock blocker.

Okay, I know I've said this a lot but I think we're finally getting somewhere. A trip to Ilum away from everybody might give them the space and air they need to figure out how to express themselves the way they need to.
Ben paced outside Luke's quarters. After breakfast, he asked Rey if she could tell him her side of the story. Ben could tell she was nervous about it. It had made her think of sensitive topics that must remain secret to Luke so she knew to keep everything very general.

Also, retelling something traumatic can be exhausting.

He couldn’t help but be a little worried. Not because he was worried Rey would expose the true nature of her fears, but this had been a lot for her. He knew she didn’t feel comfortable explaining it and revealing what they had done because she was just so used to dealing with it or thinking she deserved to be treated horribly. But Ben urged her to see that she needed to tell Luke everything they said and did.

They couldn’t let them get away with treating her like shit and getting off with a mediocre punishment.

Even though they were to take over his chores, it still didn’t feel like enough.

At least Luke has already confiscated their lightsabers.

And now they were leaving to go get Rey one of her own.

And that was good news. Very exciting news and he should be excited. But he can't help but be nervous about that too. He has the distinct feeling that when they return, it will not be the same as when they left. Ben just isn’t sure if that’s supposed to be a good thing or a bad thing.

Rey retells Luke what happened as best she can. She keeps her composure this time, relieved that she’s not crying in front of the headmaster. She’s glad that she revealed all of this to Ben first. It helped her process it a little better and she felt it had prepared her to tell Luke.

“That sounds devastating, Rey. I can’t tell you how sorry I am that this happened.”

Rey just shrugs, unsure what to say. “It’s okay.”

Luke shakes his head. “No, it’s not okay. They put you in danger, they said horrible things, and their irresponsibility led to you getting hit in the leg. A most severe wound. They were not being exemplary padawans and I’m embarrassed as their teacher, honestly. Their actions are disgraceful. I’m so glad that you’ve obviously been paying good attention to your own lessons. You handled everything with solid reasoning.”

Rey smiles, “Well, Ben is a great teacher. He’s been very supportive and patient with me and I couldn’t have done any of that without what he’s taught me.”

Luke nods, “I’m glad to hear it. To tell you the truth I’m very happy to see my nephew so engaged in something. Before you got here, he was a little bit…” Luke seems to remember who he’s talking to and decides against revealing his true thoughts. “I’m just trying to say that I’m glad you’re here with us at the Academy. Not only have you started to realize the strength of your power, but your presence seems to have also grounded him a little bit. I think this has been a great learning
experience for him too.”

Rey gives a small chuckle, unsure of what to say. Eventually, she settles for, “Well, I’m glad to hear it,” echoing what he had said a moment earlier.

Like grins at her, holding up a hand, recalling something suddenly. “Oh, I forgot. Now, Ben will go over everything with you as far as finding a crystal goes. I have no doubt that it will be a problem for you so don’t worry about that too much. It will seem intimidating at first but you’ll do just fine finding it.”

Rey gives a small chuckle, shrugging slightly. “I am a scavenger. I’m sure it’ll be okay,” she tries to joke and Luke smirks.

“Very true. Anyway, when it comes to actually assembling the lightsaber itself, it takes a very precise focus and certain materials. Now I have a lot leftover from when the rest of the students received their lightsabers which I will send with you.”

“Oh, okay. Sounds great.” She really had no idea what the process was like but receiving a collection of readied supplies had to be promising. She was good at mechanical stuff, she could figure it out.

“But…” Luke starts, holding out his hand as if to make sure she didn’t get too excited. “...and I really hate to say this, but there won’t be a whole lot of variety so you may have to get a little creative.”

Rey thinks he may be referring to how the saber will look. She didn’t think she was particularly picky about appearances. Practicality and the function of something is what came first. “I think it’ll be fine. I can make it work.”

Luke gives a laugh, almost seeming surprised. “Rey, you seem to always see the positives of everything.”

Rey has to fight to keep a smile on her face. She didn’t exactly think that was true but she knows he only meant it to be nice.

“Well, not always but I certainly try to,” Rey tries. He looks like he’s about to respond when suddenly she hears the sound of familiar engines fly overhead.

Luke stands up with a spring. “Looks like your ride is here. Let’s gather, Ben. His pacing has probably worn down a path in the floors.”

Rey gives a small laugh but when the door slides open, she knows it could have been true. He looks relieved to see her, a small smile on his face when he checks her over.

His hands twitch a little but he stuffs them in his pockets. She wonders if he wanted to reach for her hands but was refraining in Luke’s company.

She curses herself for jumping to that conclusion, no matter how much she wanted that to be true.


*Chewie?* That was his name? Ben has mentioned that a friend of his father was escorting them. But still...his name was Chewie?
They head outside. They have their backpacks packed with a few days of clothes and everything else they might need, including the thick snow coats they carried under their arms. Luke walks ahead of them with a large box of lightsaber components.

As they look out to the field they see the Millenium Falcon come into sight and Ben sees Chewie standing at the bottom of the ramp, waving his arms and moaning his greeting.

Already, Ben can hear Chewie calling his name in his language. “Little Solo!” he cheers and Ben gives a small scoff, remembering the name he insists on using.

Rey laughs beside him. “Hmm, ‘Little Solo?’” she says under her breath, nudging his arm a little bit.

He nearly rolls his eyes, pretending to be annoyed when he realizes that she understood what Chewie said. She can understand Shyriiwook. Ben is further baffled and amazed at how smart she is. She managed to teach herself so much in that horrible desert and how she managed to somehow pick up Shyriiwook is beyond him.

Luke meets Chewie at the bottom of the hill first and they share a very friendly, very loud, reunion.

Ben and Rey arrive a moment later and they meet Chewie at the bottom of the ramp. Before Ben could say anything, the wookiee launches forward, wrapping his long arms around him and lifting him off the ground in a massive hug.

“It’s been so long! I missed you so much, little Solo!” He finally sets him down, letting Ben breathe again. When his feet touch the ground, Chewie looks to him, setting a hand on his head and then lining it up to where it meets his chest. “Only you aren’t so little anymore, are you?”

Ben just shrugs, “I don’t know. You still lumber over me and pick me up without permission.”

Chewie chuffs and Ben knows the teasing, snarky comments are coming. “Oh but your demeanor hasn’t changed. Good to know,” he teases, reaching out to ruffle his hair. Ben covers his head, trying to right the damage he’s done and hope his ears hadn’t exposed themselves.

Chewie looks over his head to Rey standing behind him. Ben clears his throat, prepared to introduce them but Chewie speaks up first.

“Are you Rey?” he moans out.

“I am,” she says holding out her hand to shake but just like it happened with Ben, Chewie wraps his arms around her and pulls her into a hug.

“Chewie!” Ben snaps at him, embarrassed.

Luke laughs a little but calls to him too. “Let her breathe, at least.”

Chewie bellows out his apology. “Sorry, little one.” He sets her down. “My name is Chewbacca. Han told me all about you. You’re the one who found the Falcon!”

“Oh, uh, yeah. I guess I did,” Rey says modestly.

Chewie ruffles her hair just as he had done to Ben. Rey laughs though, admiring his behavior instead. “Let’s get you both onboard. We need to hustle if we’re going to get to Illum while the cave is open.”
Ben can tell Rey is a little confused but he tells her he’ll explain later. Quickly, they say goodbye to Luke and load up to the Falcon.

Ben beams when he sees the grin on Rey’s face.

Last night, she had discovered the note in his tunic pocket and he had managed to express what those contents had been. But ever since he realized she had been trapped in that cave, it felt like there was no disguising the love he felt for her. She was so important to him and in the moments where he couldn’t feel her, he had never been so frightened.

Last night, he started thinking about what it would have been like if she had been fatally injured or any other number of horrific scenarios that he had tried not to think about.

And to think she could have died never being told how much he loved her. He knows no one has ever said anything of the sort to her and he had decided in his restless haze in the early hours of the morning that he was going to find a way to tell her.

He was going to tell Rey how much he loved her.

Not now, but soon.

So, instead, he sets down the supplies in the booth, along with his backpack and Rey does the same. Before he can say anything though, Chewie is calling to him from the cockpit. “Little Solo, hurry up! I need a co-pilot!”

Rey snorts. “Aww...Little Solo: the co-pilot.”

Ben couldn’t keep the smirk down if he tried. Something about Rey made him melt even at the stupidest things, including her using Chewie’s nickname for him. “Shut up,” he tries to say but she knows she’s won. “Come on,” he tells her, nodding down the hall. “You can see a wookiee belittle me while we fly my dad’s junky ship.”

His heart picks up when she reaches for his arm, holding on to him as she follows. “If you get tired of it, I don’t mind getting belittled for a while,” she jokes while also offering to help fly.

_Kriff, he loves her._

They go to lightspeed after aiming towards the correct hyperspace route (which took a while) and Rey is surprised when she sees that it will take nearly fourteen hours to get there. That seemed long, even for lightspeed.

Then again she’s only been in lightspeed a couple of times. It was probably common enough.

When Chewie leaves to do some repairs she moves closer to Ben, leaning over his shoulder in the seat. “What is Ilum like? Where is it?”

He turns to look at her but as she remains perched over his shoulder it means their faces are rather close. He doesn’t seem to mind though.

“It’s technically in the unknown regions so that's why the trip time is so long. But it’s very cold. It’s coated in ice and snow. It’s inhospitable to most species and why we’re going to have to use those really thick jackets when we land.”

Rey has been in a desert for most of her life so the thought of seeing snow sounds very exciting to
Ben chuckles. “I don’t blame you. It’s kind of a crazy process. I don’t know how they decided on all the logistics of this rite of passage banthashit but at least you get a lightsaber out of it.”

Rey snorts, rolling her eyes at him. “Well, at least run me through the ‘rite of passage banthashit.’ I have no idea what I’m supposed to do.”

He shifts in his chair to look at her and for a moment, Rey gets lost in how the blue light of hyperspace washes over his face and makes his dark eyes glint and nearly sparkle.

*Gods, he looked beautiful.*

Then she remembers how he had called her beautiful last night in the medbay. She nearly dazes in the sight of him and that thought alone but he begins to explain in further detail and she realizes she needs to focus.

“A lightsaber is only possible with a certain type of crystal that is housed in the center. A kyber crystal. They are very rare and difficult to find but long ago, a cave was discovered on Ilum. It’s filled with kyber crystals and for thousands of years, the Jedi went there and they were guided to their crystal."

“Their crystal?”

Ben nods. “You’ll know it when you feel it but there’s a crystal that connects with you. You’ll sense it. It’s like it speaks to you. The energy within that crystal will fall in line with your own. The more in tune the connection is, the more powerful it will feel.”

Rey nods, the picture becoming clearer. But still, her mind is riddled with questions. "Where did you find your crystal?"

Ben snorts. "Mine was a little difficult. It was practically on the ceiling. I had to scale up to get it."

Rey didn't realize it was such an involved process, but she knows from experience that sometimes you had to work harder to get to the things that matter most. A collection of finicky pieces from old Star Destroyers come to mind. But hen she remembers another question.

“What did Chewie mean about getting to the cave before it closes?”

“Well, a single rotation on the planet is very long. Once the sun sets, it gets too cold and the cave freezes over once again. You can get trapped behind it if you’re still inside. One rotation on Ilum is about nineteen days long so the sun wouldn’t be up again for a while.”

Rey feels her eyes bulge, not expecting that. “Has...anyone ever gotten trapped?”

Ben chuckles a little. “I actually don't know. If on the off chance you are still inside when it closes, it's just ice. I'm sure we could both find a way to break through it. I’m not about to let you freeze to death after~” Ben stops himself and shakes his head a little bit. “Sorry. I don’t mean to sound too overprotective and strange. That just really freaked me out last night and even though I know you’re more than capable of taking care of yourself, I want you to know that I’m not going to let you get hurt.”

Rey sees how deeply last night’s events had affected him. He was so relieved when he found her in
the cave and although she welcomed it, she had thought a lot about the tight embrace they shared in front of everyone.

It seemed like more than they could have allowed themselves but nothing came out of it. Luke didn’t seem to notice or care.

“It’s okay. I get it, Ben.”

He nods, biting his cheek before looking to her again. “How are you feeling today, by the way?”

“Good. I guess I’m kind of tired. I didn’t sleep very well.”

“Neither did I. We have a lot of downtime until we get to Ilum though. We can do whatever we want.”

His words shouldn’t excite her as much as they do because she knows that’s not what he means. Not in the context she had escalated to.

What they actually end up doing is relocating to the table where their stuff had been waiting. They pulled out a holopad and tried to figure out what kind of creature was living in that cave.

Rey realizes once they sit down that she’s actually really tired. Ben holds the holopad in his hands and she leans close to look at it. She hardly notices how she starts to fall into him but she doesn’t try to stop herself once she does. It’s too inviting.

He’s in the middle of talking about some other kind of shore-dwelling animal when her cheek falls to his shoulder.

And it’s like they’ve done it a million times. It feels so natural and her exhaustion is temporarily battered away by the contentment flowing through her.

He makes her feel happy and cared for and safe.

Ben schools himself to behave naturally when he feels the weight of her settle against him on his shoulder.

He tries to keep busy so he doesn’t overthink anything and jump into some foolish and ill-timed confession, especially when she was obviously tired.

So they keep scrolling through the archives of animals that might be the creature from the cave. Eventually, Ben is absently scrolling past the screen, too distracted by her warmth after all, when he hears her speak up, pointing to something.

“Oh, there he is,” she says, tapping on an icon and sure enough it looks just like the creature. “The Marmaw,” she reads. He smiles, kind of amused at how she sounds with her cheek smushed against his arm. She skims the description, coming back to the picture and tapping on it to make it bigger.

He hears her chuckle a little at the sight of it. “He’s kind of cute,” she says.

“Cute?” he asks, laughter in his voice.

“Yeah, look. With his feet turned in like that, he looks kind of endearing.” She giggles a little when she hears him give a scoff. “Am I delusional?”
“Maybe. You’re probably really tired if you think the massive creature from that cave yesterday has any cute characteristics.”

That makes her give a tired laugh. “You may be right. My eyes aren’t staying open.”

“Well, just rest for a little bit. We’re going to be on the ship for a while.”

“What are you going to do?” She asks, sounding drowsy.

“I’ll be your pillow,” he says, surprised at himself.

She giggles softly at that. “You’re too nice. I’d just bug you.”

“No,” he urges softly. “You wouldn’t. Sleep if you want. I was just going to read anyway and I can do that here.”

Her eyes open a little bit. “You mean it?”

“Of course.”

She smiles again, nestling against him and Ben looks down at her serene face, her eyes are already closed. “Wake me if I start to drool on you.”

Ben chuckles at that, knowing he wouldn’t mind in the slightest if she did.

Chewbacca wished he was surprised that Han didn’t want to come with him to take the kids to Ilum. As much as he knew his friend loved his son, he didn’t exactly know how to show it, or how to act around him in general.

So, despite getting the Falcon back as recently as they did, Han insisted he would rather Chewie just take it for a few days while he did some side jobs with Lando.

He wished that Han wasn’t so afraid of doing the wrong thing because it meant that he just steered clear of the kid completely, which was one of the worst things he could do. It made Ben feel like his father didn’t love him and as much as Chewie cared for the boy, he knew that Ben had his issues. Being pushed away or ignored by the man who he only wanted love or attention from was only going to make it harder for him.

So when Luke called and asked him to escort the kids to Ilum, Chewie knew instantly he would agree. He needed to assure Ben that there were people that cared for him, even if it didn’t feel like it sometimes.

But he’s rather surprised to see that Ben may not need such a big reminder after all. This girl, Rey, seemed to have a much larger part of Ben’s life than he was expecting.

Han had mentioned that Rey was going to be getting private lessons taught by Ben. It was something that had made Han roll his eyes and mutter something under his breath that Chewie had tried to ignore. There was no substantial reason to doubt his son the way he did.

Because obviously, Ben has done a great job at teaching and Rey seems to have made tremendous progress in such a short period of time. And in that time, they seem to have become close.

Very close.

Ben has never really had any friends his own age. Of course, Chewie liked to think Ben would
consider him a friend and he knew that culinary droid he grew up with, BX-778, was still with him at the Academy. The droid knew to check in with him from time to time.

But to see that Ben had found a friend in someone like Rey was extremely uplifting.

But as Chewie did some work around the Falcon, he had noticed something about them.

He’s never seen Ben behave the way he does when he’s around her. The boy had a tendency to be a little stressed or annoyed or quiet. He certainly liked his space and his solitude.

But around Rey, Ben has smiled more than Chewie had ever seen him do in his entire life. And they seemed to be attached at the hip. Even when Ben flew beside him in the cockpit, she was right there behind him. A look of her own contentment on her face.

Even now as he rounds the corner, he sees them sitting at the table, only Rey is dead asleep on his shoulder and he’s just sitting there with a small smile on his face as he looks at the holo-pad.

Something had changed in Little Solo and Chewie knew the Solo men well enough to know that he had fallen. And given the look on his face, the boy had fallen hard.

Despite the rules and constructs of which Chewie knew Luke had put in place at his school, he can’t help but be happy for him.

Because Ben was actually happy and that was all he ever wanted for him. That’s what everyone has wanted for him.

Happiness.

Of course, it only seemed fitting that he would find it with a girl. He was his father's son after all.

He walks towards them but only Ben looks up since Rey was asleep. As he gets closer he can hear the tiniest snores coming from the girl.

That would explain the constant smile on Ben’s face. He not only didn’t mind the noise but seemed to be enjoying it.

Chewie just offers him a nod as he passes by to the cockpit, not wanting to wake her. By the sound of it, she had a rough time yesterday and he hoped she would be feeling prepared for her task.

But given the fact that the girl found the Falcon, got her way to Luke’s temple with Maz’s help, somehow managed to give Ben a brighter outlook on things, and escape certain death with a supposed sea creature, along with who knows how many other obstacles, he knew she was not to be underestimated.

There was truly something special about this girl and Chewie could see why out of everyone in the galaxy, she was the one able to finally bring a smile to Ben Solo’s face.

Ben knew he was tired but couldn’t possibly sleep.

The rest of the day was rather uneventful. By that, Ben meant that he hadn’t managed to confess his feelings to Rey.

It wasn’t really a matter of not having the chance. Chewie remained either in the cockpit or attending to different areas of the Falcon for repairs. It wasn’t like he was getting in the way of Ben speaking to Rey.
But Ben had been looking for excuses because every time it could have been right, he would get so nervous and he thinks that Rey might have noticed.

Eventually, when it was getting late, Ben insisted she take the bed and that he would sleep on the floor.

She was very hesitant to agree to this and claimed that she wouldn’t mind sleeping on the floor and it was technically his dad’s bed and that he should sleep on it.

That created a slight disagreement. Ben insisted that she would be more comfortable, defending himself by claiming it was important for her to be on a softer surface with her recovering injuries.

Rey’s arguments faltered until eventually, she just rolled her eyes and told him the bed was big enough for both of them and that he should just sleep on the bed too.

Ben thought he heard her wrong the first time but then she grabbed his hand and pulled him over to the bed.

They had a more than modest space between them and they both slept in separate sleeping bags but it was undoubtedly why Ben was having such a hard time sleeping.

Rey didn’t seem to have a problem with falling asleep, despite her nap against his shoulder earlier.

In the dim lighting of the bedroom, he gets lost in how relaxed her face is. How beautifully her eyelashes fan out. They flutter every once in a while, a sign that she had fallen asleep.

She’s so close to him. And she’s so relaxed.

It helps him relax as he evens his breathing to match hers.

Kriff, he’s so ridiculous. If only he could relax like this when she was awake when it really mattered and he could tell her how he felt.

If only he could do it now.

Suddenly, the thought evolves into an actual concept and he realizes that if she was sleeping, it might make it easier for him to tell her if he’s technically already told her. Even if she didn’t know it.

He could tell her now, realize that maybe he didn't have to be so scared, and when the time came he wouldn’t be a stammering, bumbling mess.

Just to make sure, quietly he whispers, “Rey?” She doesn’t stir. She’s sleeping but he can’t help but be paranoid so he checks one more time. “Rey? Are you awake?”

Still nothing.

Ben takes a deep breath, assuming he was in the clear.

His heart picks up but he focuses on the sound of her breathing. He matches his breaths to hers once again to balance himself.

_Breathe and wait for her_ was an effective system even when he wasn’t mad, it seemed.

Quietly, he begins. “Rey, I’ve been going crazy thinking of how to say this to you. Even now, I can’t even do it when you’re actually awake but this is all I know how to do.”
He turns over onto his back, looking at the ceiling, feeling partly encouraged by this solution and partly defeated already.

“There’s so much I want to say. There’s so much you need to hear but I have no fucking clue how to do it. I want you to have everything that I know you deserve. The rational side of me is thinking that you have the power and the instinctive goodness to be the best fucking Jedi this galaxy has ever seen. And if that’s what you wanted, I should want that for you too.

He looks to her, to make sure her eyes are still closed. “But I think I’m too selfish. No one has ever mattered to me more than you. You understand me better than anyone I’ve ever met, but it’s not just that. You make me laugh. You make me see the beauty in things I never thought to look for. You make me happy and honestly, I never thought I could be capable of that.”

He looks back at the ceiling, shaking his head in disbelief. Saying these things out loud made it all the more real and he fully understands just how happy she really makes him.

“You make me feel better than I’ve ever felt in my life. For the first time, I don’t feel alone…” Ben closes his eyes, trying to keep his voice as low as he can.

“Because I love you,” he finally admits.

It’s quiet as he expected it to be with her sleeping but to know that the air is filled with his admission really does make him feel just the slightest bit better, even in the slightest. A small weight is lifted off his chest as he spoke the actual words aloud.

“But I know it’s not that simple. I know what we’re supposed to be and what we’re not supposed to be. I know that if I say something and you don’t feel the same way, it’s going to ruin everything. I’ve already nearly ruined it so many times but this is different. I know the Academy is the closest thing you’ve ever had to a home and I don’t want to make you uncomfortable. I just want you to feel happy and safe. If that means that we’re just friends then I understand. But it’s so hard to pretend like I don’t feel the way I do. As if I wasn’t hopelessly in love with you and that it doesn’t drive me crazy or that when I thought you were hurt, it was the most terrifying thing I’ve ever felt. To know that you’re in pain is…” he can’t even think of the words. He swallows loudly, trying to bury his fears. “It’s too much.”

Ben gives a sigh, realizing he hasn’t thought this out very well and it’s good that he’s at least practicing because it was falling apart at the seams and now he was just rambling.

With a heavy sigh, he tries to conclude his thoughts and fears for what they were. “I want to give you everything, but I don’t know how…”

Realizing that he felt more defeated than encouraged, he turns over on his side, away from her. He curses himself under his breath and closes his eyes. At least the discouragement has outweighed his nerves and adrenaline and he finally closes his eyes. Exhaustion outweighs all else.

He’ll have to figure the rest out tomorrow.

Rey can’t move. She can’t speak. She can’t even open her eyes.

She’s worried if she moves, then it won’t be real.

She had heard his voice speaking quietly but at first, she didn’t have the awareness or the energy to respond.
So she just listened. But the more he spoke, the more she realized what he was saying and she feels like she can't even breathe. His words were too surreal. How could it be real?

Because he said he loved her.

Ben Solo *loves* her.

And she loves him.

So why does she feel so terrified?

Chapter End Notes

Rey is sneaky! She heard it all...All of it...she got it...he feels the same. That means that full-on admissions and confrontation of feelings are coming up next.

Ben's admission wasn't exactly planned to go that way, but then I remembered that one scene from "The Jerk" that I absolutely love and I decided to work with that idea (I'll link the scene at the end). Obviously, Ben's isn't meant to be funny but I think the whole concept is kind of cute.

Thank you for reading!

"Are you awake?" scene
Alright, here we go! They are on Ilum to search for Rey's crystal. A lot of the information I have on this is based on that one episode of the Clone Wars where Ahsoka and Yoda take some younglings to find their crystals. I'm going off memory though since those are no longer on Netflix, lol.

Anyways, if there's any obvious inconsistencies, I'm sorry. I've been trying to get through these chapters while I have some downtime. I hope it's not as corny as I think it is.

Chewie roars out when the computer chirps in near arrival he calls out to the kids so one of them can come to help them land.

Ben comes rushing in barefoot with his hair sticking up in the back. “Morning, little Solo,” he greets him, expecting to get an eye roll.

Instead, he gets a tired, but genuine, “Morning, Chewie,” in return.

They drop out of hyperspace together. As they descend upon Ilum, Chewie sees Ben spin around, probably wondering where Rey is. It really is a beautiful sight, and he knows Ben wants Rey to see it.

“Rey?” he calls out. “Come here. You have to look at this.”

Ben focuses back on the controls as they fly into the planet’s atmosphere. They hear Rey walk in behind them and she steps up to look over Ben’s shoulder.

“Wow, it’s beautiful,” she says, her voice soft and a little off from what Chewie had grown accustomed to yesterday. He turns for a moment to look at her, perched above Ben.

The girl looks like she’s trying to smile but there’s something in her eyes. Something Chewie can’t quite decipher.

But she keeps looking to Ben instead of the planet they are flying through.

Ben hasn’t turned to look at her yet, he’s focused on flying. “The sun rose not too long ago. That means the cave will be open for an optimal amount of time. Everything should be good,” he explains to her.

“Good,” she answers quietly. “That’s...that’s good.”

It’s then that Ben must notice something too. Chewie can see his back stiffen and he slowly turns to look at her. Chewie can see the sudden concern on his face. He doesn’t say anything though.

Rey must notice it too because she clears her throat. “I, umm, I’m going to go open the breakfast packs that Beex made.”
“Okay,” Ben says, watching her almost cautiously. “I’ll come join you in a minute.”

Chewie hears her step out of the cockpit. He looks back to Ben to see nothing but worry on the boy’s face. Chewie was familiar enough with Han’s behavior to know that something had happened.

Ben doesn’t seem to know what it is though. He looks hopelessly confused.

Chewie quietly moans out to him. “Ben, I don’t need a co-pilot to land. Why don’t you go eat some food and get Rey ready for her task? Or at least get dressed. You’ll both be freezing once we land.”

Ben nods, “Okay, thanks,” he says, still looking to the door she walked out of.

Chewie rolls his eyes, huffing to himself about little Solo. He was more like his father than he realized.

Ben rounds the corner, expecting to see Rey at the table, perhaps going through the food, but she’s not there.

He walks back to the bedroom to find the door closed. She must be getting dressed so he wanders away, going to find the food BX had packed.

But he was distracted. He was a little worried about her. She seemed distracted or upset in the cockpit and he wanted to make sure she was okay.

He wonders if she’s nervous about today. Maybe she was worried about finding her crystal. He could understand that, even if she had no reason to worry. She was so powerful and observant, she would have no trouble finding it.

He would have to remind her of that. He knows she can have a hard time believing in herself, another concept he could understand.

Rey steps out a moment later, finishing with her belts around her waist and not looking up.

“Rey,” he calls and she gasps, her head snapping up in surprise but he isn’t sure why. He didn’t think he would have startled her that much. He steps closer to her, his feet still bare and his hair still a mess. “Are you feeling okay?”

Her mouth opens to say something, but it closes again when she shakes her head. “I don’t know…” she answers vaguely, leaving him more confused than before. But then she steps closer, her voice dropping. “Ben, I think I really need to talk to you.”

“Are you nervous about today?” he asks her.

“I…” she starts but doesn’t finish. She doesn’t seem to know what to say so Ben brings his hands to her shoulders so she’ll look up at him.

“You don’t need to be, Rey. I’m going to be outside the whole time. If anything goes wrong, which it won’t, I’ll come in after you. But don’t worry about any of that. This is nothing compared to your ‘cute’ marmaw friend,” he jokes, thinking it would lighten things up a bit.

But she barely seems to hear him. He watches her fiddle with her hands and look anywhere but at him.

“What’s wrong? Are you feeling okay? Is it your leg?” he asks, probably too frantically.
She shakes her head. “No, it’s—” she’s cut off when the whole ship rattles upon the slight impact.
They’ve landed. They hear Chewie call from down the hallway. “Alright, everybody get moving.”

“Shit, I better get dressed.” Ben moves away from her to go find his backpack and grab some
clothes. “Go find something to eat. I’ll meet up with you in a minute.”

Rey doesn’t answer but walks away anyway.

His mind turns over, trying to figure out what was going on.

Rey didn’t know why she was so nervous. She should be happy, shouldn’t she? She should have
woken Ben up last night and just told him then about how she loves him too.

But it’s not as simple as that.

If they both give in to these feelings, what happens when they get back to the Academy? They
would have to be careful. Extremely careful.

But it could be possible. She wants it badly enough to try.

At the very least she needs to tell him how she feels. He needs to know. But they’ve just landed
near the cave that apparently had a time-based system involved so she needed to get inside as soon
as possible so she could start looking for the right kyber crystal.

Perhaps searching around would give her the time she needs to try and figure out how to deal with
all of this.

She hardly eats anything for breakfast. She didn’t really have much of an appetite.

She hears Chewie lower the ramp and calls out to whoever was listening. “Can someone help me
check all the landing gear?”

“Coming,” she calls down the hall, pulling on her boots, heading for the ramp. The moment she
steps out, she’s faced with an extreme cold like she’s never felt. She didn’t know anywhere was
actually capable of being this cold.

She remembers now that she was supposed to grab the jacket that she and Ben brought and their
importance suddenly makes much more sense. Still, she rushes forward, knowing Chewie needed
help.

She rushes over to help the wookiee beneath the freighter, trying not to shiver. Chewie calls her
over, saying that one of the landing platforms didn’t open. He has her hold some of the tools beside
him as he uses his long reach to access the hull and landing gear.

“You okay, little one?” he asks her suddenly. She looks up at him, feeling bare. Was it that obvious
that she was feeling distracted?

She clears her throat. “I’m fine.”

“You tired?”

Rey nods, knowing that she couldn’t hide that. She had seen her reflection in the fresher.

“Something on your mind?” he moans out next.
She didn’t know him very well, but she found herself answering more honestly than she should anyway. She shrugs, “Kinda.”

“Are you nervous about getting your crystal?”

Rey doesn’t know how to answer. She should just say yes. That would keep things simple, but she doesn’t seem to be responding the way she should. Everything feels delayed or muffled and she felt like she was in a strange dream. Her mind was busy elsewhere.

She’s relieved when suddenly a large clank blares out from the ship and Chewie moans in approval, his unanswered question forgotten. “How does everything look?” she asks, her teeth beginning to chatter from the cold.

“I think I’ve got it,” he says and with a hiss, the landing gear coming down and planting itself on the cold cave floor.

Rey steps away and it’s then that she hears her name echo out. “Rey?!”

Ben comes running down the ramp in one of the thick coats they packed and another one in his hands.

“Rey, your jacket,” he tells her, concern in his eyes while holding it out in his hands. “You've got to be freezing,” he says softly he stands in front of her. Her arms are tucked around her body and she realizes then that she’s shaking. She means to reach for it but Ben gently wraps it around her so she just has to slide her arms in. Once it’s on, he zips it up for her and brings the hood over her head. It’s a little big so the hood flies over her eyes and she can’t see him anymore. She chuckles as he adjusts it so it’s more practical. When she can see him again, he smiles softly at her. “Better?” he asks her quietly. She can see his breath in the cold air and almost wants to catch it. To try and hold on to every part of him.

“Better,” she tells him with a nod.

The smile on his face tries to stay where it is, but she can see he looks a little worried. She already knows it’s about her. Obviously, her ability to act naturally isn’t very convincing. Especially not to him. He knew her too well.

But instead of asking her again, he reaches for her hand and pulls her away. “Come on, I want to show you something.”

She follows him, clinging to his hand, wondering how she could possibly focus on anything besides this.

All the times he’s done this previously flash through her mind. All the times he’s reached for her hand or hugged her. Did they all come from the love he spoke of? Has she been ignorant of his affections this entire time? Has he loved her all this time?

He was always so gentle, so endearing. She had just been too blind to see that it was done with love. It was still such a new feeling. Which would explain his own doubts. All the things he must have overlooked as her own affections.

They had both been so stupid.

The thought nearly makes her want to just blurt out how much she loves him too. At least then she would get it over with and she could start breathing normally again but that wouldn't be very well
articulated. But she still feels the urgency to say something. Anything.

She squeezes his hand a little tighter, trying to get his attention. “Ben, I—”

But then they walk out from beneath the Falcon and Rey sees for the first time the extent of the massive space around them. Not only the cave they’ve landed in, but the detailed architecture residing on the furthest wall. A massive archway with some steps, leading deeper within the cave.

It’s beautiful and it’s huge, but then she notices the ice at the top of the archway, slowly creeping down. She understands what Ben had been talking about now. If the ice freezes back over the entryway she would be trapped inside.

After a moment, she feels Ben squeeze her hand in return. “Kinda cool, huh?”

“It’s amazing,” she breathes out, gazing up at it, but gradually turns to look at him. He’s staring at the archway.

He points up to the ice. “You should head in now. You want to make sure you have enough time to find it.”

Rey nods but steps even closer to him, speaking quietly. “Ben?”

He looks at her and must realize how close she is because his eyes go a little wide. “Are you nervous?” he asks her, his voice low but also gentle and reassuring.

She knows he’s referring to the cave. He’s not referring to the internal dilemma that’s going on in her head or how the weight of what she feels for him has finally settled in her bones and it’s so heavy on her shoulders. To know his feelings when he thinks they are still secret to him while also trying to articulate her own, she feels like finding a crystal is the least of her worries.

But she knows she can’t lie to him. He already knows well enough she’s anxious, even if he doesn’t know the source of it. So she nods, looking to him with large eyes, wishing he would understand from just a glance.

And when he looks back, for a moment, she thinks he does. But then wraps his arms around her, pulling her into a quick hug. “It’s okay. It seems scary, but you’re going to do fine. I know you will. And I’ll be here the whole time. I’ll come find you if you need me.”

Rey realizes that no matter what, she had to go in this cave. Sooner rather than later. And maybe it wouldn’t take that long after all. When she came back out, she could find the time and clarity to tell Ben everything she’s desperately been trying to work out. So, she just nods, stepping away and slowly beginning the ascent up the set of stairs.

She turns around before walking through the archway to take a final look at him. He gives her a small and endearing smile in return.

She takes a deep breath and walks into the cave.

Ben doesn’t move for a long while after she disappears from his vision.

One minute becomes ten minutes. Ten minutes eventually becomes a half hour. A half-hour becomes an hour. Then two hours and then he doesn’t know. He’s lost track.

And he’s done nothing but sigh and pace and cross his arms as he remains in deep thought. He
keeps glancing up at the archway and how the ice slowly works it’s way down, threatening to keep Rey within its confines.

He doesn’t know why he’s so worked up. He told her everything would be fine. And everything would be fine, he knows. But his solitude and the eerie quiet of the cave lead him to overthink everything.

And he thinks that Rey didn’t seem like herself.

Did she have enough to eat for breakfast? She seemed tired, maybe she wasn’t feeling well. Or maybe she was too cold and he scolds himself for not packing more supplies to keep her warm. She’s not used to the cold and he should have been more sensitive to what would make her comfortable.

Maybe he pushed her into this too quickly. She wanted to tell him something earlier, didn’t she? He hadn’t listened though.

Why didn’t he listen? Why didn’t he–

“Ben!”

Ben jolts at the sudden roar of his name and looks to the top of the ramp to see Chewie looking at him. He rushes back over, closer to the Falcon.

“What?” he snaps, trying to look casual and puts his hands in his pockets, trying to resist the urge to turn and look at the archway.

“I was calling you. I needed your help,” the wookiee moans.

“Oh, I didn’t hear you.” Ben steps up the ramp but Chewie remains where he is, blocking his way inside.

“It’s okay. I finished it.”

Ben realizes that he’s been really distracted and looks up to the wookiee in shame. “I’m sorry, Chewie. I didn’t mean–”

Chewie cuts him off. “Ben like her don’t you?”

Ben freezes, his eyes popping out of his skull. “–I don’t know what you’re–” he stammers, thrown completely off guard. Where was this coming from? He feels vulnerable and frightened and almost defensive. “I don’t know what you’re talking about,” he says between his teeth, hardly sounding convincing.

Chewie holds up his hands. “Ben, I’m not trying to upset you.”

“Well, regardless of you trying, you’re still doing it.” He storms around marching back down the ramp but Chewie grabs him.

“Ben, wait, wait.” Ben halts, knowing there was no point to try and get free. He knows the wookiee could rip his arm off if he wanted to. “I just want to talk to you.”

“I’m not talking to you about this. You’ll just go straight to Luke and–” Ben tried to fight down the tears gathering in his eyes. Everything was going to be ruined before he could even find the courage to tell her and it just wasn’t fair.
“Ben, I’m not going to tell anyone!”

Ben halts, wondering if he should believe him. He had no reason to doubt Chewie aside from his loyalty to his father. But even if this didn’t fall in line with the life debt to Han, Ben isn’t sure he even could talk about it with anybody.

“How did you even know? Is it that obvious?” He asks annoyed, mostly at himself.

Chewie shrugs. “Only to me. I know you well enough to know something was going on. Besides, I’ve seen the same look on your father’s face many times. The lovestruck Solo daze.”

Ben nearly scowls at the mention of his father. He knew Han had many conquests before he met his mother and he didn’t want to be compared to that. For him there was only Rey.

And Rey and himself certainly weren’t like his parents.

This was different. Things were complicated and he didn’t have the luxury of galavanting around the galaxy, free of consequence from his decisions. He refused to think it was anything similar to his father.

“Chewie, it isn’t that simple,” he says with a sigh. He’s never spoken about this with anyone. Was he really going to engage in such a conversation with Chewie?

Ben supposed he was desperate enough for answers to try.

“I don’t even know where to start. Every time, I think I can make it work, all I can think about is the kriffing Academy and how if things don’t work out, I might ruin her life. Like, completely. She’s never had a home before and she trusts me as her friend. I don’t want to jeopardize something by jumping to some stupid confession.”

“Ben, don’t be so hard on yourself.”

Ben gives a groan, covering his face. He no longer notices the chill of the cave. He might as well be sweating. “Chewie, Rey isn’t like anyone else I’ve ever met. I’ve never felt the way I do when I’m around her.”

“I can tell,” he moans. Ben tried to ignore the snark in his tone.

“If being her friend is all I can be, then that’s what I would do. But I’m going crazy, thinking of all the ways she understands me and all the ways I understand her. She...She makes me–”

“Happy,” Chewie finishes for him. “She makes you happy.”

Ben nods. “Yeah. She does. And I want her to be happy. But I feel stuck. I don’t know where to go from here.”

“Can I tell you something?”

Ben shrugs, knowing he will tell him anyway.

“Ben, I’ve known you your whole life. I know things haven’t been easy for you.”

Ben watches him carefully, surprised at his sudden honesty.

“I’ve seen how upset and confused you’ve been in the past. I know you’ve felt out of control and that your choices aren’t your own. And that’s not your fault. You’ve always been very powerful
and that meant that regardless of what you wanted, some things were not up to you.”

Ben didn’t think that Chewie had even considered this much before. He always thought he would take his father's side of everything, but he was more observant than he gave him credit for.

“And if I’m being honest, I would say that you deserve to make your own choices for once.”

“R-Really?”

Chewie nods.

“But what about Luke and—”

“I’m not saying to just disregard everything and throw caution to the wind, but I am saying that you should follow your heart on this. You should embrace this. Because you’re happy, Ben. And if anyone is going to discipline you for finding happiness, then they shouldn’t be making decisions for you. You're nearly eighteen, I think you're responsible enough to choose your own path.”

Ben can hardly believe it. Chewie was encouraging him to pursue what he wanted most.

“Just thought I should tell you that. I thought it might help. And no, I’m not going to tell anyone so don’t panic. Just think about it.”

Chewie gives him a final pat on the back before he steps back inside the Falcon, leaving him to his thoughts.

Rey wanders through the tunnels and halls, surrounded by crystals, left and right and up and down. They’re beautiful.

But she should be much more focused than she actually is. She takes another deep breath, trying to center herself. Trying to focus. Trying to think of anything but Ben Solo.

She doesn't even make it ten steps before the memory of his words wash over her once again.

Because I love you, he had said.

She could hardly believe it. It was too good to be true. She thought of reaching out to him. To return his affections as eagerly as she feels them.

Because she loves him too.

But she’s afraid. So afraid. He had doubts too, she heard. They were similar to her own. And even though he doesn’t have to worry about her not returning his affections, she knows things are complicated beyond that.

If anyone at the Academy were to find out, it would jeopardize everything. They probably wouldn’t be able to study together or eat together or even see each other if Luke found out they had violated one of the most sacred rules of the temple. Of the entire Jedi religion!

Maybe that’s why it was taking her so long to find her crystal. Maybe she’s not a Jedi at all and any connection she’s supposed to be having with these mystical rocks was shot, all because she loved Ben Solo as much as she does.

She groans out, her frustrated growls traveling through the caves, scolding herself. “Just focus for
two fucking seconds, please!” She could tear her hair out it was so maddening.

But then she feels something call to her. Pull her in.

It’s not frightening. It’s soothing and calming. She stops in her tracks, trying to focus on where it’s coming from.

She waits, letting the sensation flood through her as she acquaints herself with it.

But she feels as if she already knows it. It reminds her of how it felt to hold Ben’s lightsaber that first time in the woods.

She had never felt anything like it, but she feels it again now.

It guides her down a new pathway.

At the end of the tunnel, there’s a tremendous light, illuminating the entire space as it resides up above.

She walks further inside, craning her neck to look at it. She feels rather than sees that it was a crystal, as small as her pinky. But despite its size, the power was immense.

And even though she had been trying to not think about Ben, she’s reminded of him even more now because this power, this light, reminds her so much of his. Like it was a missing piece of his own crystal.

But it calls to her now. It only speaks to her.

It must be the one she’s meant to take.

She could use the force to summon it to her hand, but hadn’t Ben said he needed to climb to get to his? Perhaps that was the only way.

Shaking out her hands and making sure her boots were tight on her feet, she begins to climb.

Ben watches the ice in the archway, only getting closer to the bottom.

She was running out of time and it does little for his nerves.

Chewie’s conversation with him had got him feeling a little better though, as surprising as it had been. Because Chewie was right. He was happy, so why should he find all the reasons why not to be when there was the solution right in front of him?

Next time he saw her, he was going to tell her, no matter what.

He gulps at the thought but has to fight down the fear rising within him. He trusted Rey more than anyone and she trusted him.

That didn’t mean that she loved him though. But even if she didn’t, he wanted her to hear it. He wanted her to know that she was loved.

It’s then that he feels a strange new warmth blooming in his chest. It’s familiar and for a quick second, he glances down at his lightsaber. The energy was similar to his crystal’s energy, but something was slightly different.
Perhaps brighter, was the term.

But then he feels it mixed with another energy that he knows so well. Rey’s.

She’s found it! Rey found her kyber crystal.

Ben beams with pride but looks again to the ice. It was getting so low. Maybe just a few feet above his head. She would need to hurry and before he could rationalize any other thought, he charges inside, tracking her down. He follows the traces of her energy and guided by the beacon of the Force that called to him from outside. He works through a path that leads him directly to her.

But as he gets closer, he realizes that he’s taken this path before. He’s made all these same turns before.

And when he makes it to the final turn and enters the large room, illuminated by a brilliant light, he understands.

Rey’s crystal resided right beside where he had found his own.

What did that mean?

Suddenly, that day in the forest rushes into his mind, the first time they touched hands and their pasts were revealed to each other. Beyond his feelings for her, they had a connection, he knows.

Perhaps it runs even deeper than he imagined.

He sees Rey just beneath it and she reaches out for it. The light in the cave dims once she pulls away but he can see how the remaining glow illuminates her face in soft blue light.

She’s got it.

“Rey,” he breathes out. He thinks it’s too quiet for her to hear but her head spins to look at him.

“Ben!” she beams at him from up above and she begins to descend. She makes it look easy but he still holds his breath when he’s worried she could slip.

At one point he actually calls out, telling her to slow down but she doesn’t. She still makes it to the bottom and when she does, she rushes right for him. “I found it,” she tells him quietly, almost like she couldn’t believe it.

“I knew you would,” he breathes out, nearly succumbing to the impulse to hug her, but she’s still looking at her crystal. He wonders if he should tell her how it was practically in the same place where he had found his own but decides against it.

He could tell her another time.

After a moment, Ben recalls how she had said that earlier but they had been in a bit of a rush and he hadn’t listened. He wasn’t going to let it pass him by a second time, ice be damned. He needed to listen to her.
“What is it?” he looks down at her, admiring the rosiness of her cheeks and the sparkle in her eyes. She looks so beautiful, he thinks and he wonders if he could tell her he loved her now. He had decided on saying it the next time he saw her anyway.

But then she speaks.

“I...I’ve been thinking a lot about what you said.”

He looks to her a little confused. Was she referring to something he said this morning? “What do you mean?” Rey takes a deep breath. She looks a little nervous suddenly and he hopes he hasn’t upset her.

“Ben, I heard you last night,” she says quickly. His brain takes a moment to catch on but his heart has already sped up in his chest as panic settles in.

She doesn't mean...

“When you said that...that you loved me,” she says, her voice just above a whisper. The sparkle in her eyes now accompanied by the shine of oncoming tears.

All of the air leaves Ben’s body. The understanding of what he’s done crashes into him at full force. He had wanted to tell her so badly, but she already knew. Certainly, her distant behavior and nervous energy was answer enough.

All of the hopes he had begun to build in his mind start to crumble. Why had he done that? He admitted to everything he feared and loved all because he thought she was sleeping?

How can he even begin to fix this?

“Rey, I–” he starts but she cuts him off, speaking over him.

“And I love you too,” Rey tells him suddenly.

Ben is frozen. He's stuck. He wouldn’t know what to do, even if he could move. He watches her as she seems to wait for him. Her eyes pouring into his, begging him to respond. And he wants to, he needs to. But his mouth has a hard time catching up.

How could it be real?

“You...You love me?” he asks her, his voice strained and shaky with disbelief.

He hears her give a slight gasp, perhaps startled he finally said something. “Of course I do.”

Of course she does?

She says it like it’s so obvious. Like loving him wasn’t some kind of burden. Like she really meant it. She loves him.

“You love me,” he says again, but this time it wasn’t a question. More of a statement, like he was trying to get it through his head that it might be possible.

Rey takes a deep breath and continues further. “And even if I didn’t hear you last night, I would want to tell you anyway. I want you to know. Because you’re the kindest, most gentle, and most frustrating person I’ve ever met,” she says with a small laugh.

Ben tries to speak, to say the things he’s been planning on saying, but he can’t. He gets lost in her
words, as if in a trance. His heart still speeds but now filled with something else entirely. No longer panic, but exhilaration.

“I know you’re afraid, and I am too. I’m terrified.” Silent tears fall from her eyes as she speaks. “There’s a lot that could go wrong. We couldn’t let anyone find out or it would change everything. And I understand why you’re worried because you’re right. The Academy is the closest thing I’ve ever had to a home, but that’s only because of you. Out of everything there, you, your arms, your face, our beach, our lessons...That’s the most at home I’ve ever felt and that’s how I know I love you. That’s why I would want to tell you, even if you didn’t mean what you said last night.”

Ben’s mind races, overwhelmed with joy at her admission. Finally, he breaks out of his frozen state and reaches out, bringing his hands to her face and does what he should have done a long time ago. He presses his lips to hers with crushing passion. She gasps at first, a little surprised, but kisses him back almost instantly.

“I meant it,” he assures her between kisses. He didn’t want her to have any doubt about his feelings. “I love you, Rey. I love you so much.”

She gives a small sob against his mouth but brings her hands to tether against his face. Warmth spreads through him from her touch, like a healing balm. Everything that had plagued his mind earlier fades away beneath her touch. Nothing would distract him from this.

Not after he’s spent so long trying to deny his uncontrollable desire for it.

Rey tries to push up on her toes, trying to get closer to him. Ben smiles against her lips, knowing he was too tall for her and bends his knees, wrapping his arms around her waist and lifting her up just enough that their faces are at the same level.

These kisses are different than before. The night on the beach where they had agreed to share a kiss had been soft. It had been chaste and innocent. Her lips just barely pressing against his.

But now was different. This was beyond anything Ben had ever expected. It was fervent and intoxicating. It’s like they couldn’t get close enough. A new hunger making itself known within him. Something he had tried to ignore but now couldn’t fight down if he tried.

He’s inexperienced, to say the least, but his passions, as well as hers, fuel them forward and they figure it out.

They stay like that for a long time before he realizes he needs to breathe and they break away, their foreheads leaning against each other, breathing each other in.

Rey’s hands are still on either side of his face and he feels her thumbs brush past his cheeks, ridding of the wetness there. He didn’t even realize he had been crying but ever since she admitted what she did, he’s been overcome with emotion.

“I’ve been wanting to do that for a while,” he tells her so quietly not even the cave’s echo could recite it.

Rey gives him a smile. “Me too,” she says breathlessly, gently brushing her fingers past his face, over his lips.

He kisses the tips of her fingers, prepared to lean back in and kiss her lips again, but then they both hear something from the front of the cave.
Chewie’s roars, Ben realizes. “Hurry up. It’s closing!” he rumbles.

Closing! How could he forget? The kriffing massive wall of ice was going to freeze over and trap them inside.

“Oh, shit. We gotta go,” Ben tells her. He sets her back on the ground, grabbing her hand, and rushing for the exit.

They make their way back through the tunnels, winding back the same way he came in. They come around one of the last corners to see that the ice was almost completely sealed. They sprint as fast as they can towards the end to where Chewie is standing on the other side.

All they can see of him are his knees. It’s too far down to clear while upright.

“We’ll have to slide!” Ben shouts to Rey, mid-stride.

“Okay!”

They run as fast as they can, the ice only making it more difficult for them as it rapidly freezes over. But they both lean back and brace for impact, sliding beneath the massive wall and making it out the other side with mere seconds to spare, the archway complete once again. Ben turns to look at her, knowing a big grin is on his face. She smiles back at him, panting for air.

“You okay?” he asks her.

She gives him a nod with a small smile, something almost mischievous glinting in her eyes. He smiles back, about to say something else when a loud roar nearly makes him jump from his skin.

“Don’t cut it so close! What kind of chaperone would I be, letting you two get trapped in there to freeze to death?!” Chewie roars, more worried than angry.

“I know, I’m sorry. But it’s okay. We’re okay!” Ben insists, holding up his hands in mercy.

Chewie just shakes his head and lumbers over both of them, offering his hands to help them up. Both of them were still on the ground from their slide.

“Did you find something in there, Rey?” Chewie moans out, looking down to her.

She glances right at Ben for a moment and he could swear her cheeks go a little redder. “Yeah, I did,” she answers, reaching into her pocket and revealing the crystal within her palm.

“Very nice,” Chewie tells her.

“I thought so, too,” she chuckles, still a little out of breath and he sees now in the lingering light of this cave that her lips are red. They almost look swollen from their kisses and he suspects his own are in a similar state. Probably noticeable enough for Chewie to see.

But he doesn't say anything about it. “Well, we better get moving. Computer says a storm is moving in and we don’t want to get trapped in here either. Let’s get going!” Chewie moans, making back for the Falcon.

Ben and Rey follow after him. He can’t keep his eyes off of her, not when he finally knows.

Rey loves him and he doesn’t think he’s ever felt this good.

When Chewie was far enough ahead, he reaches for her hand and squeezes tight.
He never wanted to let go.

Chapter End Notes

Wow, we made it! They have admitted their feelings and everything is on the up and up! Obviously, there's still a lot to work out and if I'm being honest, I don't even know if we're halfway through yet. This story is already much longer than I ever planned it being.

Oh, and their magic rocks for their laser swords are from the same place. That's probably going to come back around later but sorry if that was weird.

Thank you so much for your patience and for sticking with this story so far! I have a lot planned for these babes so I hope everyone's enjoying it!!

Thanks for reading<3!!!
What Now?

Chapter Notes

A shorter, transitional chapter as they head back home to Oquinn.

Oh and Rey makes her lightsaber, yay!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The storm wasn’t too bad as they made their way off Ilum. They returned to space quickly enough, going to lightspeed. Rey realizes then just how long she had been in that cave because her stomach grumbles loudly and she knows she’s starving.

She hadn’t had that much to eat that morning.

Ben turns to look at her, a smile on his face. He must have heard it too.

“You hungry?” he asks her with a chuckle.

“Always,” she whispers and together they leave the cockpit, a reasonable distance apart with Chewie so close by. She had helped him fly out of the cave and through the small storm out of the atmosphere.

But Rey is surprised she even had the focus to manage all of that. Her mind was still back in that cave.

The intensity of their kiss was still making her lips tingle.

She hadn’t expected that from him. She had kissed him first that night on the beach. He had been so nervous then and seemed afraid he would disappoint her.

But this time was different. He reached for her, kissing her passionately. Their love finally bared to each other and it had given both of them newfound confidence.

For so long, they have believed their reality too complicated to give them anything to hope too much for. But when they came together, it was like all the obstacles that may threaten this path was worth it. Anything would be worth it to stay with Ben, in this way.

This way there truly would be no more secrets. No more pretending, at least not with each other. She knew there were certain pretenses to be kept up in front of everyone else.

But if it meant that she and Ben could finally have this, then she was willing to do it. She thinks she would do anything.

They move to the table where they left the food supplies. Rey takes the crystal out of her pocket before removing her jacket and sets it carefully on the table.

Chewie walks in then, claiming to be hungry. Ben throws her a knowing glance and she gives a faint smile in return. They had a lot to talk about, but it would have to wait.
Ben sits close to her while they eat, perhaps closer than he would have allowed before. Or maybe it was the same as always and he was just comforted to know that the distance between them did not seem as vast as it did before.

Now that he knows that she loves him.

Rey loves him. It’s almost too good to be true. But then she’ll turn to look at him, she’ll give him a small smile with an overwhelming ardency in her eyes and he knows it’s real.

Chewie leaves once he finishes eating, claiming he was going to sleep in the cockpit for a while so they would know where to find him if they needed anything.

Both of them remained very composed as they bid him goodnight, waiting for him to make his way down the hall.

He takes a deep breath when they are alone once again and she does too. She picks up her crystal from the table, admiring its beauty, holding it up to the light above them as if that would make it look even better. As he leans against her, sinking a little to look at it from the same angle, he thinks the light may help after all.

When he’s closest, she turns her head so her face is right in front of his. Close enough that he can feel her breath on his chin. Rey looks to him with those hazel eyes that he could get lost in forever. And he thinks he wants to.

“Ben,” she starts.

“Hmm?” Ben can’t seem to form actual words.

Her mouth starts to break into a grin and her eyes crinkle in amusement. “What now?”

He laughs. “I have no idea,” he tells her honestly. They have a lot they have to cover in the remaining thirteen or so hours that remain on their ride back to the Academy. He knows they are both on the same page about keeping it to themselves. This would have to remain secret to everyone else or it would drastically compromise everything.

They would have to be cautious. Extremely cautious.

Ben looks to the crystal in her hand once again. “Didn’t Luke give you some of the casing supplies for your saber?” he asks her. She nods. “Why don’t we look through some of it. I can show you the basics and we can talk.”

“Okay,” she breathes, taking his meaning. She takes her crystal and grabs the box that Luke gave her, the spare pieces clanking around in the box.

They move to the bedroom, setting the items on the floor. She opens the box to reveal the items inside and Ben could shake his head. Of course Luke had to offer her leftovers. He didn’t supply her with new pieces and Ben wasn’t sure he liked that. Not after she’s had to depend on scraps for so much of her life.

And yet, Rey doesn’t seem to mind.

She takes out some of the pieces that intrigue her but looks unsure of what to do with them. Ben unclips his saber from his own belt, holding it out for her to take if she wants.

She takes it, looking at it admirably, examining it with the eye of a true mechanic.
“Alright, what do you suggest I start with?” she asks him.

Ben leans over to grab his backpack, pulling out his holopad. “I have a diagram saved on here that might make it easier to explain.” He pulls it up for her to see and she studies it closely, looking between his saber and the stray pieces to gather what exactly she needs.

Ben watches as she works, admiring the nimble movements of her fingers and how she mutters to herself or chews on her bottom lip when she’s focusing. She does the same thing when she draws.

He takes hold of her crystal as she organizes herself. He looks at it curiously, trying to figure out why this one had called to her. This crystal that had been right where he had found his own. And maybe it was just his mind jumping to conclusions, but it feels so familiar. So much like the connection he shares with his own lightsaber.

She must notice he’s deep in thought because when he looks up again, she’s staring right at him.

“Is there something wrong with it?” she asks him.

“No. Of course not, I was just thinking,” he tells her.

“What?”

“It reminds me so much of my own.”

“That’s what first got my attention. I remembered what it felt like to hold your lightsaber and the power of that felt so much like this one. I didn’t understand it at first but then I realized it was calling to me.”

He nods, taking it all in. “Do you remember how I told you I needed to climb to find my crystal?”

She nods. “Yeah.”

“Well, I didn’t tell you before but when I found you in the caves, you were in the same place where I found mine.”

She looks confused at first, her brow furrowing. It seems to register quickly though and she gasps. “What does that mean, Ben? Is that just a coincidence?”

“I don’t know. I mean, how could it all just be a coincidence? After everything else that has happened? Like that day when our pasts were revealed to each other when we touched. We haven’t come across any kind of explanation in the library but we shared a connection. Something very rare. And now, with this,” he holds her crystal in his palm, looking at it fondly, “a similar energy called to both of us. Even though this is your crystal, it still reminds me of mine. These crystals chose us for a reason. We saw our pasts when we touched for a reason. All of this has to be part of something bigger. It has to be guiding us towards something.”

“What if it already has?” she asks softly.

Ben looks to her confused but when she smiles, he takes her meaning. His cheeks heating up under her implication. Because she’s right. In a way, these occurrences brought them to the understanding and the admission of their true feelings.

Ben leans forward, placing the crystal in her palm. “I think no matter what, I would have fallen in love with you anyway. Regardless of what the force had to do with it,” he tells her, quickly pressing a kiss to the corner of her mouth.
"Me too," she breathes out, turning so she could kiss him fully on the lips.

If this was a common occurrence, if he could kiss her like this every day, Ben thinks he might be the happiest person in the galaxy.

It was a strange concept, to think that he could be capable of being happy. But when they pull away, she brings up a hand to brush his hair behind his ear and perhaps it wasn’t so strange after all. It’s similar to how he usually feels around her. It’s returned to that original comfort without being diluted by his nerves. Only now it feels more profound.

Because he knows she feels the same and he doesn’t have to hide away or be ashamed of his feelings.

She sifts through the lightsaber pieces, trying to decide what she prefers. She was fiddling with an emitter matrix when suddenly turns to him again. “Ben?”

“Yeah?” He looks to what she’s doing, thinking she may have a question.

“You mentioned that your grandfather fell in love with your grandmother when he was still a Jedi,” she starts and he realizes this is unrelated to her saber.

“No. He was basically still a padawan.” Just like us, he realizes.

She seems to be searching for the right words. “He remained in the Jedi Order for many years before he fell to the dark. Do you think that was rare? For a Jedi to fall in love and just keep it secret?”

He considers her question for a moment before answering. “I think a lot of Jedi have struggled to keep their emotions away. It’s part of what is supposed to make them noble or something. So, in a way, maybe it wasn’t rare for them to fall in love. I just don’t think they acted on it. They tried to push it away. That or they tried to keep it hidden too. Like Padmé and Anakin...or us,” he added at the end, surprised that he of all people had fallen in love.

She considers this for a moment before looking to him again. “Does this,” she gestures between them, “really not make us ‘true Jedi?’”

He flounders for a moment, unsure what he should say. Who was to say what a true Jedi was or if admitting to being in love was meant to be a weakness instead of strength? “I don’t know,” he answers honestly. “But if it didn’t, would it change things for you?” he asks her, terrified of what he answer may be.

She looks to him, a surprised look on her face. As if she was offended but there’s a playful glint in her eyes. “No. Of course not.”

He smiles. “Me either.”

She smiles back before returning her focus to the pieces in her hands and laying them all out on the ground in front of her, placing her crystal in the center. She takes a deep breath glancing at the diagram once more, looking a little doubtful.

But she’s done everything right. There’s no reason for her to question herself.

“It’s just like meditating,” he tells her, watching closely. “Don’t rush it, just let the energy of the crystal guide you.”
She nods, taking another deep breath and closing her eyes and he watches her in devotion.

Rey is reminded of that day when she first successfully meditated. Ben stood beside her then, not judging or critiquing, but being supportive and encouraging. She knows she doesn't have to be afraid.

She feels the energy of the crystal more now like it could sense what was coming. The pieces seem to make more sense now. The diagram, though helpful, was nothing compared to the real thing.

She feels as things connect and slot where they are supposed to be. Her crystal housed in the casing she had created.

She holds out her hand, her eyes still closed, and gently she feels the weight of her lightsaber fall into her grip.

She opens her eyes to see the finished product. Her very own lightsaber. She examines it closely, feeling proud of herself for completing it. She doesn’t think it compares to the euphoric feeling of admitting her feelings to Ben and finding comfort in his embrace but she supposes this was pretty amazing as well.

But then she turns to see the look on Ben’s face. The love in his eyes is now mixed with awe as he looks between her and the newly completed saber.

“Try it,” he urges her, moving to stand up. He offers his hand to help her up even though she doesn’t need it. She takes it anyway, enjoying the warmth of his hand in hers. “You have to try it out.”

“Okay,” she laughs at how eager he sounds. He’s wanted her to have a lightsaber for a while now. He may be more excited about it than she is.

He steps away, giving her some space and Rey moves to the center of the room, away from anything in case she was to mess up. She would be so embarrassed if she were to accidentally tear apart the ship the first time she used it.

She takes a deep breath, looking warily to the ignition button. But there was nothing to be afraid of, she reminds herself.

She presses it and suddenly, a beam of blue light extends out, a constant hum filling the room. She marvels at it, how the hum alters when she moves it just slightly.

She hasn’t held any other lightsabers besides Ben’s but this reminds her how she felt holding his. It feels powerful. Like the crystal within is communicating with her.

But Ben had mentioned that their crystals were from the same place. It explained why their energy was so comforting to both of them or why Ben seemed baffled that hers felt so much like his own.

She looks to him then, seeing the blue glow wash over his features and shine in his eyes. He’s smiling at her so wide she could see his teeth. He never smiled like that. It was rare to get such a grin out of Ben Solo and yet she had seen it several times within the last few hours alone.

Feeling smug, knowing they were meant for her, she spins the saber in her hand, never taking her eyes off of him. “What do you think?”

He takes a step closer, coming for her. She deactivates the saber, not wanting to slice him by
accident and she wonders if she hadn’t if he would have bothered slowing down. He stands right before her, his dark eyes pouring into hers.

“It’s perfect, Rey,” he tells her, leaning closer and reaching for it in her hands to hold for himself. He looks at it closely like she had looked at his. Rey admires the look in his eyes and she smiles, knowing he means it. He truly approves.

Knowing she can’t resist, she wraps her arms around him and pulls herself close. He clings to her with his free arm, resting his face against the top of her head, still holding the saber in his other hand.

“Thank you,” she mumbles into his chest.

He chuckles, “For what?”

For teaching her.

For being her friend.

For believing in her.

For loving her.

“For everything,” she says at last.

Ben pulls away just slightly to look down at her. He looks almost confused at first but then there’s a passing wave of understanding in his eyes and he nods, pressing a kiss to her temple. “Thank you, too.”

They’re back in the bed, although still in separate sleeping bags. Only this time, the space between them is not as vast. Their faces are inches apart as they speak softly in the darkness of the room and their hands linger near each other, brushing past each other’s palms.

“We’ll have to be careful once we get back,” Rey whispers.

“I know. And we will be,” Ben insists. They had to be.

She bites her lip before speaking. “Do you think Chewie is suspicious?”

Ben gives a small scoff at himself. “I completely forgot to tell you. Apparently, he’s beyond suspicious and more than certain about how we feel for each other. Or at least how I feel for you.”

Rey sits up from the bed with a jolt. “What!”

Ben sits up beside her, trying to calm her down. “Don’t worry. It’s not what you think.”

“But Ben, he’ll go to your father. He’ll go to Luke!”

Ben shakes his head. “I thought so too, but he won’t.” Rey doesn’t argue that point, seeing that he obviously had more to say. “When I was waiting for you to come out of the cave, he spoke with me. He asked me outright if I liked you and I got so upset and nearly turned away. But then he insisted he wasn’t going to tell anyone, he just wanted to speak with me about it.”

“What did he say?” she asks, sounding less tense than before.
“He said that he noticed the difference in me. He says I seemed happier around you than he’s ever seen from me.”

Rey blushes at that, chuckling softly at the wookiee’s observation.

“He also told me that he understands that I haven’t exactly been able to make my own choices. A lot of them were made for me and although I don’t think he would ever say it out loud, he knows that my parents and I don’t exactly see eye to eye.

“But he told me that if I found a way to be happy, then I should follow my own path. I never thought anyone in my family really trusted me, but Chewie...he seemed to understand. I never thought he paid so much attention.”

“He loves you,” Rey whispers, starting to lay back down to where she was before. Ben reclines as well.

“Yes. He does,” he realizes with a smile. “It made me feel good. For so long, I think I haven’t been able to trust myself. I’ve doubted everything I do because I know my family doesn’t trust me and they think of me as some kind of embarrassment…”

Rey takes hold of his hand when he says this, hoping to comfort him.

“But Chewie, he spoke to me like a friend. He wasn’t judging me or telling me what I’ve done wrong. He only thought to tell me what he thought and it helped me realize that I could trust myself too. I decided that when I saw you next, that I would tell you I loved you no matter what, even if you didn’t feel the same.” The corners of his mouth quirk up in a smile. “But then you beat me to it,” he jokes. Rey laughs.

"No, you still said it first last night,” she insists.

Ben smiles, admiring the dimples on her cheeks and the fluttering of her tired eyes. He shouldn’t keep her awake any longer. She needs to rest, but there’s something else he wants to tell her.

“It was that night we kissed on the beach that I first admitted it to myself,” Ben whispers.

“The first time you admitted what?” she asks him softly.

“That I loved you,” he brings his hand up to brush her hair away from her face. “I laid in bed all night going out of my mind, thinking about what I should do. I knew I had very strong feelings for you and I almost felt guilty at the time for agreeing to kiss you, knowing that I couldn’t think of it as something simple or platonic. I wanted to tell you how I really felt but I was going crazy, trying to calm down and not freak out because I finally realized what was going on with me and that was even scarier than not knowing what was happening to me.”

Rey chuckles a little. “I was going crazy too. I was swearing at my pillow, trying to figure out what was going on. I knew it was love I felt for you, but I doubted myself. I was worried I wouldn’t know what it is since I have never truly loved or been loved before.”

Ben’s heart sinks at her words. Her parent’s absence and her life on Jakku had been so difficult. She had been so neglected when she should have been loved all along. Ben brings the hand from her hair to trail along her cheek, trying to comfort her.

“But like I told you earlier, you’re my home.” She brings up her own hand to brush her fingers past his lips. “But that didn’t mean it stopped me from going crazy almost every night, trying to convince myself I shouldn’t feel that way. Not when we were supposed to be something else.”
Ben gives a soft laugh. “I don’t know how many hours of sleep I’ve missed just tossing and turning in my bed, doing the same thing. All this time and we didn’t even realize we were going insane over the same problem,” he chuckles. It wasn’t funny before but now that they have each other, he can see the humor in it. Just barely.

“Maybe we did, but we were too distracted by our own strife to recognize it in each other,” Rey muses drowsily, her eyes closing.

“Well, I won’t make the same mistake again,” Ben vows, leaning forward to kiss her softly on the lips and then her cheek. “Goodnight, Rey,” he breathes out.

“Goodnight, Ben,” she says, snuggling against him and making herself comfortable, ignoring the fact that they were in separate sleeping bags. Rey lay cradled between his upper arm and his chest, her own arm draped across his torso.

He gives her a final kiss on her forehead, his nose pressed against her hair. A most soothing scent to fall asleep to.

This was so different from last night. This time yesterday it seemed to be just a wild fantasy. Last night, he could only dream of ever getting this close. Of ever getting to be with her like this. But it was real.

Both of them drift off in each other’s arms, sleeping more soundly than either of them have ever experienced.

Chapter End Notes

soft babes and their soft ways make my days
Parent's Night

Chapter Summary

And now we return to the padawan acadawan/pademy academy

Chapter Notes

This one took me forever and I'm not super happy with it but I'm really anxious to get to the more intensive parts of the story so I'm glad to have this one down.

Thanks for reading, babes.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Luke was eating dinner in his quarters when he hears an incoming call from the holopad. He’s still chewing when he makes it over to see the incoming call signal and his heart sinks in his chest.

It’s from Leia. And he can already guess what she’s going to say.

He accepts the call, schooling his expression to not look as disappointed as he felt, but he can already see she’s sporting one of her own in the blue glow of the hologram.

“So, I’m guessing you’re not calling to ask what I’m serving for dinner tomorrow night,” he starts.

She sighs, “Is my track record that bad?”

Luke gives a sigh of his own, leaning back in his chair. “No,” he lies, “I just know how badly you wanted to come tomorrow.”

“I truly did. It sounds like he’s doing really well and I feel horrible, but as it turns out there’s a bit of an issue with the Centrists that I need to be here for. They’re stirring things up again and I think there are too many politicians who are too easily influenced and too young to really understand the horror of the Empire or the war in general.”

“Wait a minute, I think I’m having a similar problem here,” Luke tries to joke but he can tell Leia isn’t in the mood. “Leia, your work is important and you can always trust your instincts. If you feel you need to stay then you should.”

“I already know how he’s going to take it, but I need to tell him anyway. Do you think you could get him for me?”

“Well, funny story. He isn’t actually here right now. He’s with Chewie.”

“Chewie?”

“Yeah. Rey, the girl he’s been studying with, was ready for her lightsaber. Chewie took them to Ilum in the Falcon. They’ll be back tomorrow.” Luke leaves out the details of Han’s decision not to
accompany them. She knew they went in the Millennium Falcon so she could probably deduce that much on her own.

“It sounds like he’s doing so well. I wanted to see it for myself, but maybe this is for the best. I seem to only make things worse.”

Luke nods, knowing exactly how that felt. But she’s obviously upset, so he tries to think of something for her to look forward to. “Listen, I don’t know when I’m hosting the next parent’s night but Ben’s birthday is coming up pretty soon. Maybe you could arrange to come to visit then. I could even let him leave for a few days if you had something you wanted to do with him.”

Ben would be turning eighteen pretty soon. If Luke didn’t feel old yet, that definitely would have made it clear.

“Eighteen,” Leia gasps. “I can’t believe it. It’s all gone by so fast. He’ll be an adult.”

“I know.”

“Not to sound pushy, but if he’s an adult, how much longer does his training go on for?”

Luke gives a humorless laugh. “Honestly, I don’t know. He’s very skilled, but I’d say he still has a ways to go until his training is finished. He’s been preoccupied lately with Rey’s lessons but now that she’s getting her lightsaber, I think she’s ready to integrate with the rest of the class.”

Luke already knows Ben won’t like that idea. He didn’t like regular classes when he had been apart of them. And although he wasn’t enthusiastic about teaching Rey at first, he’s certainly grown fond of it over time.

If he were to move them to regular classes, he can already anticipate Ben’s disapproval of it. But if he was going to be a Jedi, he had to adjust to things. Not every mission or task was going to be his first choice, in fact, quite the opposite. Accepting things for what they were was all part of his training. And there was no need to keep Rey’s lessons isolated anymore. Not when she’s somehow mastered things that most of the other students couldn’t even comprehend.

She was ready to make the transition.

Luke shakes his head, realizing he’s gotten lost in his thoughts and looks back to his sister, trying to give her a more solid answer. “Probably another few years or so at least before he’s ready to go out on his own. I haven’t exactly perfected the whole nature of this system. These are still my first batch of kids.”

Leia gives a small snicker. “You make them sound like baked goods.”

“Sometimes, I wish they were. Teaching is hard. The level of patience I’m supposed to have is drastically different from the patience I actually have. Which can be disheartening at times because I’m supposed to be the exemplary Jedi.”

Leia laughs at him and he’s glad she’s able to relax, even in the slightest. “Luke, you do an amazing job. Don’t be so hard on yourself.”

“Okay, as long as you do the same.”

She nods, “I’ll try.” She looks down at her hands, quiet for a moment before speaking again. “Will you at least tell him how sorry I am. I know it won’t do any good, but I want him to know how proud I am.”
“I’ll tell him, Leia.”

“Thank you, Luke.”

They’re about to land back at the Academy and Ben tries to linger in the sanctity of their privacy, especially with Chewie in the cockpit.

“I wish this trip back was longer,” he admits against her lips.

She smiles, “I know what you mean.”

He presses a final kiss to her mouth before pulling away. If they kept it up any longer, their lips would be swollen and it would be too obvious when they landed of what they had been doing. She runs her hands past his hair, trying to fix where her hands had tussled it. He wishes they didn’t have to erase all of it, but if it meant they could remain together in secret, he would do whatever it takes.

And even if Chewie could guess what they were doing together in private, that didn’t mean Ben wanted it to be obvious.

“The parents are coming tonight?” she asks him suddenly.

“Yeah,” he says, honestly forgetting all about the ordeal that Luke insists on doing at least twice a year.

“Are your parents coming?” she asks him softly, running her hands past his tunic. It comforts him and he knows she’s doing it on purpose. She knows how he feels about his parents.

“Just my mom, I think. I spoke to her a while back and I think she was planning on coming. I haven’t talked to her since then. She can’t always make it.”

“Are you worried about it?” she asks him, looking deeply into his eyes.

Ben takes a deep breath. “I usually am but to be honest, I feel fine. I don’t think I can be bothered,” he tells her, wishing he could lean forward and kiss her but refrains. Instead, he just brushes his fingers past her cheek, pushing some hair behind her ear.

“Well, I’m glad,” she tells him, teetering forward as if she might kiss him anyway, but then the whole ship jolts beneath their feet and they catch each other to keep from falling.

Ben groans, knowing they’ve landed. “Alright. I guess we should get this shit over with.” Rey giggles a little and rises on her toes to kiss him on the cheek.

They gather their things and Ben watches as Rey situates her new lightsaber on her belt when he latches his own to his person. He smiles, admiring how she looks with it.

Chewie lowers the ramp and they already hear Luke chatting with him.

Rey takes a deep breath when she hears Luke’s voice and he turns to see a slightly worried look on her face.

“Hey,” he whispers. She looks to him with big eyes and he melts a little. “We’re gonna be fine.”

She nods quickly, stepping forward and making for the ramp. He waits a moment before he follows after her, a comfortable distance away. When he steps outside, he can see that Luke is
already examining and complimenting Rey on her lightsaber.

“Wonderful construction, Rey. I can see you made excellent use of those pieces after all.”

“Thank you, Master Skywalker,” she tells him.

Ben sees Luke acknowledge him as he walks down the ramp and for a fleeting moment, he wonders if he’s going to greet him. But then his attention is elsewhere.

“Master Skywalker!” Ben can hear BX call from on top of the hill near the temple.

“What is it Beex?”

“What color table cloths would you prefer? Blue or green?”

Luke groans, muttering under his breath before calling back. “I’ll be up in a minute!”

“We also have white!” the droid offers persistently which makes Rey chuckle and Ben represses a smile.

“I said ‘I’ll be up in a minute, Beex!’” Luke hollers.

“Apologies! I’ll wait in the mess hall!” and with that, the droid disappears back inside the temple.

Luke turns back to them with a sigh. “Sorry. We’re still preparing for this evening and I always seem to forget how much work goes into these events. For now, why don’t you two get your things put away and then see what you can do to help the other students.” Luke looks back to Ben, making eye contact this time. “Oh, and Ben, there are some things we need to discuss so why don’t you walk up to my office with me.”

Ben stills a little, unnerved by what he was suggesting. They just got back and already he wanted to talk. Suddenly, he feels his cheeks heating up, wondering if his lips looked swollen still.

“Chewie, do you think you could take Ben’s things back to his hut?” Luke asks.

“No problem,” the wookiee says, moving over to Ben and taking his backpack and coat. Ben looks to him warily, hoping that when he promised to keep his secret that he meant it. Would he really have sold them out this quick?

But when Chewie’s back is to Luke, he gives a slight shake of his head, subtle but clear enough for Ben to know he hadn’t said anything.

As he follows Luke back up the hill, he turns around just once to see the nervous look on Rey’s face. He gives a slight wave of his hand, trying to let her know not to worry, even though he couldn’t be sure of that himself.


Ben clears his throat. “Yeah. Everything was great.” That wasn’t a lie, he thinks. “Rey handled everything very well.” Also true.

“I’m glad to hear it.”

Ben watches him out of the corner of his eye. “Is...is that all? What did you want to talk to me about?”
They enter the temple and Luke guides him up the stairs. “I spoke with your mother last night.”

Oh, Ben realizes. He already knows where this was headed and he selfishly takes a sigh of relief. Still, he tries to play dumb for a moment.

“What did she say?”

“She won’t be able to make it tonight. She wants me to tell you how sorry she is.”

Ben shrugs. “It’s okay.” This was not an uncommon thing for his mother to do. He’s not nearly as surprised or disappointed as he knows he probably should be.

Luke looks at him strangely. Perhaps he was expecting a bigger reaction. Ben realizes that in the past, this kind of news usually prompted one of his tantrums. “Do you... want to talk about it?” Luke offers, looking uncomfortable just asking the question.

Ben shakes his head. It didn’t stir up the usual emotional turmoil that it usually does. He was still feeling pretty euphoric about his relationship with Rey.

“Well, umm,” Luke continues, not knowing what else to do, “she wanted me to tell you how proud she is of you. She thinks you’re doing a great job and she wanted to come so she could tell you that.”

Ben nods, taking the words in but having a hard time believing it.

“I know she was also looking forward to meeting Rey.”

Suddenly, Ben thinks this might all be for the best. He thinks that if his mother met Rey, or saw him around Rey, even if he kept a respectable distance, she might have been able to put two and two together. Leia was more receptive to connections than Luke was.

“I’m sure there will be another time in the future,” Ben says, sounding as passive as he can.

“Well, I did mention that if you had something in mind for your upcoming birthday that she could come here or accompany you somewhere. You’ll be eighteen, you know. You’ll legally be a man.”

Ben does roll his eyes at that. He didn’t think being eighteen made someone a man. His father was well into his middle ages and Ben has always thought him to remain a child. Besides, he’s never really liked celebrating his birthday anyway. Suddenly, the memory Rey had witnessed came to mind. The one where Han got him the blaster.

Han hasn’t gotten him any kind of present since then, but he still didn’t want to invite another opportunity for something like that to happen.

Ben wants to tell Luke flat out that he doesn’t want to celebrate his birthday but he knows it might be better to just save that argument for later. So he just nods.

They wait in awkward silence for a moment and Ben looks to the door, wondering if he could leave yet but then Luke speaks up again.

“There is something else I wanted to talk to you about, but I don’t think you’re going to like it very much. I wasn’t going to tell you until later but maybe you would like some time to adjust and prepare for it.”

Oh kriff, what did that mean?
“What is it?”

“Well, it seems like Rey is progressing very well and is handling very advanced material.”

“She is,” Ben affirms, feeling a little skeptical.

“If she’s responding so well to the material in such a short amount of time, I don’t see any reason why she should be separated from the main classes anymore. And I’d say the same goes for you too.”

Ben sways on his feet a little bit, feeling unsteady. Was he suggesting what he thought he was suggesting?

“You’re ending our lessons?”

Luke nods, “I think it’s time you continued your usual training and time that Rey became integrated with everyone else. So, yes.”

Ben’s fingers curl into his palms. _Calm. Stay calm!_

“I don’t like that idea,” Ben says, intending to stand his ground on this matter. “Last time she was in regular classes, she got chased out to a cave where she was nearly killed.”

“Come on, Ben. That’s not going to happen again.”

“But, they—”

“Yes, I know what they did, but frankly, the longer that you two are confined to private lessons, the harder it’s going to be to ever change these dynamics. I’m glad you two are friends but there’s a serious divide between my students and as the headmaster, it’s my job to try and mend that gap. Now that Rey has a lightsaber, I think she’s more than ready to make this transition. And if I’m being honest, no one is probably going to want to mess with her after what they saw her do out in that cave. They all know what she’s capable of. You don’t have to worry about her Ben.”

_If only you knew_, Ben thinks.

He sighs, knowing Luke’s mind is made up. There’s plenty of defenses swirling in Ben’s mind but he doesn’t want to sound too protective. He didn’t want to do anything that might make Luke suspicious. Perhaps he just had to cave in. The best way to stay with Rey was to keep everything as hidden as possible, which was about to get a lot harder when they were going to both be thrust back into the mix of assholes.

And regardless of what Ben said, he knew Luke wouldn’t sway on this.

_Fuck._

“Fine. Whatever,” Ben shrugs, trying not to grit his teeth. “Is that everything?”

“Yes, you can leave,” Luke says, nodding to the door.

Ben steps out, feeling ready to burst. Why did Luke have to be like this?

Ben actually thought he had been very kind and reasonable to him when he told him that Rey could go to Ilum to find her crystal. He had spoken to him the way Ben suspects most uncles speak to their nephews. Friendly, respectful, proud even.
It seemed that brief facade had ended.

Trying not to mutter under his breath, he marches down the hill, making his way for Rey.

Rey set her things down in her hut, not bothering to unpack. She was too distracted.

She was pacing back and forth, trying to figure out why Luke had asked Ben to join him in private.

*Did he know? Was that possible?*

But then she hears the familiar heavy footsteps coming down to the bottom of the hill and she bolts for the curtain, throwing it aside to stand in the doorway.

Ben is making his way down, making a beeline for her and a questionable expression on his face. She didn’t know what that meant and she nearly rushes to meet him in the middle, not liking how the uncertainty was making her stomach turn. But then she hears someone else calling her name.

“Rey! You’re back!” Osi calls, charging for her with Boris close behind.

“Did you get it? Did you make one?”

Rey forces a smile on her face, glancing behind her to see if Ben was still coming over. He’s changed his course to aim for his hut where Chewie was likely still inside.

Knowing she can’t justify turning them away and rushing into Ben’s hut she invites them into her own, intending to show them her new lightsaber.

Already, this was proving to be difficult and she wonders how she’s going to get through the rest of the day let alone every day at this temple.

Seeing that Rey had gotten trapped in other company, Ben reluctantly storms into his hut to find a large wookiee sitting on the end of his bed, looking absolutely massive in the small space.

And Ben thought he was too big for his bed.

The wookiee starts to stand up when he notices Ben has come in but must remember he’s too tall for the small space and hunches back down. “What happened? Does he know?”

“No,” Ben tells him, surprised that once again, he’s having a conversation with Chewie that he never pictured having. “But my mom isn’t coming tonight. That’s what it was about. I guess she got busy with work.”

Chewie gives a low and sorrowful moan. “I’m sorry, little Solo.”

Ben shrugs, crossing his arms. “It’s fine.”

“I could stay for dinner if you wanted,” Chewie offers.

The words to refuse him are already on Ben’s tongue before he realizes that he actually might enjoy that. Perhaps it wasn’t such a bad idea. And Rey liked him and would probably enjoy the company while everyone else was occupied with their families. He doesn’t want the obvious absences at their table to remind her of what her parents did to her.

And if his parents weren’t going to be there either, maybe Chewie could fill that role for both of
them.

This could be good.

“Yeah. I mean, unless you have to get back, or whatever,” he tries to sound passive but he knows it’s not working.

“Nope. I’m where I’m meant to be.”

“Well...thank you,” Ben mumbles.

They are quiet for a moment and Ben is unsure of what else to say. He didn’t want to go into the true frustration of his lessons with Rey being canceled. As much as Chewie seems to understand, he doubts he would be willing to have a conversation where he just complains about Luke.

But then Chewie speaks up anyway.

“Not that you need to tell me, but I’m guessing you told little Rey how you felt, judging by how you two looked when you slid out of that cave and then spent almost all of hyperspace alone together,” Chewie says and Ben can hear the amusement in his voice.

Ben’s cheeks heat up and he covers his face. “Kriff, Chewie. I can’t talk about everything with you. There are limits to these things.”

“You don’t need to tell me anything,” he repeats. “I can connect the dots on my own.”

“Well, congratulations,” Ben says rolling his eyes.

Chewie just laughs at him. “Nothing to be embarrassed about.”

He wasn’t embarrassed about his feelings for Rey, not anymore. Except talking about it with Chewie made him blush way too fiercely so he needed to stop the conversation before it got any farther. “Okay, enough, we’re done. We’re done talking about this stuff,” Ben insists waving his hands dismissively.

Chewie’s chuffing laughter continues and Ben just shakes his head.

Rey is bombarded by questions from Boris and Osi who then insist she has to show their other friends.

Perhaps Rey wouldn’t find it so tiresome if she wasn’t so worried. Ben looked a little upset when he came down the hill and she couldn’t shake the feeling that something bad had happened.

But Luke hasn’t called her to his quarters or anything though so maybe she was overreacting.

Everyone is preparing for this evening so Rey thinks it might be better if she just blended in and tried to distract herself with helping around.

Of course, she stayed clear of Hux and the other assholes but their chores seemed to be a little more involved than just helping BX put up decorations. They had the grittier jobs.

Eventually, the door opens and her breath hitches when she sees it’s Ben and Chewie. Her feet want to bolt over to him but she refrains. She isn’t sure she’s able to hide the apprehensive expression on her face though.
She clutches a bundle of streamers in her hands as he approaches her. Gently, he reaches for her, running his hands past hers. “Here, let me help you with that,” he says. But his touch relaxes her a bit and she relents on her grip to pass him some of the ribbons. His head turns around, looking at who else was in the room before speaking so low she almost couldn’t hear him.

“We’re fine. Luke doesn’t know.”

Rey takes a deep breath then, his words settling her beyond relief and she can finally relax a little bit.

He still looks slightly distressed but she knows that she would have to wait to hear what happened. There are too many people around.

“We’ll talk about it after dinner.”

“What about your mom, though?” Surely he would want to at least spend some time with her. Even if he didn’t, she would be suspicious if he took off and Rey was the only one not there either.

He’s quiet for a moment before answering. “She’s not coming.”

Rey’s heart sinks a little bit. Again, she is reminded that just because one has parents does not ensure that they will always be there for you. She knows this is not an uncommon occurrence for him.

“I’m sorry, Ben.”

He shrugs, beginning to hang some of the decorations, trying to look busy. “It’s fine. It’s probably for the best,” he says.

Rey has the urge to hug him or hold his hand, to let him know that she was there for him but she is restricted once again. This was going to be very difficult.

He gives a small laugh as if he could see her conflict written on her face.

“Really. I’m okay with it. That’s not what bugs me.”

Rey just nods, knowing that whatever it was, they would have to discuss it later.

So they put up the decorations as well as they can and watch how excited the others are when they begin to hear the sounds of ships flying overhead and landing in the field next to the Falcon.

As the students flood outside to greet the first wave of families, Ben leans closer to her. “It’s gonna be a long day.”

And Rey gives a humorless chuckle. She knew exactly what he meant.

Armitage was not eager to see his father.

Even if his lightsaber hadn’t been confiscated and Luke hadn’t punished him for what he did to Rey, he would not want to see Brendol anyway. He could already anticipate how the entire evening was going to go and Armitage was hardly in the mood to deal with it.

Brendol used to work with the Jedi during the Clone Wars and he served the Republic as a junior officer. A fact that was impressive to Luke when Armitage had first arrived at the Academy. But Armitage knew the truth of his father’s more than humble beginnings and what it led to. He knew
all about the Camandment’s Cadets that he was more than proud to tell him about in the few times he had allowed him to drink with him. The first time had been when he was about ten years old.

Brendol did not respect or aspire to the morals or upstanding of what the Jedi believed in, but Luke didn’t need to know that.

And Armitage didn’t believe in them either. He just needed to proceed cautiously. It was after Brendol’s efforts in the Clone Wars that he began consulting in more Imperial affairs. Again, nothing Luke needed to be aware of though.

And although the Empire had fallen, Armitage knew that his father was working with something. Something that someday was going to rise next and push out the New Republic.

But no matter how much he fell in line with his father’s beliefs, he still didn’t like him.

So, when he sees the sleek spacecraft descend from the sky and into the field of other ships riddled with students and families, he reluctantly steps forward, gritting his teeth when he sees the ramp coming down.

A round, bitter looking man appears at the top of the ramp. His hands held behind his back.

“Armitage,” he greets. He steps down at a modest pace with a passive expression, even though they haven’t seen or spoken with each other in nearly six months.

He comes to stand before him and Armitage finds himself finally looking down at him. A most intriguing view to see his father, in any way, beneath him. Brendol seems to notice this too.

“I see you’ve grown since I saw you last.”

Armitage nearly balks. He might as well have said he missed him. It almost sounded like a compliment.

“I have. One of the tallest in the class,” he boasts, trying not to think about Solo being taller than him, even if only by an inch or so.

“Impressive,” Brendol says and Armitage almost wonders if the man is already drunk and just hiding it well. He was being cordial. “I always wanted to be taller. People feel more intimidated when you look down on them.”

Armitage knows this. “I agree.”

Brendol keeps his hands behind his back as looks around at the grounds, scowling a little. “This place looks shabbier every time I visit. Almost primitive.”

Brendol wasn’t wrong, and if he was insulting other things and not him, Armitage would almost say that he was in a good mood. Even though he’s more than certain that Luke at least briefed him about his current punishment.

“Yes, I agree.”

Brendol looks him up and down. “I see your lightsaber is gone.”

Armitage prepares himself for what comes next, crossing his arms. “Yes. It was confiscated, as I’m sure you already know.”

His father nods. “Master Skywalker called me a few days ago and told me that due to your
behavior, you would be punished until he saw fit. He didn’t tell me all the specifics but he did mention that a classmate was put in near-fatal danger and you were held partially responsible for the circumstances.”

Brendol doesn’t sound upset. He sounds curious and almost intrigued. “Would you be interested to hear the details?” Armitage offers, wondering if this were the case.

“Very interested,” Brendol says with the closest thing he has to a smile on his face.

What a fascinating turn. Armitage never would have anticipated this reaction from his father but the more he thinks about it, the specifics would more or less be more impressive to him than anything else he does at this Academy.

Suddenly, Armitage isn’t so tense anymore and he wasn’t dreading the evening as much as before. They had a lot to catch up on and Brendol might be the only one who could comprehend the severity of the ignorance of which he is currently surrounded.

Ben and Rey’s usual table is swept up to a different location to accommodate Azmo’s massive family so they retreat to a table in the far corner of the mess hall. They sit on the same side of the bench while Chewie sits across from them in the almost deafening mess hall, digging into his food, somehow managing to not get any on the blue tablecloth BX had been so stressed about earlier.

Ben isn’t eating as enthusiastically as the wookiee is. He’s a little overwhelmed with the noise and traffic of the whole room. And he doesn’t like how every so often, Hux or Iella or Dono will say something to their parents and point in their direction and glare at Rey.

Rey seems to ignore it but must notice how much it upsets him because she rests her hand over his thigh, settling his bouncing leg. It is a silent interaction, but when he meets her eyes, it’s like a whole conversation passes between them. He already knows what she would say.

So they keep eating, trying to get through it as well as they can in the near hectic atmosphere.

Chewie doesn’t seem too bothered though. “Beex is an amazing chef,” he moans out after nearly licking his plate clean. “I always liked coming to dinner when he was your culinary droid on Chandrila.”

Ben smiles at him. “Yeah, he knows what he’s doing.”

Chewie looks to Rey. “Little Solo’s favorite meals were stacks of pancakes in the shapes of stars. Beex would make them real fancy for him”

Ben feels his cheeks already heating up.

Rey giggles. “Oh, really?”

“Yeah,” Chewie continues, ”and he liked to sing a song about them as he covered them in syrup.”

“You did?” Rey asks him, admiration oozing from her eyes. He realized that although he initially felt embarrassed about it, Chewie’s recollections were harmless and Rey wouldn’t make fun of him. He didn’t need to shut everything out. It wasn’t all bad.

And now that he was thinking about it, he really did like those pancakes. Rey would probably like them too.
“Yeah,” he admits, reveling in the smile she gives him in return.

As Chewie continues on, doing his best to try and embarrass him, Ben doesn’t really mind. Rey seems to enjoy it. She liked hearing about the more pleasant moments from his childhood, a stark contrast to the ones she had been witness to.

Her laughter is contagious and he gets lost in her beauty, all the sounds of the room receding so he could admire her. He realizes now, that whatever defenses he had been pretending to have, the ones he had put up in hopes of denying his feelings, were pointless. How could he not fall in love with her? She was everything.

She was worthy of everything.

He must be starring too long because she nudges him in the side after a while but has a small smirk on her blushing face. “Knock it off,” she mutters under her breath.

He snaps his head away, laughing to himself. “Right, sorry.”

When he looks back to Chewie, they all hear the ringing coming from his satchel. He reaches inside, fiddling with a holopad that looks too small in his big furry hands. He gives a low Kashyykian swear before they ask him what’s wrong.

“I guess that side job your dad and Lando went on took a bad turn. They’re asking for back-up.”

“Are they alright?” Rey asks.

“Oh, they’re fine. They get into scrapes like this all the time.”

Ben knows how true that is. His father usually liked to appear in control of everything but it usually spiraled pretty bad. Ben had been waiting for Chewie to get a call like this and was honestly surprised it lasted this long.

“I should get going and try to help them. If I know Han and Lando, they’re gonna need it.”

He gathers his tray, standing up and Rey and Ben do the same. Chewie hunts down Luke in the sea of people to give him a brief goodbye. Luke thanks him for taking Ben and Rey to Ilum and for staying for dinner. Ben and Rey then follow him out of the mess hall. Ben takes a deep breath, relieved to finally be out of there.

The three of them travel down the pathway back to where the Falcon was. It a little more cluttered out on this field with all the other ships around but he still has plenty of space to lift off.

As they stand at the base of the ramp, their conversation seems to turn a little heavier as Chewie looks to them fondly.

“I’m happy for you kids.”

Ben takes his meaning, looking to Rey and although he told her about Chewie’s approval, she still looks surprised.

Chewie gives an amused chuff. “Don’t worry, little Rey. Your secret is safe with me.”

Ben looks back to Rey, noticing the unshed tears in her eyes. She launches forward, wrapping her arms around the massive wookiee, looking even smaller than she normally does.

“Thank you,” she breathes against his fur. “Thank you for everything, Chewie. You’ve been so
kind.”

“Don’t worry about it, little Rey. I just want what’s best for you and little Solo, and I think this is it.”

Chewie looks right at Ben and nods him over. Ben doesn’t even roll his eyes as he makes his way over, wedging himself in their embrace.

He doesn’t think he’s ever felt so grateful for Chewie than he does now. He’s never realized how understanding he could be.

“Thank you, Chewie,” Ben tells him for himself.

“Don’t mention it,” he moans. “But please just promise you’ll be careful and smart about this. I’d hate to give you two a lecture about anything too serious,” he adds.

“Chewie!” he exclaims, feeling the heat on his cheeks once again.

“What? I’m your family. I’m supposed to say things that embarrass you.”

Ben rolls his eyes and Rey just giggles.

They stay on the field, waving up at the Falcon until Chewie flies away. As the sound of the engines fades, soon there’s only the sound of the distant commotion coming from inside the temple.

Rey really hoped they didn’t have to go back in there. It was a little too much for her and she had been craving solitude all afternoon. Well, solitude with Ben, that is.

She looks to him then, seeing how he was still watching the sky. She sees the stars glimmer in his dark eyes and she leans forward a little, drawn into him without realizing.

He finally looks down at her. He smiles at first but it falls a moment later. Her curiosity and patience finally give out.

“Is everything okay?”

Ben gives a sigh and bows his head, reaching out for her hand. He looks to the temple cautiously before looking back at their joined hands. “It’s still early. Most of these events end up going pretty late. Why don’t we go to the beach and talk about it? I doubt they’ll notice we’re even gone.”

Rey is quick to agree and they make for the trees.

As they walk along the familiar path to their spot along the shore, they step closer together. Both of them turn around a few times to make sure they weren’t followed.

Relieved to see the coast is clear, she gives a sigh of her own and before she can turn to look back at him properly, she feels his other hand reach for her face as he pulls her closer to him. He places a quick kiss to her lips and she gives a small chuckle against his mouth before kissing him back.

So impatient, she thinks to herself, although she knows she probably would have done the same if he didn’t first.

He pulls away a moment later, laughing at himself. “Sorry. I’ve been wanting to do that all day. Everyone was driving me crazy.”
She moves up on her toes to press a final brief kiss to his lips. “I know how you feel.”

“And I’m sure you could hear it for yourself but Dono’s sister has even more painful voice than she does. My head is killing me.”

Rey laughs at him, pulling him along as he runs a hand past his temple. “Well, the waves and night air will help with that. Come on.”

They walk ahead and eventually, she’s not pulling him anymore but he’s walking beside her with his arm over her shoulder.

They’ve never done that before but, like everything else, it feels natural. Like they’ve done it a thousand times.

She keeps a hand around his waist, admiring the warmth of how close he is. They fall into a content silence. A relief after the long day but Rey still has unanswered questions. She figures it’s best to start with the stuff she does know.

“I’m sorry you’re mom didn’t come, Ben.”

“It’s okay,” he tells her and it sounds like the truth. “Honestly, if she did come, I would have been a little worried.”

“How come?” Earlier when they spoke on the Falcon, he said he wasn’t nervous about seeing her. She wonders what had changed.

“Well, the more I thought about it, I think my mom would have noticed something. She’s a little more receptive to these things and even though we haven’t seen each other as much in the past few years, she was always quick to conclusions.”

“You seemed upset though...after you spoke to Luke.”

He gives another big sigh.”I was.”

They finally approach the beach and they both accommodate their pace to trek along the soft sand.

“Why?” Rey looks up at him, halting and moving to sit down, pulling him with her.

He holds her hand a little tighter.”Luke said that we can’t have private lessons anymore.”

“What!” she stiffens a little bit, looking to him in shock.

“He said that given how well you’ve been doing, it wouldn’t make sense to keep us separated from the main lessons. And I guess, given how powerful you are, it makes sense.”

Rey huffs a little, trying to stay calm. “I don’t think I like that.”

“Neither do I. And I would have fought him on it if he wasn’t right.”

“Right?” she repeats, questioning his statement.

Ben shakes his head, his hair falling in his eyes. “Rey, you’re incredibly powerful and more capable than anyone of those assholes back there. Including me!” She swats at him lightly but he ignores it. “And if I were to deny it because I’m selfish and I want to keep you to myself,” he says so matter of factly, "Luke would just get suspicious.”

Rey sighs, seeing his point. He was right. She still didn’t like it though. “I don’t want things to
change. Not like that. I only spent one proper day in regular lessons and that ended horribly.”

“I know. That’s what I told him, but he thinks that if your transition is put off longer then it will just be harder to adjust around everyone else. He thinks this will be good for all of us.”

Rey leans closer to him, brushing hair past his large ears. The way he looks to her is unlike anyone else ever has. It’s so emotional, but not in a sad kind of way. It’s a mix of so many things and it’s her privilege to decipher each one and find that it matches her own feelings.

After a moment she smiles at him a little sadly but still meant to be a smirk. “Well, I guess we’ll have to work out our own schedule for each other,” she proposes. “I would like to kiss you at least once a day,” she says with her lips brushing against his.

He laughs against her mouth before diving to kiss her completely. She can feel his smile against her cheeks.

“We’ll figure something out. We always have here,” he gestures to the beach around them, tightening his other hand around her waist. “We can find times like this. Even if we have to sneak out here in the middle of the night, it would be worth being exhausted the next morning.”

“If we both show up exhausted with swollen lips it wouldn’t be very inconspicuous.”

Ben looks like he’s about to say something else when he sighs. She knows what he’s doing. He’s trying to come up with solutions but there aren’t a whole lot of opportunities that cater to their benefits.

So, instead, he presses his forehead to hers and pulls her closer. “We’ll figure it out,” he whispers close to her ear. Rey takes a tighter hold of him, keeping him close.

Ben then presses a kiss to the skin beneath her ear, and then another one at her jaw. His hair blows gently in the ocean breeze and it softly caresses her face. “I’d wait however long I needed to if it meant we could keep this.” He presses another soft kiss at her neck. “I love you, Rey.”

She lightly tugs on his hair, pulling his face away from her neck so she could kiss him on the lips. Rey presses her tongue against his lips and instantly, his mouth welcomes her with a loud moan. She might have laughed if his response didn’t take her breath away.

“I love you, Ben,” she finally manages between kisses. She feels how Ben’s hands tighten around her waist. But he’s still not near as close as she would like.

Rey brings her hands to his broad shoulders as she swings a leg over his own, straddling him. Ben pulls away from her lips, his breath hitching as he looks up to her, now slightly above him. In this position, he looks up to her with wide dark eyes and she can see the stars reflect there even clearer now.

He's properly beautiful, she thinks to herself.

Ben’s hands pull her even closer, one of them reaching up for her face to kiss again. She returns the fervency and running her own hands into his long, soft hair, unashamed at the moans that escape her when his tongue runs past her lips.

She really loves this boy and she was really going to miss their lessons.

But he’s right. They always had here.
There could always be a way.

Chapter End Notes

Ok, before I say anything else, how 'bout this fine piece of artwork made by the lovely dragonsbruja<3!! If only you could hear my squeal when I first saw this, I love it so much!!

So, I'm pretty sure the next chapter will be almost exclusively a discussion between Hux and his father so if you feel like there was more to Brendol's whole attitude, we got some interesting things coming round the mountain.

A lot of the info regarding Brendol's work is like, kinda-sorta accurate. I'm kind of hodgepodging what I need so that it would make sense for Hux to be at the Academy (even though it makes zero fucking sense, lol).

Leia's work is based on some of the issues from Bloodline but obviously, some things are different. Hence the fanfiction, lol.

I feel like I'm forgetting something else but whatever. Thanks for reading!!

<3<3<3!!!
The Hux's

Chapter Summary

Keeping up with the Hux's and their douchery.

Chapter Notes

Whatever, I’m just gonna post it. It’s pretty short and fluff-less but necessary so...yeet

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Armitage is surprised at his father. He had expected him to be disappointed and cross, but he seems more intrigued with him than ever. A stark contrast to how he usually either ignores him or criticizes him.

But his father didn’t miss a beat when Luke was around.

After dinner, Luke asked if Brendol and Armitage would join him in a brief conference. He wanted to discuss his behavior issues. They stepped inside the room and were asked to sit down. And in an instant, his father put on the other face he knew so well.

“It’s good to see you again, Brendol,” Luke says professionally. “How are things going on Arkanis?”

The truth of Brendol’s occupation remains secret to Luke. Even Armitage doesn’t totally know what he does currently but knows whatever it is, a Jedi like Luke wouldn’t approve.

Brendol gives a slight groan. “The weather’s been dreadful lately. I’ve never known it to be so hot. I’ve been spending a lot of my time in the climate-controlled rooms.”

“Ah, yes. I agree. It’s hard to escape the heat sometimes,” Luke says, almost sounding disappointed that they are reduced to speaking about the weather. So he cuts to the chase. “I apologize to interrupt the evening you’re enjoying with your son, but I have some concerns.”

“Yes, you spoke of the incident with the new girl,” Brendol says, glaring at Armitage suddenly. “I can’t tell you how disgusted I was to hear that. Honestly, Armitage, I’m so disappointed in you.”

His words don’t carry the same disapproving weight they usually do when Brendol reprimands him. To Luke, it probably sounded genuine, but to Armitage, who is well versed in the many forms of disapproval from his father, these sounded like false words and judgments coming from his mouth and Armitage finds himself almost amused.

He knows better than to show it though.

“Rey, our newest student, is thankfully quite gifted in the force. However, I seriously believe that were it not for her abilities, the situation she was faced with likely would have killed her. I don’t take that possibility lightly, especially when Armitage would have been held responsible for that.”
Armitage has to refrain from rolling his eyes. *If Rey had died in that cave, he would have done the galaxy a favor,* he thinks to himself. *And then Solo would have snapped for sure.*

Just that reaction alone would have been worth it.

Luke goes on for a long time about how upsetting this had been for everyone and how if another incident like this happened, he may have no choice but to expel him from the Academy completely.

Armitage feels himself go stiff. He didn’t like being at this school, but he had a certain plan he had made for himself. His place at this school was integral to how he would prove to his father of his capabilities.

“I understand,” Brendol says. “I’d hate for it to come to that but if he’s a danger to other students, it may be the only solution.”

Armitage has to refrain from looking at his father. He knows this all must be part of the concerned dad routine he’s playing because he knows that he could not care less about the well being of the other students. Armitage hardly thought Brendol was bothered with his own well being.

After Armitage vows to behave and work on his behavior, Luke excuses them to enjoy the rest of their evening, but when they get back downstairs, Brendol nods for the doorway. “Come with me. We can talk in my ship.” Brendol walks ahead of him with his arms behind his back.

Armitage is a little confused as to what his father was doing exactly. He behaved more like his usual self in that office but Armitage could see through his disapproval. It would be hard for anyone else to catch but Armitage was weathered enough in Brendol’s behavior to recognize it.

They walk down the hill and Armitage notices that the eyesore of a ship known as the Millenium Falcon is gone. That wookiee must have left.

He looks all around for a moment, wondering if Ben and Rey were still around. He knows well enough they aren’t but suspects they might still be together. He still needed some literal proof before he went to Luke. He has to have undeniable evidence if he’s going to go to Luke now.

Apparently, any slip up would get him “expelled.”

Brendol steps up the ramp into the sleek looking ship. He doesn’t turn around to make sure Armitage is even up all the way before he presses the button to close it. He rushes in, trying not to look like he clumsily made his way up the ramp.

Brendol directs him to a small nook area where he seemed to have decorated it to his liking. His father stands at a counter that Armitage realizes is a bar.

“This is a nice ship,” Armitage compliments.

“Yes. I know. I bought it about a month ago. I had them modify this space to my liking though which took a little longer.” Brendol pours two glasses of whiskey, picking them up and taking a sip out of one. He comes to sit down next to Armitage, passing him the other glass.

Armitage isn’t surprised. He’s had drinks with his father before, but only when he was in a good mood and decided to share.

He picks up the glass and takes a sip, using all his focus and control not to sputter when the taste hits his lips.
“Do you like the new rug?” Brendol asks him, nodding to the crimson red and fluffy expanse on the obsidian flooring in the otherwise sleek and hard-edged ship. He nods in approval, knowing it was best to indulge his father in his strange fondness for rugs.

“What’s it made out of?”

Brendol shakes his head. “I don’t remember what the tag said. Something savage I’m sure. It likely held no purpose except in death when the hide could serve as a suitable rug.”

Armitage chuckles at that. Although he didn’t have the same affinity for rugs, he could see what his father was saying.

“So,” Brendol says, setting the now empty glass on the table, hiccuping under his breath. “I see Master Skywalker is rather upset about your most recent stunt,” he says, swirling the whiskey is his glass.

“And you’re not?”

Brendol frowns. “Not particularly. My frustrations lie in much different waters.”

Armitage takes another sip, finally getting used to the taste. “Which would be what, father?”

Brendol shrugs, setting the glass down and looking to him. “Well, let’s say the girl was a dud and didn’t have powers.”

“She’s still a dud regardless,” Armitage mutters into the glass.

Brendol smirks slightly but keeps talking. “The evidence of her inevitable demise would have undoubtedly led to you and Luke most definitely would have expelled you then and you would have been held accountable for her death.”

“So, me possibly getting expelled is what upsets you? Not the fact that I may have been involved with her death?”

“Come now, Armitage. I know I’ve spoken to you about the Commandment’s Cadets. I’m not above eliminating certain pests in the ranks. But I think that method is a little too radical for a place like this. There’s only a dozen or so students and ridding of them through death is more noticeable than cutting off the useless fringes of a regiment.”

“Are you suggesting I cut off the ‘useless fringes?’”

Brendol gives a tired huff. “My son, in case you haven’t noticed, you are the one on the useless fringes. Whatever this force banthashit is, you don’t have it. Honestly, I’m surprised Luke hasn’t excused you completely.”

Brendol takes another swig, giving Armitage a moment to soak in his words and realize how much he hates them. But then he burps and speaks again, sliding a little closer to Armitage. “But your place here is still very useful to me and instead, I’m suggesting the opposite.”

“Which would be what?”

Brendol seems frustrated that he even has to explain. “Obviously, Luke is investing quite a lot of attention to this new girl. He thinks she has true Jedi potential, and if you really want to play this thing through, you let that girl ruin her own reputation through a series of obstacles that ‘conveniently’ present themselves. And ’convenience,’ as you should know, is rarely up to chance...
but usually attributed to somebody pulling the right strings and not getting caught. There’s no such thing as chance or luck when it comes to getting what you want or, in this case, what you don’t want.”

Armitage is catching on. “Luke would never buy anything I try to sell him about her or Solo again. If I even talk back to his beloved droids, I bet he’d send me off.”

“Exactly, which is why in a political sense, this is when you make him realize that his star pupils are nothing more than the scum they really are. Lower his expectations. Make him realize that you’re worthy of staying here after all.”

“I thought you didn’t like me staying at this school.”

Brendol sighs and sets down his glass. Armitage knew he was about to get into something extensive and he ignores the drink in his hand to focus.

“Son, I don’t think I need to explain to you that this galaxy is a fucked up place. It’s filthy and hardly situated to be governed by the pricks who run the New Republic.” Brendol’s profanity increased substantially when he drank.

“And I know you also know that my line of work isn’t confined to Arkanis. We’re striving towards something bigger. Something bigger than the New fucking Republic. Something more practical than the peace, love, and harmony crap that Jedi bastard is trying to sell. That being said, it’s people like him that come to the frontlines when we try to make progress. And this is the asshole that brought down the Empire the first time around. So when things are ready to change, I rather he didn’t have a collection of readily trained kids on his side that can use that magic shit to turn our hard work around. And the best way to break him is to let him crash and burn on his own before anything even starts. I figure the best way to do that is from within the core of what he’s worked so hard to achieve.”

“This school,” Armitage finishes. “His whole legacy.”

“Precisely, so I would say that our galaxy benefits from you doing some pivotal work from here. No one is completely clean, even this girl who plays this total ‘I bleed innocence’ role. Find the shit and let her crash and burn. Even if she is clean, find a way to drag her down from a safe distance. Once she goes down, well, it’s just a matter of following that act with anyone else that allows Skywalker too much confidence in his teachings.”

Armitage never thought that his father would trust him with such a responsibility. To know that he could be here, both dragging down the people he despises and somewhat earning the attention he craves from his father all at once.

Brendol gets up, moving back for the bar and grabbing the whiskey by the throat of the bottle, refilling both their glasses. Hux pales at how much he pours in the glass but knows better than to turn it away. His father was in too good of a mood to try and ruin it now. He rather liked this new shared camaraderie between them, even if he still thought the man was a pompous ass. But he could disregard that for the time being, seeing as he had a similar perspective to his own.

“So, what can you tell me about this girl?” Brendol asks. “What can you do to let her tear herself down?”

“She’s from Jakku. She was a scavenger or something,” Hux scoffs, taking another sip from the glass. The more he drank the more accustomed he got to the taste and it wasn’t so bad.
“Jakku?” Brendol asks with a scoff. “So she’s desert trash then,” he realizes.

“Yes.”

“She must have been a slave.”

Armitage frowns. He didn’t recall hearing that about her but he also wasn’t really up to date on the social standings of Jakku in the first place. It would make sense for there to still be slaves there, despite how much the New Republic has tried to abolish it throughout the galaxy, there were some corners too far from their reach.

“Slavery is on Jakku?” Armitage asks his father.

“Oh, most definitely. I was there recently, recruiting—” Brendol stops himself and Armitage suspects this whiskey must be pretty potent to make him slip up like that. “Well, you know, work things. I’ll tell you soon but I don’t want to go too far into it right now.”

Armitage nods, slightly disappointed that Brendol hadn’t shared it with him but doesn’t dwell on it. This business about slaves on Jakku could actually be informative.

Had Rey been a slave?

“A girl like that on Jakku would not have been allowed to just roam freely. As scrawny as she looks, Jakku is the kind of place desperate for a girl like that. Be it for scavenging or warming beds of travelers.”

“You think she was a prostitute?” Armitage’s eyebrows shoot up into his hair.

Brendol chuckles. “I don’t know. Likely not just by the looks of her. She didn’t have much to offer. But even if she wasn’t, there’s no reason why Luke shouldn’t think she was.”

That was a good idea. And maybe it would even fall in line with how close she’s gotten to Solo. Surely even Luke has noticed the change in temperament his nephew has around that girl compared to everyone else. If not, Skywalker was an even bigger idiot than he thought he was.

“How can I ‘conveniently’ present those circumstances?” he asks his father.

Brendol burps, groaning as he stands up, searching for something. He comes back over with an elaborate looking holopad.

“Use this. It has access to the darker holonet, galactic crime records, and black market listings. Designed by some of the blokes I’m working with these days. I’ve got these things coming out of my ears so play around with it a little. If she comes up clean, you can also use it to forge holograms or whatever.” He hands it over sloppily, losing his patience and coherence. “Fuck, I don’t know. You’re smart, you figure it out.”

“I will,” Armitage vows.

“And you know, I’m only doing this because I think you’re ready for this responsibility. If you get caught, you don’t mention me or anything. If you get expelled and Luke’s little posse here flourishes, then I really will be pissed off, so stay in line with this shit, alright?”

That was the most he sounded like his usual self all evening, but Armitage nods anyway. “Of course. I understand.”
“Good,” Brendol says, pouring more whiskey into his glass. “It’s about time you started showing some sign of use.”

Armitage is too intoxicated to get too angry about that, but the reminder of his initial feelings for his father flood back in muddled pieces and he ends up chuckling to himself.

Yes. Armitage would play this game with his father now and prove how worth not just to him, but to whoever he was associated with too. And then one day, Brendol would be the pawn in Armitage’s game and maybe he’ll be the one who ends up as a tacky rug on someone’s floor.

Armitage realizes he must be really drunk because the thought of his father as a rug didn’t even strike him as odd.

Brendol laughs with him, even though they both find humor for various reasons.

Armitage helps his father activate the autopilot so he doesn’t have to fly. Brendol was right. The ship was quite a state of the art and equipped with much finer technology and capabilities than any of the other ships some of the other families arrived on.

*I’ll have one like this one day too, *Armitage* thinks to himself. *But no rugs and no Brendol.*

Armitage and his father don’t really spend a great deal on saying goodbye. Instead, Armitage nodded at him as he stood up and Brendol pointed to a cabinet beside the bar that had some chewing tablets that would wane off the effect the whiskey had on him. He knows Brendol won’t use any though so he doesn’t offer.

After that, his head feels a little clearer and he gives his father a final nod. Brendol holds up his half-empty glass in response and with that, Armitage goes back down the ramp, hiccuping slightly.

He keeps the holopad tucked safely in his arm and he rushes to get back to his hut, barely registering the sound of the ship lifting off behind him.

He forges a path around the temple rather than through it, knowing that the festivities and company of everyone else were still very much taking place and would continue to do so. But he didn’t want to be caught with the holopad. And he’s slightly concerned that although the tablets helped him not feel so drunk, his breath is likely still atrocious.

So he quickly makes it back to his hut, brushing his teeth just in case anyone decided to drop in.

Once he does, he rushes to his bed, pulling up the holopad.

The holopads that Luke had supplied them with all had restrictions as to what could be searched for. And almost all of the news that they could access came from New Republic platforms that more often than not, focused on only their opinions which Armitage totally disagreed with.

The likes of which Ben Solo’s mother was often seen speaking on or promoting, encouraging people to act with compassion.

But this holopad, as his father had said, cut through all those walls and barriers that he has long been denied. Indeed the galaxy is a filthy and wretched place so it may take some time before he can even figure out how to specify on just Jakku but he was willing to do it.

He had to.
Brendol is a dickweed dad. I understand that his role and motives in this might sound a little ridiculous. Like he's the yuppie dad at the country club in a cheesy 80's movie. Or the douchey karate instructor from the 'Karate Kid' that tells the kid to "sweep the leg," lol.

I genuinely think Armitage (not just in this story but in canon) is a very interesting character and I can't help but feel for him a little. That being said, he is a nosy, naughty little prick.

A lot of that beef comes from this buttwad of a dad that he has and how Brendol just totally screwed him over from the start. I see Armitage as the kind of person that thrives to get noticed and respected for his achievements by people that he kind of loathes. Maybe that's not true or it's just me pretending I'm a space therapist but regardless, I do think there is more to this character than just being a pasty little goblin.

(Those of you who read 'Lorelei' know how much I think he's capable of amounting to a much more sinister role in Episode IX.)

Thank you for reading. Sorry, this one was short but I thought it was best to let Armitage's little POV stand on its own. We'll be back to our regularly scheduled fluff in the next bit.
After Light's Out

Chapter Notes

This one is a little shorter but whatever, here yee go.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It’s not as bad as the first time she was mixed in with the rest of the class. Mainly because Ben was there.

He gives the smallest hints of a smile when she turns to look at him. She thinks anyone else may not notice at all, but Rey is more than used to the infinite expressions his face is capable of.

But she can’t admire it as much as she would like, so she grounds herself in the lessons.

It makes her realize just how often she looks at Ben because she must refrain from glancing at him almost non stop.

And then when he looks at her, that quiet but loaded look, she knows he feels the same. He misses their lessons. Their solitude.

They had only been in regular classes for about a week now, and already, the schedule was less than stimulating.

The actual subject matter was somewhat interesting and usually challenging enough to distract her, but she still has to remind herself not to stare at him. And she desperately hopes she doesn’t blush for kriff’s sake.

That is incentive enough to avoid his gaze. She had to keep it together. Surely she could make it through a day without touching, kissing, drawing, or oozing over Ben Solo. But then every time their eyes meet, she knows she’s just kidding herself and she constantly looks to the chrono, counting down the hours until they can be together again.

They met on the beach just the other night, taking advantage of their solitude, but it was not a luxury they could afford every day.

But Rey desperately hoped it would work out this evening. Even though he seldom goes beyond ten feet from her, she can’t help but miss him in the way she’s come to know him.

He’s so different around other people. He’s quiet and keeps his head down, sometimes biting the inside of his cheek or his lip to keep from saying something he knows he shouldn’t say when he gets annoyed.

She sees how he fidgets when he doesn’t quite know what to do with his hands so he ends up crossing them over his chest, making him look all the more intimidating to the others. She wants to hold him, or take his hand in hers to help him relax. Or maybe even find him a bouquet of small delicate flowers so he could braid them together and keep himself distracted.

But she knows she can’t and both of them have to endure the mediocrity of their shared distance and deny the pull they feel so strongly to each other.
So, when it’s finally dinner time, she waits to the side, pretending to look for something in her bag until Ben enters the mess hall so she could go through the buffet line with him. He knows exactly what she’s doing so he smirks before nodding to the trays. “After you, fellow classmate,” he says lowly, no one else could hear it. But it makes Rey snort in a small laugh.

“How kind of you,” she says, grabbing a tray, somehow managing to keep her own smirk off her face. He grabs a tray and gets in line behind her, much closer than he should. So much so that the wall of his chest is all she can see in her peripheral.

His knuckles nudge against hers where both of them are gripping the edge of their trays. She soaks in the contact but she knows what he’s doing. She tries to ignore him, not trusting herself to conceal her reaction.

She hears him give a small huff as though he’s disappointed she didn’t respond as much as he wanted her to. She knows he’s just being dramatic because if she responded as she really wished to, they would have a much worse issue to deal with. But his annoyance amuses her and she smirks to herself, not letting him see it.

She takes far too much enjoyment in teasing him and at least that encourages her to keep her hands to herself.

At least for now.

Ben has never enjoyed the classes with the rest of the students. He’s never felt like he’s fit in. And although he still is not extremely pleased with it, it was comforting in a way to have Rey there.

He’s found himself dazing off quite a lot, thinking of how much things had changed, how he has changed.

There was something so magnetic about Rey and he’s been more than impatient to be with her again. Where it was just them. He’s been having a hard time (almost quite literally) when he finds himself alone, confined to his own company at night.

But he knows that it’s all for the best. He can’t be with her as much as he craves. The fear of getting caught is potent to both of them.

But he would make it up to her one day. One day, maybe they could choose for themselves what they wanted to do. Maybe they wouldn’t be Jedi at all and they could fulfill those childhood daydreams they had pondered on before. And it amused him. The thought of him as a pilot and her as a mechanic. Not that they had to commit to those careers but it was intriguing to imagine a time in his life where he didn’t have to be constricted by his legacy and the pressures upon him to become the Jedi he’s supposed to be.

To be a mediocre pilot and travel the galaxy with Rey sounded preferable in every instance. There was so much he wanted to show her.

He writes in his journal on occasion. He used to be able to write about nothing for hours, and now that so much is happening to him, now that he’s not trying to lie to himself, he finds that he can express himself with so much more clarity. It doesn’t take near as long to feel as if he’s said everything he’s needed to say. And although he probably could write forever on how much he cares for and admires Rey, he finds he would rather spend the time telling her himself. He would rather put his time to good use and be with her.

Which made it all the more frustrating when he knew he couldn’t. Of course, right when he and
Rey had realized their feelings for each other was when Luke had decided their lessons would end. All that time they had wasted, pretending that they don’t feel the way they do.

But things could be worse, he supposes. They still have each other and although the circumstances are not ideal for what he assumes a normal relationship would be, he knew that it didn’t take away from the connection they share.

But for now, Ben is alone again, sitting at his desk. He should probably be writing, but he just smiles to himself, reading through previous passages in his journal and almost laughing to himself at the progression of his entries. They haven’t only changed in brevity but in how he writes as well. The way his outlook has progressively become more positive.

Just then his chest blooms with a warm and comforting feeling, flooding with the energy he knows to be Rey’s.

He looks to the curtain, almost hoping she would burst through, even if he knows that’s a little bit more reckless than they could afford to be. It was long after dinner but just before light’s out. If she was seen around his hut that would certainly raise questions.

But then, a flash of something flies in under the curtain and settles on the floor. Ben summons it to his hand, anxious to look at what it was.

He unfolds it, finding she’s drawn a rather animated version of herself with hearts as her eyes. Above her is a thought bubble containing an almost grumpy looking doodle of what he knows is meant to be him. He laughs to himself before seeing the words she’s written at the bottom.

*Beach after light’s out. Bring your massive self as discreetly as you can.*

His heart beats quickly in his chest as he rejoices in his head. She seems to have been in a similar state to himself and he’s excited to meet with her.

The minutes drag on then as he waits painfully for the lights to go out and for the coast to be clear. He’s fairly certain Rey has already left for the beach on her own, which would make sense. She’s able to sneak around easier than himself, with her smaller size and swiftness that he couldn’t quite replicate.

He quickly and quietly makes for the trees, deciding to take the long way around rather than chancing a trek up and around the temple. As he gets closer to the beach, he can feel once again that energy of hers and it tells him she’s already there. And she can probably feel him.

He smiles to himself, gently running his hands past the tops of wildflowers and admires their soft caress, comparing it to her touch. Although hardened and strengthened by that cruel desert, there was a softness, a gentleness to Rey, that Ben has never known someone to be capable of. In more sense than one.

As he steps over from forest to sand, he expects to see her sitting in the sand, looking out at the ocean, but he can’t see her. He looks across the whole expanse of the shore and even the waves, panicking slightly at where she could be.

“You got my note?”

Ben jolts, spinning to see her standing against a tree with a smirk on her face. He brings a hand to his chest, shaking his head. “That’s not nice,” he tells her, unable to hold back the grin on his face. “But yeah, I got it. Very funny by the way,” he pretends to sound unamused although he very much enjoyed it. He slowly steps closer.
“I know it was, I heard your laugh from my hut.” She sees right through him, pleased with herself and laughing at him. He steps right before her, his hands reaching to circle her waist.

“I guess my ‘massive self’ isn’t very good at being discrete then.”


“Agreed,” he mumbles before leaning forward the rest of the way and pressing his lips against hers. They take their time at first, reacquainting themselves with this thing they’ve learned to savor. She smiles up at him when they pull away, their noses brushing against each other.

She gives a content kind of sigh and he rests his forehead against hers. “I missed this,” he breathes out before diving down and kissing her again.

“Me too. You know you make it very difficult to make it through a day.”

Ben chuckles, “I’m glad.”

“I wasn’t trying to compliment you.”

“Well, I take it as one.”

“These classes are rather grueling on their own. At least most of the time. It kind of helps to have you so distracting, that way I force myself to listen.”

“Oh, I can’t listen at all.”

Rey smacks his chest. “Yes, you can. Don’t be ridiculous.”

“It’s hard enough as it is. Especially when you look at me the way you do,” he tries to pin it on her.

She looks to him in mock offense. “I do no such thing.”

He nods, unconvinced. “Uh-huh. Sure. I think you know what you’re doing,” he tells her, kissing below her ear, smiling to himself when he feels her cling to him a little tighter. “But I have been trying to stay busy thinking of other things,” he says, his hands reaching up for her face.

“Mmm? Like what?”

He thinks of saying something stupid and funny, something to make her laugh. An insult about Hux comes to mind. But he decides to admit a much more honest thought that’s been on his mind. One he hasn’t even confessed to the paper in his journals. Too frightened to put his hopes in writing, but never afraid to share with her.

“I was thinking about my birthday coming up, actually.”

She looks surprised. “Really?” she asks softly. He nods. “When is it?”

“It’s still about a month and a half away. My mom tries to plan ahead with how busy she is but even then it doesn’t always work out,” he shrugs, thinking of parent’s night. Rey nods in understanding.

“I never think about my birthday. Not anymore,” he tells her. She settles her hands firmly on his sides, pulling him a little closer.
“I know you don’t,” she says quietly. “Does it make you...upset?”

“No. I mean, I’ve been thinking about it a little differently, I guess.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, I told you what Luke said. About my mom wanting to take me someplace for my birthday.” Rey nods, recalling the conversation. “Anyway, I started thinking about it a little. I never even would have considered it before but maybe…” he trails off but she holds him tighter.

“Maybe?” she prompts.

“I was wondering if I should.”

“Yeah?” she smiles up at him, tucking hair behind his ear.

He shrugs again. “I haven’t decided anything, I’m just considering it and I only know how to talk to you and you would tell me if I was being stupid.”

“You’re not stupid. I think it’d be nice for you to do something with her. It’d be good for you.”

He holds her cheek in his hand, admiring the glimmer of the night sky in her eyes. “I’ll think about it a little more. I just thought it would be a good excuse to get out of here and buy you some nice things. Maybe some paint. Some brushes. Your own birthday present.”

Rey’s face is a jumble of emotions as she pulls him a little closer, her eyes looking down. “Ben, you don’t have to get me anything.”

“I know, but I want to,” he insists. There was a lot he wanted to give her and she deserved all of it, even if she didn’t think she did.

“Ben, I don’t even have a birthday,” she says quietly into his chest, sounding almost ashamed.

His heart sinks a little as he understands why she looked the way she did. He runs his hand past the back of her neck. “Hey,” he tries to get her head up. “Hey, look at me.” She does, her eyes looking a little glassy. “That doesn’t make you any less of a person. They’re overrated anyway.”

She gives a small laugh, sniffling a little. He kisses her softly on the lips, then the corner of her mouth. “Besides, if you wanted, we can always make one up for you.”

“Really?”

“Of course,” he says, kissing her softly on the cheek.

“When?”

Ben purses his lips. “I don’t know. Maybe I’ll surprise you with one some day,” he suggests with a smile.

Rey chuckles. “I’d like that,” she says pulling him down to kiss him again.

“Yeah?” he looks to her, to make sure she meant it.

“Yeah,” she affirms, keeping him where he is as she pushes to her toes, kissing him harder.

He gives a small laugh but it gets lost in her mouth and this time they don’t pull away to talk. They
stay close, their kisses increasing in fervency.

Thinking to only have her closer, he picks her up, off the ground and her legs wrapped around his torso, bringing them closer than they’ve ever been and both of them gasp out at the new contact.

They pull back to look at each other. He knows his breath is ragged and she’s so close she could probably feel his pounding heartbeat, but he looks into her eyes, amazed at the depth there.

She looks at him like he’s never been looked at before. It was captivating.

“Is this okay?” he breathes out.

She nods almost frantically before pulling his face back to hers and kissing him passionately.

Ben doesn’t even mind how the tree bark digs into his knuckles. He doesn't think about how late it must be getting. He could spend forever here, holding her like this, being with her. He knows he can’t though so he cherishes it as much as he can.

Armitage might vomit if the need to be silent wasn’t so crucial.

He was a safe distance away, watching through electrobinoculars as Solo and the desert rat went at it against a tree.

He had been keeping an eye out after everyone had gone to bed, delighted to see that Solo had excused himself from his hut and made a quick jaunt for the forest.

Abandoning his holopad for the night, he grabbed the electrobinoculars and quietly snuck out after him.

He suspected that he was going to meet Rey and knowing them, they would likely rendezvous at the beach where they used to train so he didn’t need to stay too close when he was following him.

He had been watching them carefully throughout the past week. His suspicions began before they left for Ilum so he was eager to see how they behave in a more public setting, but aside from eating at their usual table and speaking occasionally between activities, nothing seemed too peculiar or incriminating.

Solo was still his reserved and awkward self, keeping to the side until his uncle called on him to answer a question, perhaps assuming he wasn’t paying attention. But Solo always answered correctly, no matter how far off he managed to appear.

Rey was a fair enough student, which vexed Armitage greatly. He hoped that integrating Rey into the regular classes would prove that she was just as useless as he wanted her to be, but that proved to not be the case. Both her and Solo were top of the class and kept their distance from each other. A very safe and friendly distance.

But looking at them now, "friendly" was hardly the word he would use to describe what they were doing. Or maybe "too friendly” was a more accurate depiction. It was exhausting actually, watching them like this, despite the initial encouragement that he had been right all along.

Armitage figures he has enough to haunt his dreams for a few weeks at the least and he could leave his post for tonight.

There wasn’t much he could do with the information now. Not with Luke cracking down on him
the way he was. If he said anything remotely negative about his golden students, he doubts he would even get a full sentence out before he was expelled and cast away from here completely.

No. He would need more.

The holopad his father had given him was extremely helpful, but it could be a tad overwhelming. Armitage never would have suspected just how many junkyard, slave-owning creatures Jakku had to offer.

He’s researched at least a dozen villages on the planet but so far there has been no record of Rey at all. He had decided to save that detective work for another night which had given him the inspiration to look elsewhere.

If he could dig up something on Rey, something Luke couldn’t ignore, this little thing she and Solo have would expose itself instantly. Solo was far too emotional to let most things pass him by, especially where she was concerned.

Solo would throw a fit and drag himself down alongside his precious scavenger, no matter how credible Armitage’s conclusions turned out to be. And no matter what, he knew he needed to shock Luke into listening so that they would suffer before he did. Before he got himself expelled.

Armitage knew he had his work cut out for him, but he carried forward, thinking of a time and place beyond this temple. A place where he gave the orders and the likes of Solo, Luke, and even Brendol were nowhere to be found.

Chapter End Notes

I don't know if this is making sense anymore but I'm striving towards something that we're quickly approaching. I know this one wasn't very exciting but I thought that at least it shows them figuring stuff out as well as they can.

Unfortunately, Hux is quickly getting up to speed with everything and you can probably already tell that it's not going to go well.

Thank you so much for reading! <3!!
Chapters are special.

Rey wakes with a jolt in her bed. Her head pounds and her heart races and she tries desperately to catch her breath.

Something was wrong.

She looks to the chrono beside her bed and sees how its the middle of the night. Far from the morning but she’s woken up panicked. Taking as steady as a breath as she can, she tries to focus and reach out to what it could be.

She gasps when she realizes it’s Ben. This fear, this panic, it was his.

She throws off her covers and quietly races from her hut to his. As she throws back the curtain, she can hear him tossing in his bed and making small noises of discomfort, even on the verge of crying.

She launches herself forward, rushing to his side, hovering over him and grabbing his bare shoulders, trying to settle him.

“Ben, wake up. Ben…Ben, you’re dreaming. Wake up,” she urges as loud as she can afford to be, jostling him slightly.

She feels how his skin is cold and clammy. She brings a hand to his face to find he’s sweating all over. She speaks softly, trying to ease him awake. “Ben, it’s alright. I’ve got you. It’s just a dream. It’s just a dream,” she tells him with her own tears in her eyes.

She thinks of that horrible voice she heard in his memories. The one that always tried to break him down. What if that was happening again?

“Ben, please wake up. Please,” she begs him.

It’s then that his eyes finally blow open and he bolts up, his breath shudders for a moment as he...
seems to be lost, confused as to what happened and where he is. And then his eyes focus on her. “Rey?” he croaks out, his voice hoarse and strained. In the small light from the chrono at his bedside, she can see the shine of the tears in his eyes and the tremble of his lip.

“Rey,” he says again, this time a small sob coming with it as he falls forward, allowing himself to be caught in her arms. She clings to him tightly as his tears fall against her neck where he’s pressed his face.

She runs her hands past his back. “It’s okay. You were dreaming. It’s over now.”

“I thought...I thought you were—” he can’t quite say what he’s trying to say. He knows he needs to stay quiet but he could hardly catch his breath.

She tries to help him relax and runs her hands through his hair.

They stay like that for a while. Ben with his giant frame cradled against her while she whispered to him softly, letting him know she was there.

Eventually, his breath evens out and she places a hand on his back, relieved to feel he’s relaxed a little. His arms move from where he’s been gripping her shirt and he sits up a little, finally looking at her.

“I’m sorry,” he tells her.

She shakes her head. “Don’t be. It was just a dream.”

This time he shakes his head, pulling her closer. “It didn’t feel like a dream. It felt real,” he tells her.

“What was it?” she asks him, lightly stroking his back. She becomes fully aware now of his lack of shirt and admires the planes of his back she can reach, tracing circles where she pleases.

He doesn’t answer for a moment and she’s about to ask him if he heard those voices again when he finally speaks.

“It was about you.” His voice becomes strained again as he says this and when he brings his hands to her shoulders, pulling her closer, she can feel how his hands are shaking a little.

“Ben?”

“You were...you were just gone. I couldn’t help you and I didn’t know how to get to you. But I knew it was something bad. Something got you.”

She takes in his words, unsure of what it could mean and regardless of what she thinks, she continues to hold him telling him, “It was just a dream. It doesn’t mean anything. I’m here. We’re fine.”

Ben seems unconvinced but nods anyway and leans his head against hers. “How did you...Did you hear me?” he asks, suddenly looking concerned as if more people might have heard and they could be found together in his bed.

“No,” she assures him. “I felt it, Ben. I woke up and I knew something was wrong. It only took me a moment to realize it was you.”

He takes a deep breath, his shoulders slumping in understanding before bringing a hand to the back
of her neck. “Thank you,” he breathes out before he pulls her forward to kiss her softly. “Thank you for coming.”

“It’s alright. I’m just glad you’re okay,” she tells him as he lays back down in his bed, covering his face with his hands. “Are you feeling better?”

He gives a small chuckle, looking up at her as she hovers over him. “Are you going to leave if I say yes?”

She smiles at him. “Well, I don’t know what else I would do,” she teases. “It’s not like there’s any room for me. You look cramped enough in that bed as it is.”

That actually was true. Ben looked far too big for this small bed and she wonders how he sleeps comfortably at all. He just laughs though, looking up at her with a soft smile and scooting over a little, patting the space beside him. Too tempted to think of anything else, she lays down beside him, relieved when she feels his arms tug her closer so she’s pressed against his bare chest.

There was room for her after all, and although she knows she can’t stay for long, she tries to pretend that she could. She tries to pretend that there was only them.

Ben had been so afraid.

He hadn’t been able to find her. He can’t remember everything about the dream, just that she had been taken away or something equally as terrifying. He had been so frightened that Rey was gone and he had believed it to be real.

But everything was okay, or so it seemed. She was here. She came to him when she knew something was wrong and it reminds him just how much has changed.

He used to be so embarrassed by his nightmares and his dreams. He never wanted anyone to know about it. It made him feel weak and childish for being scared of what he should know isn’t real. But as most things were with Rey, he liked being with her because she didn’t make him feel embarrassed or self-conscious. She made him feel like himself. More himself than he’s ever felt before.

It’s why his dream had scared him so much. The thought of Rey gone forever...it was frightening. Who would he be, who would he have become, if not for her?

She lies beside him now, pressed against him in the ridiculously small bed and he feels the urge to tell her that himself.

“Rey?”

“Hmm?” she answers, nudging him with her nose. Her eyes closed.

“I don’t know what I would do…” he starts and her eyes slowly open to look at him. “If you were gone, I don’t know what I would do,” he tells her, his throat seizing on him again.

She opens her eyes looking at him closely. She brings her hand up to his face, brushing the tips of her fingers past his lips. She did that sometimes and although he wasn’t entirely sure why, Ben really loved it. It made him feel cared for.

“It was just a dream, Ben. Don’t worry about it...I’m not going anywhere, you know.”
“I know,” he breathes out, pulling her as close to him as he can. “But I just wanted you to know. You’ve...you’ve changed me.”

Rey gives him a smile, her eyes going glassy. “Ben, I know you might feel like that, but you’ve always been this person. Even if you didn’t think you were good, you’ve always been in there,” she reaches up to gently poke his forehead. “I believe that.”

Ben wasn’t sure that was true. He’s never been sure if he was a good person. He knows his parents were supposed to be considered good people to this galaxy, as well as his uncle. But they had been frustrating and confusing. It made him question whether he could ever be capable of being good because he told himself he wouldn’t be like them.

But he knows now that there are different kinds of good. There are different kinds of bad. He didn’t have to force himself into a role he didn’t want to be in.

Even if they weren’t at this temple, Rey would have taught him so much about life and what he wants out of it.

“You make me feel like a whole person,” he tells her with a smile.

Rey blinks once or twice before answering. “Ben, I think you give me too much credit. Really.”

“No, I don’t. Rey, I’m afraid of what I would be if it weren’t for you.” She puts her head down against his shoulder and he hears her sigh. “What?” he asks her, confused. She doesn’t answer, but he knows something’s wrong. “Rey, tell me, please.”

She keeps her face buried against his shoulder and he gently runs his hands down her back, trying to ignore just how thin her shirt really is or how much he could feel of her since she wasn’t wearing a breast band.

There were more important things to think about. Like how suddenly her mood had changed when he had only meant to tell her how much she meant to him.

“Ben, it means everything to me that you care about me the way you do. I’ve never had anyone like you and...you make me feel like a complete person too. Truly, you do.”

Ben is relieved that at least he hasn’t frightened her by saying what he did, but he’s still confused as to why she’s upset. “Then what’s wrong?”

She shakes her head a little and although her voice remains steady, he can feel her tears fall onto his shoulder and he holds her a little tighter, concerned. “I uh...I just waited so long for my parents to come back and I always thought that when they did, I would be able to figure out everything that I thought was wrong with me. I thought that they would have some big excuse for leaving me there and they would tell me how sorry they were and that empty feeling would finally go away. But the longer they were away, the bigger that feeling got. And when I realized they were never coming at all, I just figured that...that if they didn’t want me then no one...”

“Don’t,” Ben says, not letting her finish. “Don’t think like that. You have to know that isn’t true,” he tells her firmly, pulling back to look at her. When their eyes meet, her lip trembles a little.

“But I--”

“Rey, those people were selfish and cruel and it just makes my stomach hurt to know there are creatures like that out in the galaxy. So don’t for one second think that just because they did what they did is any reflection on you. They didn’t deserve you.”
“I’m sorry,” she dives back into his shoulder. He’s about to tell her not to be when she speaks again. “When you tell me those things...that I make you feel whole or that you love me–”

“I do, Rey. I do love you,” he tells her quickly.

She sobs then and his heart breaks a little. “There’s a part of me that’s just waiting for it to all end, and you’ll realize it just like they did and it’ll happen all over again.”

Ben sits up again, bringing her with him. Her face remains tucked in the crook of his shoulder but he sets her across his lap, holding her tightly.

He feels like such a fool. He spends so much time thinking about the strife in his family and here was Rey, perfect, beautiful Rey, who thinks that the scumbags that left her to be property on a dustball planet had some valid reason to do so. She thinks herself unworthy of love.

And Ben can understand that. He struggles with his own self-confidence and esteem. It was hard to believe in yourself. But when Rey gives her reasons for thinking the way she does, he can’t believe she of all people believes herself to be worthy of leaving behind. That she could be the nothing her parents and that croolute convinced her to be.

Or that no matter how much he tells her what she means to him, she’s worried about when the day will come that he will leave her behind too.

And for now, all he can do is assure her that wasn’t true.

“Rey...Rey, sweetheart, please, please, don’t think that,” he begs her, his own tears beginning again.

“I’m sorry,” she says, shaking her head and sounding almost ashamed. “I know–I know you do. Really, I believe that. I think I’m just not used to it. I don’t want you to think I’m trying to dismiss those things you say. I just...all of this is still so new to me. To have someone who cares and is there for me. But I spent thousands of days just waiting for people to come back. I spent every one of them lying to myself of where they went and what they said to me before they left. And now that I know what a lie it was I had created for myself, I think I’m just scared it will happen again so I’m trying to prepare myself for when it’s gone.”

“It won’t be. This, what we have Rey, this isn’t like that. It’s different.”

“I know it is,” she nods. “I know it is, I’m sorry to even say what I have. I’m so embarrassed,” she pulls away, covering her face with her hands, not wanting him to look at her.

Ben’s tears fall freely down his face as he looks at her crying on his lap in his too-small bed. “Rey,” he starts softly, still aware of how quiet they needed to be. “Rey, you have to believe me. You have to know that although, yes, I don’t have much experience with people and, yes, we are thrown a lot of obstacles from where we are and what we’re supposed to be, I know what I want. I know that before you got here, I was just a shell of a person and I hated everything and I was afraid of what I was going to become but I tried to bury it under all the anger I convinced myself to feel. But then you came and it’s been like I see things differently. I feel like for the first time in my life, I look forward to waking up in the morning and going to breakfast, or even putting up with the assholes around here because it means I’m closer to being with you. And you’ve shown me what it means to be happy and to find the beauty in the small things. And that’s what I meant earlier when I said that. If it weren’t for you, I worry about who I could be. That beach, our beach, was nothing but a place where I would go to just punch tree bark or where I swam out so far until I felt like I could drown. Now it’s the place where I’ve never smiled so much in my life. Now I can see why
you were so transfixed that first day you saw it because it’s beautiful but it took so long for me to see it that way. It took you to be there for me to realize.”

She looks at him, her hands pulled away from her face, her eyes red and her hair a total mess, looking as beautiful as she always does. She’s listening.

“And that’s why I was so afraid. That dream of you gone was too much. It was too real. You’ve shown me what it means to be loved and to love in return and I don’t want to go back to how it was before. I want to be with you because I love you. I love you so much, Rey.” She wraps her arms around his neck and hugs him tightly. “I wouldn’t ever give this up, or leave you behind. I want to be with you always.”

“I love you too,” she breathes out against his neck.

He gives a sigh of relief, glad to hear her voice again, however small it was. “I’m afraid you’re stuck with me...if that’s alright with you.”

He can’t tell if it’s a laugh or a sob that leaves her lips but she nods against him, kissing his cheek, his jaw, and even his ears that he knows are sticking out of his hair. “Good,” she chuckles.

Eventually, he lays back down, this time pulling her on top of him so there was more space on the bed. He combs through her hair with his fingers, his heart finally settling again. His eyes close, even though he won’t fall asleep just yet. He just wants to take the time to remember how this feels.

Rey speaks up after a long while and he wonders if she's going to leave. But then she asks him a question instead. “Can I stay here? Just for a while? I’ll go back before first light.”

He chuckles softly against her hair. “Of course.”

As they both take a deep breath, no longer anxious of her approaching departure, Ben finally relaxes enough to the point where he thinks he could fall back asleep. And right before he slips under, falling back into rest, he feels her press her lips against his chest, just above his heart and she whispers, “Thank you, Ben.”

Chapter End Notes

Sorry if that was cliché but thanks for reading!!
Rey comes to his hut at night now. It’s probably too reckless of them but she waits until about an hour after light’s out before she sneaks in through the curtain and plants herself beside him in the ridiculously small bed. They hold each other close though and manage to sleep soundly until Rey’s alarm on her wrist vibrates, telling her to go back to her hut before dawn.

Ben always wakes then too, kissing her goodbye. It’s the last time they have together until the whole cycle begins again and they have to make it through the day practically ignoring each other.

This morning was no different as Ben feels the alarm on her wrist buzz against his arm. She gets up, turning it off and he rises with her, grabbing her and pulling her against his chest. “You can’t leave,” he mumbles against her throat.

She snorts a laugh as he presses lazy, sleepy kisses against her skin. “I know, but I have to. I’ll see you later,” she tells him with a firm kiss to his lips.

“Mmm. ‘Later,’” he repeats with a low voice into her mouth as she has yet to pull away.

“Later,” she says again, finally moving off the bed but still holding on to him, pressing a few final kisses to his lips and his face before pulling away to put on her boots and making for the door.

Feeling bold, Ben stands up, nearly tripping on his own boots and crosses the room in an ungraceful rush as he holds her face in his hands, kissing her one last time. It was much more passionate than most of their morning endeavors usually were and he notices how quickly his body reacts to all of it, knowing he has to pull away before he went past the point of no return.

He pulls back to look at her in the dark room. The blue glow of the early dawn has started to emerge and he admires the soft features of her face, running his thumbs past her cheeks. “I love you,” he whispers out.

“I love you, too,” she says back, kissing him on the nose. “I’ll see you at breakfast,” she says before spinning back around to leave. He watches through his small window to make sure she got back to her hut alright and unnoticed.

There was still a fair amount of time to sleep before breakfast but he knew he wouldn’t be able to achieve that. His heart was still beating pretty fast so he decided to just get ready for his day, starting with a very cold shower and trying to school his expression down from the ecstatic grin that was starting to make his cheeks ache.

Finally, after what felt like forever, he hears the bell for breakfast and rushes out of his hut, headed for the temple. He can already see Rey up ahead, walking with Un’i and Hevaj.

He’s about to speed up to join them when he spots Hux coming out of his hut.
Ben ignores him, not in the mood to stir things up today, especially this early, but then the prick falls into step alongside him with a shit-eating grin on his face.

“Feelings rested, Solo?”

Ben hates this kid with an all-encompassing rage but he still needs to be rational, so instead of yelling at him or doing something else likely too foolish, he just grounds his teeth. “What do you care?” he responds.

Hux shrugs, unaffected by Ben’s response by the looks of it, keeping a smirk on his face. “Alright, keep it to yourself then. I certainly hope you are well rested though. Something tells me you’re going to need it.”

With that, Hux jogs ahead to meet up with Xid and Iella. Ben didn’t like the way he sounded or how he tried to even speak with him at all.

After the whole cave and Marmaw incident, he and Hux have stayed pretty much clear of each other. Why Hux bothered to try and get a rise out of him now seemed so childish and pointless. It wasn’t worth getting all worked up again when he knew the bastard was just trying to draw him back into the stupid dynamics he didn’t enjoy being involved with.

So he steps into the mess hall, moving to stand behind Rey in the line. Coincidental to anyone that may have been watching even though he knows she waited for him.

She flashes him a friendly smile then. “Good morning, Ben,” she says casually as if they hadn’t already seen each other.

It makes him smile too and he gives the same courtesy. “Good morning, Rey.”

She turns back around then, saying something to Un’i. He takes notice how she’s wearing one of the higher neck tunics today and his cheeks heat up when he thinks of how he had kissed her throat perhaps too enthusiastically last night.

That was probably his fault but he couldn’t help but feel smug anyway.

He thinks back to when they woke up and when she left, reassuring that they would be back there later and they could...continue?

There was no doubt that Ben enjoyed being with Rey. His hormonal teenage mind reminded him of that constantly and he occasionally had dreams where things suddenly progress much further than where they’ve been currently taking it.

It left him waking in compromised states, sometimes too obvious to hide from Rey. It was mortifying the first time when they both realized what had happened. But as ashamed as he had felt, as he always does, Rey never gives him a reason to be.

She merely held him tighter, enough that she could feel it for herself. He had told her how sorry he was, prepared to pull himself away but she just wrapped her arms around his neck saying, “Don’t be. I like it,” and that was that.

Every night she comes to his hut, they manage to surpass new territory in some way, as small as it may be. Things progress at a slow but comfortable pace where neither of them feels pressured. Because they both know if they go too fast what it may lead to, even though they haven’t said it out loud. They both know what his body is trying to tell him when they find themselves in such a predicament and what typically solves that problem.
They are still trying to hide everything from everyone and if they gave their all to each other, what happens then? Where does that leave them in this place where they have to spend every day like classmates who just eat at the same table every day?

He didn’t want to be with her like that and then spend their lives pretending it didn’t happen as they went about their lessons. It was already hard enough to go through their days the way they do but if they change anything about it, they would be discovered and then Ben doesn’t know what happens next.

There was no simple answer, but he knew that one thing was for certain. No matter what, even if Luke discovers them and insist they must be separated, Ben knows he would not just stop being with Rey.

But as careful as they tried to be, he doubts their luck will hold out forever. One way or another, Luke is going to find out one day. Along with his parents and their douchey classmates.

And Ben isn’t ready for that either. So he just sits down on the bench with the tray he had loaded up with food in a distracted haze, preparing himself for the day and all that is to come.

He nudges Rey’s feet beneath the table with his own and she smiles into her food and he does the same.

It’s barely an hour after light’s out when Rey leaves her hut, making her way to Ben’s. It’s a familiar path now. She could do it with her eyes closed. Some nights were so dark that she may as well have had her eyes closed anyway but it made no difference. She always got there and he was always waiting there with a sweet smile on his face.

His very kissable face.

The day had been as long as they always are here. But they do a good job though, keeping clear of each other as much as they can. Sometimes it’s difficult though because Ben will seclude himself to the side, away from people and she wants to rush over and be with him, but she knows that’s too obvious.

But she knows that he usually stayed to himself before she got there so no one else is phased by his distance the way she is. It doesn’t affect them as it affects her.

He was at his desk tonight when she walks in, hunched over and writing in his journal. She’s never read anything in them and she knows he will share with her if he wants to, but he could decide to do that in his own time. She wouldn’t pressure him into sharing something she knows is very personal to him.

He turns to look at her walk in, smiling wide enough for her to see his teeth in the dim light of the lamp on his desk that he should have turned off an hour ago. She gives him a smile of her own as she walks towards him slowly, giving him time to put away his things if he wanted to.

But he just turns in his chair, holding out his arms and she meets him there, letting him pull her into his lap.

“Good evening,” he says in a playful voice. “I missed you,” he says pulling her down to meet his mouth and kiss her softly.

“I saw you only a few hours ago,” she jokes.
“You know what I mean.”

She does. “I do.”

He beams up at her, kissing her again and pulling her closer by her waist and she feels the warmth and solidity of his bare chest slotting against her own.

He pulls away then, looking up at her with dark eyes and an almost dazed look on his face like he wasn’t sure if she was part of a dream or if he was still awake. His hands brush through her hair, behind her ears and then trailing softly down her neck.

He chuckles softly, examining the faded marks he had left there from last night. She scoffs then, poking him in the chest. “Admiring your work, then?”

“I didn’t realize, I’m sorry. I noticed you had to wear one of the high neck tunics today.”

“I don’t mind. It felt nice at the time,” she tells him honestly.

“I shouldn’t be so careless though. Suppose there were no high neck tunics? Where would we be then?”

“Then I would have said a massive bug bit me in my sleep.”

His eyes go wide in mock offense. “I don’t like that. I worked hard on this,” he says with boyish pride and a stifled laugh. “To let a bug take the credit? No thank you. We’ll just have to think of something else.”

Suddenly, a private vision of her own comes to mind. “Then I guess you’ll have to start focusing on something else. Someplace no one else would think to look,” she suggests in a hushed tone.

Ben must take her meaning because his smile falls a little, looking very serious suddenly. “Someplace else?” he asks her softly.

So she nods slowly in response, pulling her hands away from him and settling them on the hem of her shirt.

She hears him gasp quietly into the room, reaching to cover her hands with his own. “Rey?” he asks her, asking so much more than just her name. Like he’s making sure she wants to and that he doesn’t expect her to and she loves him all the more for it.

She leans forward slightly to peck him on the lips and then nodding so her nose bumps his. With that she reaches back down for the hem of her thin shirt and begins to pull it up and over her head, leaving her bare from the waist up as she sits on his lap.

She fights the urge to cover herself up, feeling almost foolish now, realizing she doesn’t have much to display anyway, but then she looks back at him.

His chest is rising and falling rapidly as he breathes heavily into the small room. So much so that she can feel it on her now exposed chest.

His hands return to her waist, keeping her where she is on his lap, his thumbs brushing past her ribcage and slowly making their way up.

“Rey,” he says in a near growl. “You’re so beautiful.”

He seems hesitant to move his hands any further though so Rey grabs one of them and places it
softly against her breast, making both of them gasp at the sensation.

His hand is massive and he can fit his entire palm over her. He stays just like that for a moment, looking between her chest and her eyes before he seems to get ahold of himself and squeeze ever so lightly.

She doesn’t mean to moan the way she does but suddenly that’s all she can hear in the small hut.

“Fuck,” he breathes out, his other hand inching up to cup the other one, both of his thumbs brushing past her hardened nipples.

Rey needs to be closer. It’s a need, the new sensation stirring new things within her. She launches forward, kissing him quickly. He gasps into her mouth, one of his hands reaching up to hold her face while the other remains against her breast.

He starts to angle himself lower, kissing her jawline, back towards her ear. He whispers that he loves her as he trails lower to her neck, pressing soft, chaste kisses on the marks he left there previously.

Rey whispers it back as well as she can with her heart beating wildly.

She feels, rather than hears him chuckle softly against her throat as he starts to move even lower, past her collar bone.

But he’s tall, and even with her on his lap, he has a hard time craning his neck. So she isn’t surprised when she feels his hands slide under her thighs as he picks her up.

She is surprised when he settles her against his desk, knocking over who knows what. But it’s only for a moment as he turns off his lamp before he pulls her against him once again and walks them towards his bed.

Luke is awakened by the insistent ringing from the holopad. He groans, storming out of his bed and looking to see it was the same number as earlier.

For the third time that night, someone has been trying to contact him with a code he does not recognize so he just let it be. But now they were calling again and he was not only losing patience by ignoring it but also sleep as well.

So running a hand past his face and groaning a little bit, he answers the call.

The holopad lights up with the blue portrait of a very stubby, very angry looking man. “Oh, nice of you to pick up. You know how long I’ve been tryin’ to call?”

“Apologies, sir, I was very busy this evening,” Luke tells him, thinking how he brought his dinner back to his quarters so he could watch something on the holonet by himself. “Is there something I can help you with, sir?” he tries to ask as politely as he was capable of, which wasn’t very polite at all.

“Yeah, you can start by giving me your go codes.”

“Go codes?”

“I’ve been sitting out here at the gate of your territory trying to get authorization in but some droids keep snapping at me, saying I need to talk to you.”
“You-You want permission to enter school grounds? I’m sorry sir, but that’s almost impossible. I only allow people in for emergencies of families of my students. I’m afraid you won’t be allowed in.”

The man scoffs. “As far as I’m concerned, I’m the closest thing to family that little bitch has.”

“Whoa, sir, excuse me, but I think that you’re confusing the Academy with someplace else. I don’t think we have who you’re looking for. Perhaps I can help you figure out where you need to be.” There were a lot of farmers elsewhere on the planet, perhaps he was trying to reach one of them.

He laughs. “Yeah. You can ‘help me’ by returning what is rightfully mine.”

“I’m sorry, but are you implying that I’ve stolen something from you, sir? I don’t even know who you are.”

“Eh, don’t try and play that shit with me. By the looks of her, you should have known what she was from a mile away. You should have known she had no right to be here legally.”

“Excuse me? Who is ‘she’?”

“The scrawny one! The little bitch! Goes by Rey!” he shouts at him.

Luke’s inevitable argument gets caught in his throat at the mention of his student. “What are you implying, sir? How do you have information about one of my students?”

“Oh no, don’t start with me. All these months I’ve been on the lookout for her and now that I find where’s she’s at, I’m entitled to what’s mine.”


The man groans impatiently, “For kriff’s sake. The girl is a slave. I bought her when she was just a youngin’ at this tall,” he says, holding his hand probably three feet high.

Luke recalls when he first spoke to Maz about Rey and she mentioned that she had been a scavenger on Jakku. Luke knows he asked if she had been a slave at first but now that he thinks of it, he doesn’t think that was ever officially answered.

“I’m sorry but unless you have some actual proof we will not be continuing this conversation and you’ll have to be on your way. I choose to believe in my students rather than slimy slave owners, so have a nice trip back home.”

The crolute bellows out in a concerning laugh. “Oh, that girl is a piece of work.”

“I’m sure she is, sir,” Luke patronizes, fumbling for the buttons, trying to get out of this quickly.

“You know, I’ve never had a runaway slave succeed before. Succeed in getting away that is, but most of them don’t resort to murder either.”

Luke’s hand hovers over the end call button, his heart speeding up at his words.

*_Murder?*_

“Excuse me?”

“Oh, that got your attention, didn’t it?”
Luke doesn’t answer at first. He isn’t sure what to say. “Murder is a very serious thing. If you’re just trying to get my attention and keep me on the line by fabricating some lie about one of my students then I suggest you get going while you still can.”

The man just laughs, fumbling for a holopad and pulling up some things on the screen. “Alright, you see here?” he points to the screen and Luke sees the picture of a young girl who looks, at the most, maybe five years old.

“This is Rey. I bought her from some drunkards who were desperate for more shit to keep themselves numb so they sold off the only thing of possible value they had, their younkin’.”

Luke’s heart sinks a little. Rey had mentioned that her parents left her there and didn’t come back. She never mentioned they had sold her though. That she had been a slave.

“She was one of my finest scavengers. She was tiny and nimble enough to get places not many of my other workers could. But we live in hard times and a few months back, I couldn’t give her a decent cut of portions with what she was bringing me. Now one thing led to another and she went berserk, trying to steal food from me and some of the others. When I confronted her, she started screaming and suddenly me and a buddy of mine were thrown back.”


“Aye. I went flying and the impact crushed my spine. My legs have been nothing but trouble since then.”

“You’re paralyzed?”

“I can still walk but it hurts like hell, especially without a cane. I’m sure as hell doing better than the other guy.”


“She killed him. Took off immediately after when she saw I was down and stole a ship from my junkyard.”

She...Rey killed somebody? Luke refuses to believe it. She was one of his brightest students. His head is spinning suddenly, he almost feels nauseous. He didn’t want to believe this man, so why should he? Other than the documents of Rey being purchased, he had no proof.

“Am I supposed to just believe you? I’m supposed to just believe that she’s responsible for this man’s death because you say it’s so?”

“Ah, you want proof? Let me get somethin’ here for you.” He looks down at the holopad for a moment before pulling up a security transmission that appears beside his face. “This is what the camera caught that day. I keep one on every side of my main tent in case someone decides to crack wise or steal my shit. They certainly served their purpose that day because as you can see…” the crolute waits, letting Luke see for himself how Rey forces the two of them back. The man he spoke of lands all wrong and likely snapping his neck. He sees Rey go to check on him and when she looks over him, she waits only a moment before speeding off out of frame, likely to go fetch the Falcon.

Luke doesn’t know what to do. How does he respond? Rey lied to him instead of being honest. He understands life was hard on Jakku but to resort to murder? That was a very serious issue indeed.

Regardless of what he was going to do, he knew their dialogue was far from over.
“So, your aim of coming here is to take her back? To make her pay for her crimes?”

“Uh-huh,” he grunts back.

“And...how did you find out she was here? We lead a very private life and I keep the information about my students and our Academy very confidential.”

“Well, I figure once I knew it was that force nonsense she was doing when she left, she may have gone to be with people like her. I’ve been sending word around for the past few months, trying to get wind of where a place like that might be for people like her and where she might have gone. I finally got lucky with some good info that came through which means I guess you ain’t as careful as you think you are.”

Luke shakes his head, at a loss of what to do.

“Listen, there’s a lot to discuss and I don’t have the patience to stare at the hologram any longer. I will grant you access onto the territory and allow you to speak with me. But I take the safety of my students very seriously so once the gates open, you will be boarded by the security droids to make sure you are unarmed and alone. This may take a little while so I encourage you to remain patient or it will just take longer. If they do not clear you, then you get sent away, is that understood?”

“Aye, no problem.”

“Alright. Now, I’m going to get ahold of Rey and the three of us can have a civil and calm conversation about how we are going to deal with this. Understand?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Alright,” Luke is about to end the call when he realizes something. “Oh, um, I didn’t catch your name.”

“Unkar Plutt,” he grumbles back.

“Very well, Mister Plutt. I am–”

The man scoffs, “Eh, don’t bother. Everyone knows who you are, don’t flatter yourself, Skyrunner.”

And with that, the transmission ends and Luke just stands there feeling a little lost for a moment before thinking of how to proceed.

First, he sends a message to Rey, telling her to rouse as quickly as she can to meet him in his quarters regarding a very serious problem that couldn’t wait until morning.

Rey has to bite her lip to keep herself from being too loud.

Ben was on top of her, his mouth pressing hot and wet kisses against her breasts, her sides, her stomach, and even a few below the waistline of her pants.

It’s maddening. The more he does, the crazier it makes her and she feels desperate, needy for more. To get closer. To give him what he gives her.

She can feel him through the fabric of his pants and she knows it’s probably making it very difficult for him. He’s laying between her legs so she urges him to ease up further so she can feel for herself as the protrusion nestles against the place where she wants him most.
He groans out then, burying his face in her neck. “Everything about you feels good.”

She gives a small laugh, just a swift exhale through her nose as she runs her hands past his back and in his messy hair.

She knows she wants him. But it’s dangerous. Not only could they be heard and exposed, but she knows that if they were to do that, it could lead to more problems.

She’s heard of birth control implants but she doesn’t have one and she knows Ben probably doesn’t have anything like that either. She doubts 2-1B supplies those in the med bay at an Academy where the students are supposed to abandon attachments, especially this kind.

It would be easier and safer to just pull away from each other and say goodnight, but it was hard to be rational when he kept moving over her.

So she still pulls him closer, lifting her hips to his, wrapping her legs around him. He groans then and she is quick to cover his mouth.

“Shh,” she urges him with a small giggle.

His apology is muffled by her hand but he hardly sounds sincere, getting lost in how close they are and how they get the slightest relief when they thrust against each other.

It builds and builds and Rey covers her mouth, trying to clamp down the strange and all-encompassing feeling rushing over her.

Ben’s breathing gets heavier. “Fuck, I think–” he starts but before he could say it his face changes. He gasps at first before a groan escapes his throat. Rey quickly brings herself up to kiss him so that it might drown out the noises.

“Kriff,” he sighs pulling away from her mouth. “Shit, I’m sorry.”

“Why?”

He shakes his head. “I...you know,” he says looking down between them and Rey realizes that the firmness between her legs has subsided.

And he’s embarrassed about it.

“Don’t be sorry, Ben. I liked it.”

He snorts. “You always say stuff like that.”

“I mean it.”

“I know you do,” he assures her, kissing her softly before pulling himself away, sitting on the edge of the bed. She knows he feels a little embarrassed, even if she told him he doesn’t need to be. He never had to be when he was around her.

She sits up, moving to hug him from behind so her chest is pressed against his back, hoping to comfort him. She traces soft circles on his stomach where her hands rested.

They remain like that for what could have either been a moment or an hour. Either way, she loves it.

“Rey?” he breathes out.
“Mmm?” She manages, occupies with pressing soft kisses along his shoulders.

“I want to be with you in every way...but I’m worried about what could happen. I guess I’m nervous.”

“I know,” she tells him. “Me too.”

“If we do that here...I just...I want it to be special and I want to do it the right way and not hurt you and then even if all of that goes okay, I don’t want to just wake up the next morning and go to breakfast like nothing happened and...fuck, I don’t know what else. I just know I don’t want to rush into it,” he sighs into the room, getting up and walking towards the other side of the room. She knows what he’s doing when she hears the dresser drawers open.

“I know. I want that too but I’m worried about the same things.” It’s too dark to see him changing anyway so she doesn’t turn away but she can hear him pulling the other pair off to step into the new ones.

“It won’t always be like this,” he says, moving back over to the bed and sitting beside her again. “Someday, we’ll be somewhere else and we can have the freedom to be together in every way and we won’t have to worry like this.”

Rey nods, wrapping her arms around him again. “I know.” She rests her head on his back, listening to his heartbeat. “We don’t have to be afraid...and I don’t care how long we wait. I’d wait however long we had to...”

Ben turns then, moving further up the bed. He moves to his back, pulling her over him so they could both fit on the small bed. He brushes his fingers through her hair and kisses the top of her head. “Me too...I love you, Rey.”

She kisses his chest, “I love you too. Goodnight, Ben.”

It’s been over fifteen minutes Rey hasn’t come to the temple yet. Plutt would be arriving soon once the droids finished the security check.

The more Luke thinks about it, perhaps that message sounded a little strange for Rey to wake up to in the middle of the night. And although the kids all used their holopads for everything, including their alarms, there was no guarantee that Rey would wake up to it.

So he decides to put his boots on and an extra tunic over his pajamas so he can tell Rey to join him personally.

“Artoo, there will very likely be an angry man arriving very soon so wake Beex if you can and try to confine him to the mess hall and just give him what he wants. I will return with Rey. By the looks of things, it’s going to be a very long night.”

R2 beeps back in reply, telling him he shouldn’t be reduced to this but he cooperates anyway.

Luke makes his way down the hill as quietly as he can, cautious of his other sleeping students.

He was concerned about what he was going to do about Rey. She seemed like a very nice girl and he was alarmed to discover that she had actually killed somebody.

It didn’t show control, it showed emotion and aggression. Signs of the dark side. Perhaps that is why she chose to give him a false story. She knew how it would sound.
But she was one of his best students and a good friend to his nephew who never really had any.

And he certainly doesn’t agree with slavery and it always startles him to discover that there are still places in the galaxy that resort to such methods.

But if Rey committed a crime, he’s not sure what he could do. From an ethical standpoint and the perspective as this Academy's teacher, he is supposed to encourage exemplary behavior and punish bad ones. But this feels like new territory for him.

He knows that in the Old Republic, padawans and Jedi were no stranger to battle and casualties, but this wasn’t the Old Republic. This was a new age and none of the other students have ever even used their lightsabers on something that wasn’t a training droid. The thought of any of them being capable of what he now knows Rey has done is almost laughable. Many of them haven’t really seen how cruel the galaxy could be. They don’t know what it’s really like.

Maybe he’s taking this all a little too judgementally. Maybe he should have sent Plutt away, claiming he didn’t have Rey at all. Just because it had been a while since things were handled like this, Rey seemed to have fair judgment and perhaps her reaction had been the product of just not knowing how to control herself.

Rey has progressed at a very alarming rate. She was very gifted in the Force and in her studies. He doesn’t want to lose her, but if she was responsible for a man's death, he couldn’t just ignore it.

But then he considers something he has had yet to confront with his other students.

*The Jedi trials.*

The ritual of where a padawan became a true Jedi Knight. It was a very traditional process and often placed padawans in difficult and emotionally exhausting situations where they must overcome great tribulations that will prepare them for their Knighthood.

Trials of skill, courage, spirit, flesh, and insight.

Luke could always suggest that if she can somehow overcome the conflict on Jakku rationally, answering for her crimes, atoning for her behavior, and return to the school then she will have overcome her great trials. She could find her place here once more.

He arrives in front of her hut, taking a deep breath before ducking inside and turning on the lights. “Rey, I–” he stops in his tracks as he realizes that Rey isn’t in her hut at all.

Luke spins around for a moment, confused.

For a moment, he wonders if he specified something in his message that might have implied who was arriving, enough to make her bolt. But he had been very brief, just asking her to hurry up to the temple and join him and R2. And all of her things are still there. Aside from her boots, everything looked ordinary. Even her bed looked like it hadn’t been slept in. Like she hadn’t gone to bed at all.

She probably never even saw his message.

He rushes out of her hut, trying to think of where she’s gone. She didn’t head up to the temple because he would have seen her. Perhaps she went to that beach again. He knows she finds peace in the ocean. He had a similar fondness for it as he too grew up on a desert planet.

Maybe Ben could show him where it is exactly. Besides, if Rey was involved, he knows Ben
would want to help. She was his best friend.

Making his way over for his nephew’s hut, he remains quiet so not to disturb any of the other students before entering.

But as he steps inside the dark room, he senses something strange. It almost feels like Rey is already here.

*Oh fuck...*

With a flick of his wrist, the lights igniting at their brightest luminosity, revealing the sight of Ben and Rey together on his small bed.

Both of them wake with a start staring at him with wide eyes. Rey gasps, her eyes instantly filling with tears as she realizes they’ve been caught. And yet they still don’t separate, because Ben’s body is all that is shielding Rey’s bare chest as she hides behind him.

Ben looks to him with a face he hasn’t seen him make since he was a young boy. One of such open vulnerability and fear. He knows what he’s done is wrong but he’s done it anyway, disregarding his training, Rey’s training, all of his teachings.

It’s disrespectful.

Luke can’t really form words right now. He’s overcome with anger and he nearly screams, wanting the hut to cave in and leave it in a pile of rubble.

But this is serious. Very serious. And dismantling the only barrier keeping them hidden from the elements and the inevitable eyes of the other students weren’t going to help anything.

So he clenches his fists and grits out thorough his teeth, “Both of you are going to get dressed and meet me outside in one minute.” And he means one minute.

Before he turns around to storm out, the look on Ben’s face morphs into one of anger but Luke doesn’t really care.

Luke doesn’t care if it makes him mad or if it makes Rey cry. The thoughts from earlier, his thoughts of keeping an open mind are quickly diminishing. He doesn’t know how long this has been going on but it doesn’t really matter. He just knows it needs to end and that he’s never been so disappointed in them.

He’s never felt so ashamed of Ben as he does now.

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**Chapter End Notes**

We are getting to the part of the story where I felt it was time to add the OOC Luke tag because although he’s not immune to stupid decisions, he’s about to make a few doozies that might feel a little out of place.
As soon as Luke steps out of the hut, Ben turns to look at Rey. She has already got tears on her cheeks as she looks up at him frightened before they both scramble to get off the bed.

He knows he needs to say something but he’s scared too. He’s seen Luke angry before but he's never seen him look quite like that. Or sound quite like that either.

“Don’t,” he starts, trying to think of something encouraging, even though his hands were shaking and his mind was racing in frantic energy. “Don’t worry. We’re gonna be okay.”

Rey closes her eyes, making her tears fall faster as she nods. But she shakes her head a little too, like she isn’t sure if she can believe him and it makes him want to cry too.

Instead, he rushes over to his dresser, pulling out two tunics and picking up her thin top from the ground by his desk. He passes it to her and she slips it back on as he puts his arms through the sleeves of the tunic and passing her the second one to give her some extra coverage, although it is pretty big on her.

If this were any other time, he might have taken a moment to admire just how much he loved to see her in his clothes, but her silent tears and his uncle waiting for them outside shatter any kind of happiness he could have found just then.
So with the ten seconds or less they have before they have to join Luke, Ben takes her face in his hands and kisses her firmly. He tries to relay everything he feels for her in this brief embrace. She keeps her hands tethered to him, returning his passions with her own.

But when he pulls away, she gives a small sob and it makes his heart ache. He settles his forehead against hers and breathes out, “I love you. Nothing changes that. Nothing.”

She nods quickly, moving to her toes to kiss his lips one more time. “I know. I love you,” she whispers to him, hugging him so tightly.

And with that, he knows they’re out of time.

He reaches for her hand, pulling her with him as they make for the curtain outside.

He doesn’t let go of her hand when they step out. There was no reason to hide from him now that he knows. Because Ben has never been as confident in anything as he is with Rey and they will face this together. They will be okay. He has to believe that.

They step out of the hut into the moonlight. Luke scoffs when he notices their hands and Ben wants to scream. This is something that has made Ben happy, happier than he’s ever been, and Luke’s first instinct is to roll his eyes and practically laugh at them.

“How long has this been going on?” He asks them but doesn’t really give them time to answer. Not that Ben would have anyway. “Huh? Do you want to tell me just how long you’ve been lying to me or should I just guess?” Like stands there with wide eyes, but again doesn’t give them much time to really answer. “You know what? Don’t tell me, I don’t want to know,” he says, throwing up his hands in defeat.


“No. I don’t want to hear it. I am still trying to wrap my head around it so just don’t talk.”

Ben fumes. This was so ridiculous. Seeing how he’s taking it makes him all the more baffled at just how useless the celibacy rule really was. What was so horrible in them being with each other? How could something that makes him feel so happy be considered this wrong?

He decides there is nothing for him to understand. He’s not a true Jedi and he couldn’t be more proud about it.

Luke gives a heavy sigh then as if he’s trying to figure out what to do and has come to a conclusion. “Alright, you know what? I’m too tired to deal with all this shit right now. Ben, I will be speaking with you later. For now, Rey, I need you to come up with me to the temple, there are some things we need to discuss.”

Rey squeezes his hand a little tighter and Ben does the same. “No. If she goes, I go, too,” he practically shouts at him and it’s then that he hears a few other voices. They’ve awoken the other students and everyone is watching them, likely piecing everything together.

Luke takes a step back then so he’s not looking up at Ben, trying to re-establish himself as the authority figure from a distance, knowing Ben towered over him.

“Ben,” Luke starts out, sounding composed enough but Ben thinks it’s an act. “You are going to stay here in your hut while Rey comes up with me—”

“No—” Ben tries to interrupt but Luke shouts over him louder.
“This is not a negotiation! You will stay here and wait until I call you to the temple where I will then speak to you! Until then, you are in no place to try and wedge yourself where you don’t belong. You don’t run this school, I do, and right now, Rey is coming with me and you are staying!”

Ben is about to fire back a reply of his own when Rey tugs on his hand, squeezing it tightly. “Ben,” she whispers but it sounds like so much more. She’s saying she needs to go and he needs to let go of her hand.

He shakes his head. He doesn’t like this. He has a horrible feeling that if he lets go of her hand something bad will happen.

But he does anyway because, in some twisted way, he knows they have to face this. His eyes don’t leave hers as they separate and she pulls away, heading for Luke.

“Ben, stay there, do you understand?” He’s talking to him like he was some kind of animal.

“I got it,” he grits out through his teeth, relieved when Luke finally turned back around.

Rey lingers though, looking at him with worried eyes. She knows something feels wrong too, she has to. She looks like she’s about to say something, or maybe run back for him, but then Luke barks over his shoulder.

“Rey, now!”

And with that, she makes her way up the hill, leaving Ben helpless and riddled with worry outside his hut.

Luke is quiet all the way up the hill. Rey has never been so uncomfortable around him, or this scared of him.

She could only imagine how furious he was with them but this quiet, his refusal to even look at her was frightening her the most.

Everyone whispers as they walk past the other huts but she doesn’t pay it much attention. She doesn’t care what any of them think about her. She’s not ashamed for what she feels for Ben and she won’t apologize for it. If it weren’t for Ben, she would still be afraid of herself. If it weren’t for Ben, she would still be lost within the shell she had made for herself.

She loves him.

But that doesn’t compute with Luke. To Luke, they were just some dumb kids who were giving in to weakness. They were two kids who had been tempted by harmful thoughts and denied their teachings.

Rey prepares herself for what was going to happen. She knew he was going to be upset, but what could he do? Keep them away from each other? The school, or at least the class size, was small. How effectively was this going to work?

Maybe there was something she could say that would help their case. Anything to try and help Luke see this for what it was.

She expects them to head for the stairs, up to his office, but they take a turn for the mess hall. She looks to him hesitantly but he nods harshly for her to enter. When she walks inside, BX and R2 are
there off to the side, activated and attentive to Luke's actions.

What were they doing here?

“Rey, sit down,” Luke instructs and she abides, moving to slide onto the bench of one of the tables.

He doesn’t sit though. He remains standing and he has that look like he wants to pace but restrains himself. “I am in a very difficult position, Rey. I hope you realize that. You and Ben have not made this easy for me.”

“I understand that, but—”

He holds up a hand. “Don’t speak. Just listen,” he tells her, not even looking at her. “Rey, we only have a few minutes here so I’m just going to focus on the more serious matter here. Earlier, I got a call from a man. He insisted he knew you from Jakku.”

Rey’s heart thuds loudly in her chest. Luke must read her reaction for what it is because he shakes his head at her.

“This man’s name is Plutt and he has a very different depiction of how you got off Jakku with the Falcon. And before I try to describe that to you, is there something you would like to tell me? Hmm? Is there anything you would like to try and explain because if what that man told me is true, we have a very serious problem, Rey.”

How the hell had Plutt figured out where she was, or even get ahold of this place? Why would he bother chasing her down through the galaxy? Rey tries to keep the sob in her throat down but it rises when she opens her mouth trying to speak. “P-Plutt was the man who owned me. I lied. I was a slave,” she admits. “I’m sorry I lied.”

Her apology doesn’t change Luke’s expression. “He mentioned that. But that is not why I brought you up here. Do you want to try again or should I be the one to tell you?”

Luke sounds so fed up and Rey knows what he’s getting at. Her heart sinks as she realizes that he knows. He knows she killed somebody and there's no use in hiding it anymore.

“I—I...killed a man,” she reveals out loud, the words sounding so wrong and like something from someone else’s life and not her own.


“But, you don’t understand. I didn’t mean to. It just happened. And I had to do something. He was going to hurt me!”

“Yes, Plutt told me they had gotten a little upset with you after you tried stealing food.”

Stealing food?

“No, that wasn’t...Master Skywalker, whatever Plutt told you is a lie. I had to!”

“You had to kill this man?” he asks incredulously.

“Y-Yes,” she stammers out, trying to defend herself, now wishing that Ben had come up with her after all. But if he had revealed that he knew of this, that he knew the true nature of Rey’s escape, it would only drag him further into this mess too and she wouldn’t do that. She already felt guilty
enough that she had made him carry the burden of this secret.

“I’m sorry, Rey, but knowing that you’ve concealed this from me since you’ve first arrived, I’m having a hard time trusting you, especially now that I know you’ve been lying to me and disrespecting the rules of this Academy...with my nephew!”

“I–I…” she trails off, feeling everything spiral around her and she can’t keep up, she doesn’t know what to say or do. He tells her all this as if she needs to feel guilty for these things but she doesn’t.

Is she supposed to feel guilty for killing the man who was going to hurt her or for falling in love with Ben? If so, then maybe Luke was a much different person than she thought he was.

“I’ve had to make a decision, Rey. It’s not an easy one but at this point, understanding all the variables, I think it’s the only way I can proceed. It’s the only way that I, as Master of this Academy, can try to help you atone for what you’ve done, especially now.”

She sits there confused as to what he means when suddenly, everything seems to blur together and she just holds the sides of her head with her hands, trying to keep the world from spinning out of control.

“I’ve granted Plutt permission onto the school grounds. He’s going to be here in a few minutes, I think.”

She snaps out of her haze at his words, looking to him in shock. “He’s here? Plutt’s here?” Luke let that man on school grounds?

“I’m afraid so. He’s here and insisting to take you back. And given what he’s told me and how I now understand the true nature of your relationship with my nephew, I believe it would be best for everyone if you left with him.”

Left with...No, this couldn’t be happening.

She wouldn’t believe it. This was some dream and Ben would wake her up, holding her tightly and telling her not to worry. Just like she had done when he had a bad dream of his own.

Because it couldn’t be true. Plutt was on the other side of the galaxy. Certainly not here. Anywhere but here.

“I–I can’t. Please,” she feels tears racing down her cheeks and her entire body is trembling.

Luke looks down at his hands. “I know this is hard, Rey, but this doesn't mean you have to leave forever. In fact, I think this is going to help you face the troubles you’re dealing with. I think this is the path best for you. And this is not uncommon to Jedi in training. In the days of the old Republic, all padawans were expected to complete a series of trials before becoming a true Knight.”

“I don’t need to be a Knight, I just can’t go back there!” Rey practically shouts at him.

Luke’s jaw tightens as he considers her words for a moment before answering, “Well, if you aren’t here to be a Jedi anyway, then maybe this isn’t the place for you.”

His words strike her deep. All her life she’s only wanted to belong somewhere. With somebody. And she found that here with Ben. But now, she’s not even allowed to stay. She’s become such a disappointment to Luke so that he’s not even listening to her. He’s valuing Plutt’s word over her own. Plutt! A slave owner who has traveled great lengths to, what? Arrest her?
One thing is for certain though. Luke doesn’t want her here.

“If you can come to terms with what you’ve done and try to right them, to see the error in your ways, then one day, you can come back. You can try again and go from there. Because you have wonderful potential and great power but until you find a way to mend your past mistakes, I’m afraid I don’t have another option for you. You must first prove to me and to yourself that this way of dealing with things is behind you. You can’t lie anymore.”

He thinks she’s a liar and a murderer, and maybe she is. But not in the way he thinks. Not in the way Plutt makes her out to be.

And just then, R2 rolls over beeping and whistling to Luke that Plutt was approaching. He also seems to ask Luke if he was sure this is was a good idea but Luke ignored him, rising from the tables and looking at Rey to follow.

“Wha—Now? Tonight?”

“Yes. Tonight, Rey. I’m sorry.”

She rises from the table, suddenly feeling frantic. “But...what about Ben and—”

“Ben was irresponsible and acted in a way he should know better than. I’m disappointed in him as his Master but also embarrassed as his uncle. I don’t think there’s any need in giving in to his temptations.”

She shakes her head. “No. I need to say goodbye at least. Or get my things. My lightsaber and—”

“The lightsaber is the weapon of a Jedi and until you manage to return and pursue your training properly, it will remain safe with me.”

She couldn’t believe this. He was sending her off empty-handed without even a goodbye to the boy she loved. She lets the angry tears well up inside her as she tries to speak. “If you want me to go, I’ll go, but I’m not going anywhere until I see Ben.”

“This is exactly what I’m talking about. You need to train yourself to let go of this attachment. It will only lead to pain and fear, greed and jealousy. This is a dangerous path, one that I do not trust Ben is even capable of treading. He’s already conflicted enough. I won’t subject him to the dangers of himself he does not understand and I won’t encourage it.”

Rey looks to him as if she’s never seen him before. He speaks so harshly of Ben as if he was a troublesome toddler. She decides then that he doesn’t know anything about Ben.

And then she hears the sound of engines approaching, getting lower as Plutt no doubt is landing in the field that very moment.

Rey feels like she’s in a dream. A horrible dream. And then it hits her.

Ben’s horrible dream. The one that she had awoken him from. He was afraid she was taken away and it had finally come true. And she had been the one to tell him everything would be okay.

What she wouldn’t give for him to be here now, telling her that. Even if it were a lie and she really did have to go, it would be worth it to at least hear his voice and feel his arms around her now.

Ben doesn’t remember ever feeling this panicked or unnerved.
His instincts are telling him to ignore Luke’s demands and rush up to Rey. He should be by her side through this but Luke has insisted they be separated.

He should have been more aware. He should have sensed Luke before he came in and found them on his bed.

But he didn’t and now Luke was not only aware of their relationship, but completely pissed off. And Ben thinks it’s hypocritical for the man to get so emotional over the fact that he and Rey actually have emotions.

This place, this Academy, this whole fucking religion was so backward and counterintuitive and he hates it.

Just because this works for his uncle doesn’t mean that works for him. It didn’t work for his mom. She has the force but she chose to pursue something else. A life in politics and to have the freedom to start a family.

His childhood was spent in a lot of solitude because of the choices she and his father made, including the one that got him here in the first place. But if they had the freedom to choose, why not him? Because they didn’t trust him or they were afraid of what he could become?

There were times where he hated them for that. And then there were times where he was afraid of himself too. But now was different. Now he had Rey and he didn’t want to lose what they found. He wouldn't just submit to Luke’s demands and insistence to follow ancient teachings. This was his life. This was Rey’s life. They were practically adults. They should be able to make their own path.

He feels useless in his hut, pacing back and forth and he wants to rush into the temple, telling Luke exactly how he feels.

So he will, he decides. He marches out of the small structure and makes his way up the hill, ignoring how everyone clustered around in whispers, watching him warily. They could talk all they wanted. He didn’t care what they had to say.

But then he’s actively trying to block out Azmo and Nourdi’s voices calling to him.

“Oi! Solo! Come here,” Azmo says in a whispered tone but it projects across the field and Ben rolls his eyes.

He doesn’t say anything, determined to get up the hill.


Boris emerges in Ben’s path looking a little worried. “Luke looked really mad. Is she in trouble?”

Behind him, Ben hears Soldar chuckle. “Oh, she’s in trouble alright. Luke was more pissed than ever as he grumbled up the hill. That girl is done for...and whoever else was involved.” Soldar looks to Ben with a knowing look on his face. Ben wants to ignore it but he can feel himself getting upset and it starts to get to him.

“Were...Are you and Rey...together?” Boris asks him, stepping closer to Ben and looking up to him in shock, his nose twitching.

“Sh-She...I...We–” Ben stammers, caught off guard of what to say. He didn’t like to feel cornered.
Soldar lumbers closer and Xid stays close behind. “She was in your hut, wasn’t she?”

Ben didn’t like how Soldar sounded when he spoke about Rey. He knew the implication everyone was trying to make but Soldar sounded way too pleased. So he stops stammering and finds himself bursting. “That’s none of your business.”

“Ooooh,” Xid draws out with a smirk. “Solo, you really did it didn’t you?”

“Shut up!” Ben snaps at them.

They don’t and Soldar gets closer. “Damn, after all these years I took you for a freak, but damn…” he trails off, looking over his shoulder to Soldar with a laugh. “…looks like the desert girl finally got to you.”

“I said shut the fuck—” Ben’s furious response is interrupted by the sudden emergence of a sound. A sound growing louder and louder and the unmistakable hum of an incoming ship. His head snaps around looking beyond the sky of the temple to see a ship traveling low in the sky. They land in the field behind the temple.

“Who the hell is that?” Azmo shouts out.

“How did they get in?” someone else says but Ben isn’t quite tuned in. Whoever had come was headed for the temple and his stomach turns as his initial mission has returned. He pushes away from everyone that had crowded him and rushes up the hill.

He doesn’t know why, but something feels wrong. Something bad was coming.

He crashes through the front doors, calling her name. “Rey!”

He rushes through the halls looking for her and feeling panicked. She’s nowhere to be found. Not even Luke or R2 was around. So he rushes through to the other side, moving to where he heard the ship land. But at that door he sees BX standing there looking very worried.


“Th-They’re outside, Master Solo. But they’re not alone.”

Ben stomps forward, ready to barge through the second set of doors and see what the hell was going on, ignoring how all the other students are storming after him to do the same but then BX grabs him by the arm.

“Master Solo! No! Master Skywalker asked me to keep everyone away!”

“Let go of me, Beex!” Ben shrugs him off and pushes through the doors, finally seeing the ship that had landed…and the man that came with it.

He sees a large bulbous man standing with a cane at the bottom of a ramp speaking with Luke while Rey stood between them. Ben’s entire body is paralyzed for a moment as he realizes who it is.

It’s Plutt. He survived. And he’s here for Rey.

No, no, no, no, no.

“Rey!” he projects, sprinting down the hill to the ship.
“Ben!” she shouts back, her voice cracking as she moves to meet him but Plutt reaches out and holds her back.

“Stay here, girly,” he says in a voice Ben now knows is just as horrible as Rey's shared memories made it seem. Anger boils within him as he sees him grab Rey.

But it is nothing compared to how Luke stands there, blocking his way and holding out his arms, allowing this to all pass him by. “Ben, stop it! Go back to the temple.” Ben pushes through him, choosing not to hear his demand and heading straight for Rey but Luke holds him at bay. “Ben, I said to ’go back to the temple!’”

“No, you can't do this. You can’t do this just because you’re mad at me! I won’t let you send her back.”

“Ben, not everything is about you! Stay out of this.”

“No, I won’t let you.” Ben turns back around to face Rey and Plutt. She looks so afraid. So scared. And as Plutt grabs her by the arm again, pushing her closer to the ramp, he realizes the strange-looking binders around her wrists and neck.

*Force suppressants.*

She was getting arrested. She was getting taken back to Jakku and a sob breaks out of his throat.

*No. This can’t be happening.*

He turns to look back at Luke. “You can’t let this happen. What jurisdiction does a slave owner have on a free planet? What power does a slave owner have in the New Republic anyway? He's the one that should be getting arrested! This is bullshit! Tell him to let her go!”

Luke’s face remains unnervingly placid as he crosses his arms. “How did you know he was a slave owner?”

Ben opens his mouth to answer but he hears Rey call out to him from behind Plutt. “Ben,” she says in a warning tone, earning her another shove from Plutt.

He turns back to Luke, hoping he would see just how cruel this man was and fix something. But he just stares right at Ben. “You’ve known this whole time, haven’t you?” he whispers to him, low enough that the other students wouldn’t hear.

Instantly, Ben knows what he means. He’s talking about the man that was trying to hurt Rey that she killed. The man she *had* to kill. It’s what got her off Jakku and got her here and got his dad his ship back. So much has come from that. Depriving the galaxy of a filthy cretin like that was the kind of shit the Jedi should applaud, and yet Ben knew not to tell Luke. Maz knew Luke wouldn’t like it either. It was why Rey gave a false awakening story. Luke wouldn’t like it.

But Ben didn’t think it would be this bad of a reaction.

“She did what she had to do. You shouldn’t punish her for that. You can’t.”

“I am the Master of this Academy. I choose what is best for my students. And if I believe that they need to be separated to protect them from themselves, I will do so. If I discover that one of my students has committed a serious crime and lied to me, *repeatedly,*” he throws a look at Rey, “then I will deal with it as I see fit. And as far as you’re concerned, I suggest you stop talking and head back up to that temple.”
He shakes his head, fighting back the tears so he can see more clearly. So he can see Rey.

“If this is her punishment, if this is what you’re throwing her into, then I’m going with her.”

“Ben, damn it, stop! You’re not going anywhere!”

“If she goes, I go!” He repeats, louder.

Plutt grumbles behind him. “Knock it off, boy. I’m not running a charter service.”

“Ben,” Rey sobs out from behind him, but it almost sounds like a plea. Like he needs to stop. He faintly registers Luke yelling something else and the students have started an uproar of gossip and no longer quiet words. He only looks at her, trying to pretend all these horrible things weren’t happening.

“Rey,” Ben croaks out, his lip trembling. “Rey, what do I do?” he says, so quietly, he himself didn’t hear it. But somehow she still hears it. She knows what he’s asked.

She looks to him with tears in her eyes, looking so defeated. “I love you,” she says softly. So softly he doesn’t know how he could hear it over all the chaos. But it’s like he felt it rather than hearing it with his ears. This truth that sounded too much like a goodbye.

No. He didn’t want her to lose her courage. Her fiery spirit. Her need to survive has gotten her this far, why is she stopping now? Was it because of him? Was it really so hopeless? He didn't want to believe that. They could figure this out.

But what can be done? What can he do? How can he stop this and save her from going with a man who only wants to ruin her life and drag her back to the filthy sands of Jakku?

He doesn’t have his lightsaber, but he would easily have used it to slice Plutt down. A least with him gone, there would be no threat for Rey to leave.

But he’s unarmed and he’s furious and he only wants to keep Rey from this fate. So what can he do?

“Take me instead!” he demands of Plutt. “Take me instead of Rey. Please.”

“Ben!” Both Luke and Rey shout at once.

Plutt just laughs. “Taller and stronger you likely are, I have no ownership of you. For all I know, You’ve got parents that will come to whisk you away and then I’m back to square one. Back to not enough scavengers. Not that I’d take you anyway. Rey here is the one that committed the crime and can fit where most others can’t. It has to be her. And now that I’ve got her, I have no reason to be here, so I take my leave and my bounty and getting the kriff out of here” He looks to Luke then. “I suggest you get your students in line. When they turn against you, they can bust your legs!” he says with a chortle and knocking his braces with his cane and pushing Rey up the ramp.

“Rey!” Ben charges forward, following them anyway.

“Ben!” she cries out but suddenly Ben is stuck, frozen.

He knows it’s Luke, keeping him in place, unable to advance for her and take her in his arms or at the very least say goodbye.

His heart wrenches at the thought of having to say goodbye, but it ignites with rage as he realizes
he won’t get to do anything at all.

All he will be left to do is watch this ship leave with the girl he loves inside it, off to a planet that nearly killed her the first time she was there.

So he fights the strain his uncle has on him. He tries to break the invisible hold on him so that he might move and find a way to stop the ship. And for a moment he does, putting one foot in front of the other, trying to make his way to Rey who he can’t even see anymore. He’s blinded by his tears and the dizzying toll the force hold takes on his body, so much so that he can’t hear anything but a low hum in his ears.

And before he could get too far, he’s plummeting, crashing into the dirt as someone holds him down.

“Ben, stop! You’re going to hurt yourself,” he hears Boris’s voice.

“Get off me! I need to get to her!”

“Ben...sh-she’s gone,” he tells him, almost apologetically, moving off of him and backing up.

Ben refuses to believe it but as he cranes his head, he sees that Boris is right. The ship was already gone.

She’s gone and he didn’t save her.

*How did this happen?* He hopes more than anything this was just another horrible dream and she would wake him up with soft kisses and gentle touches. But it’s real. It’s painful and far too similar to the dream he had several weeks ago when Rey first started sleeping in his hut.

The one where she was taken away, he just didn’t know where. Well, now he knows.

No more would she come to him. No longer would he wake up to see her smile at him knowingly across the table or see her draw his ridiculous face in the sketchbook he gave her. She was gone.

Suddenly, the fire in his heart meets his gaze and his mind and he fumes with rage.

He spins around, looking to Luke. “How could you let him take her? What the fuck is wrong with you?” Ben screams louder than he ever has, his voice echoing out, projecting it everywhere. The sound of it makes the others back up, frightened.

They’re scared of him. Good.

“Ben, come with me. We’re going to discuss all of this but you need to stay calm.”

“Calm? Fucking calm? You just sent her off with a filthy slave owner, all because you’re trying to teach us a lesson?”

“Ben...” Luke warns. “I did what I did for your own good. And hers. If you want to discuss it further then you need to come with me into the temple. I won’t argue with you.”

“You let her go!” Ben sobs, ignoring Luke’s need to conceal this with the other’s watching.

“She lied to me! She killed somebody! That is not the Jedi way!”

Ben holds out his hand, summoning the lightsaber on Luke’s belt to his palm. As the hilt fits in his grasp, he ignites it, the green light glowing brightly in the night.
“Than what the fuck are these things for?”

Luke looks to him as if he were a stranger, holding out his hands for everyone else to stay back. “Ben...give that back to me.”

Ben ignores him. “Do you have any idea what that creature does to her? He beats her and starves her and treats her like shit. You didn’t even ask why she really had to kill that man. You don’t understand, she had to! That place is crawling with filthy creatures trying to kill her every day and you just willingly sent her away!”

“Ben! Damn it, put it down!” Luke screams this time.

“Fuck you!” Ben screams back.

And with that, Ben feels something strange start to come over him. A sudden haze. Heavy and insistent on dragging him down. He can’t stop it. He looks down at himself, curious as to why he couldn’t feel his legs and sees a small dart lodged in his thigh.

“Thanks, Artoo,” Luke says to the astromech which Ben hadn’t even noticed had rolled up beside him.

A sedative. *Fuck.*

Luke watches as Ben slumps to the ground in a massive heap. He summons his saber back to his hand before turning back to all of his students. “Alright, everyone. Show’s over. Back to bed.”

He turns back to look at Ben on the ground, seeing how Boris had gotten closer as if to make sure he was alright.

“She’s okay, Boris. Artoo is equipped to administer a mild sedative if anyone gets a little out of hand.” Luke forgot he had programmed the droid to do that. He never thought it would be necessary but apparently he was wrong.

“But, Master Skywalker…” the Chadra-Fan starts but Luke knows his face must give something away that makes him recoil, trailing off and standing back up, moving away with the rest to go back to his hut.

But Luke calls out to him before he gets too far away. “Boris, can you stop by the med bay and tell two-onebee to come and give me a hand?”

“Y-Yes, Master Skywalker,” he stammers, suddenly so nervous. Luke knows something has changed tonight. Much has now changed between not only him and his nephew, but there was also a lot his students have now witnessed. Now they would see him differently and he’s not sure how to feel about that.

But he saves his worry for another time. He’s far too exhausted.

So, for now, he looks down at Ben. The nephew he always thought of as a young boy suddenly didn't look so young anymore.

“Oh, Ben...what am I gonna do with you?”

Armitage settles back into his hut, lounging back onto his bed with a smile on his face.
He couldn’t have hoped for a better performance. Solo’s breakdown was downright legendary.

Unkar Plutt had been hard to track down but once they got in contact, it was clear that they both had something in common.

They both hated little Rey No Name.

But in Plutt’s case, he was looking to find her where Armitage was trying to get her lost. Fortunately, they could help each other out.

And trying to remain ahead of the obstacles, Armitage had taken precautions. He knew Luke took the school’s security very seriously and he also knew that as desperate as Plutt was to find Rey, he might not have had the technique to play along as Armitage needed him to.

So, he used a cloaked hologram that supplied an alternate visual image to his own and altered his voice enough that Plutt wouldn’t recognize it just in case he revealed to Luke how he managed to find Rey’s location in the first place.

But the brute managed to his way here and, by some strange miracle, sold his story well enough that Luke let him on school grounds. He must have revealed the video of Rey killing that man already.

Armitage had been very delighted to see that video. The perfect student image was ruined for young Rey. Rey who was now likely in hyperspace right now, heading back to that shit ball planet. And given how furious Luke was, any kind of hope he had for Solo was diminished. He knew just what he and the girl had really been up to.

Armitage had laid out his cards it was finally time to reap in the rewards.

He’s won.

Chapter End Notes

This is such a fucking mess!! I don't know if it even makes sense anymore so let me know if you have questions but it was literally killing me so I thought I would just publish it and go on with my Tuesday.

Writing this chapter was such a challenge and there must be four different unfinished versions sitting in my google drive. I've tried to visualize how I wanted this chapter to go for months now and I always had a vague idea of what I wanted but had a hard time making decisions.

That being said, I know that regardless of how this went, it was going to be upsetting because Rey had to leave and Luke is being a douche. I know this seems like such a cluster fuck right now but we're going to all take a breath and figure it all out, I promise.

We are hiking up Angst Mountain so try to remember your base camp training when you have heart palpitations and repeat to yourself: "They gots to be okay."

[EDIT: Tags still apply. There is NO rape. That does not happen to Rey, I promise! She is returning to be a scavenger and this will be expanded on in the next chapter. If
this is where you stop reading, I understand and I’m sorry. Although they are separated for now, they will find each other again and it will all be okay!}
Hi. I feel really weird about last chapter and it makes me a little self conscious about this one but whatever, yeet. Thanks if you're still reading.

Love you nerds<3!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Rey sat in the grimey co-pilot’s seat, trying to remain as vigilant as possible with Plutt not three feet away.

And her tears almost start all over again when she thinks of Ben. He had demanded she not be taken away, or to at least let him take her place instead. She would never want Ben to be subjected to living on Jakku. She loves him too much. But knowing he loves her just the same, she understands why he suggested what he did. He wanted to help her any way he could, even if that meant endangering himself.

But Luke didn’t want to hear any of that either.

Everything was beyond her control and she doesn’t understand why Luke acted the way he did.

She thought back to the words he had said. She needed to “atone” as he had put it, in ways where she couldn’t stay on Oquinn. And maybe she would have listened if he had been more understanding, but anything but sending her back to Jakku with the man who thought of her as nothing more than a tool. A scavenger. Property.

She shivers, afraid of what was going to happen to her. The whole reason she left the way she did was because Plutt tried to force her into a new line of work. He tried to force her into doing the work Katarina died from.

She wouldn’t let that happen. She would rather die.

So, she figures she will tell him that much outright.

“I don’t care about these cuffs and this collar,” she lies because she really did. They were extremely uncomfortable and the collar was way too tight and probably the thing keeping her sobs down. “They won’t stop me from giving everything I have to fight you and anyone else that tries to hurt me.”

Plutt grumbles over the controls. “Easy, girly. No need to get ahead of yourself.”

She frowns at him, confused. “What is that supposed to mean?”
He gives another groan and a sigh. “You’re going back to scavenging and only scavenging. I hate to admit it but I guess you were responsible for a substantial amount of my dependable haul. And honestly, after what the rest of the outpost saw you do, I doubt anyone is gonna want to get near you, least of all try to get with you.” He laughs then as if any of that had been funny. “Besides, I’m going to have to keep a much closer eye on you anyway, given how you treated me last time you were in my outpost.”

“What do you mean?” she asks quickly.

“I spent a lot of money to get those force restraints,” he points to her neck and to her hands. “I can take off the wrist binders but the collar stays on. I can’t have you pulling that same shit from earlier and killing everyone around.”

“I was defending myself! From someone you were going to make me go to!”

Plutt shrugs, unaffected. “That doesn’t change the fact that you killed the guy.”

Rey fumes, seeing red for a moment. She won’t apologize for killing him. She had to. She doesn’t care what Luke believes or what a “good Jedi” is supposed to do, she’s not going to feel guilty for something that saved her life.

They don’t say anything for a while and they just sit in the consuming silence with the blues and whites of hyperspace swirling past them.

Rey doesn’t understand. She thought everyone was trying to get off Jakku, maybe even Plutt. But he had found out where she was and traveled across the galaxy to bring her back. What was the point? Why go to the trouble? Why didn’t he just flee and make a new life for himself on a new planet?

“I don’t get it,” she says quietly, refusing to just go along with anything anymore. She is going to get answers where she wants them.

“What’s that, girly?”

“Why not just leave Jakku and go somewhere else? Why bother with me? Why come after me after all this time?”

Plutt huffs, annoyed. “Stick your nose someplace else.”

“No,” she says defiantly. “If you traveled across the galaxy to retrieve one slave and bring them back instead of killing them, then what’s the point?”

“Why did you take so long to get off Jakku?”

“Because I was a kriffing slave!”

Plutt shakes his head. “No. That thing you can do. That Jedi stuff, you probably could have done that anytime. You could have killed me a long time ago. But you didn’t. You were waiting around for something, weren’t you? I know you were ‘cause you used to cry about it when you was small and too hungry to scavenge.”

Rey scoffs, trying to hold back the tears. Feeling defensive she spits out, “Are you trying to tell me you’re waiting for your family to come back too? That’s why you own slaves and treat everyone so horribly.”
Plutt swats his hand in the air. “Oh, shut up. You don’t know nothing and I ain’t explaining nothing to you. You caused me more than enough trouble. Not just in my outpost but look at this,” he knocks against his leg braces. “Look at me! Crippled and fat and ugly. Where else can something like me go in this galaxy other than that outpost? That’s all I got and I won’t have you demeaning me. Especially when you had the chance to flee and you still fucked it up. You sure had Skyrunner upset when he found out you was a crazy maniac.”

“Shut up!”

“Watch it. This is me showing patience so don’t go making me mad or I’ll throw you in the brig until we get back to Niima.”

“That doesn’t sound so bad,” Rey says.

Plutt chuckles. “You say that, but this ship is weak and not suited for so much space travel. The brig’s hull is damn near paper-thin and held together with spit. I wouldn’t chance that if I were you.”

At this point, getting sucked out into space sounded preferable.

Luke stands a generous distance away from the exam table Ben was sleeping on. He hadn’t woken up from the sedative yet but he knew it would be soon.

He’s still trying to debate if he should be here when he wakes, knowing he was the last person Ben wanted to see.

Luke wasn’t a fool. He knows that went horribly. He knows Ben likely hates him right now.

And perhaps he had been too hasty and influenced by his own emotions to have made any kind of big decision like that. But he also knows that if he didn’t separate them, they would be putting themselves at tremendous risk.

He doesn’t quite know just what they have been up to and how far it got or how long it has been happening. He feels upset to think that Rey’s tutoring might have all just been some excuse for them to...actually, Luke doesn’t even want to think about it.

Ben should have known better. But Luke worries he may have influenced Rey to do those things with him.

And it wasn’t just that. But after Rey had been taken away, Ben had gotten so...aggressive. He was so furious and enraged that he summoned Luke’s lightsaber and he actually felt afraid of the boy then. The look on his face and the pain in his voice as he screamed out.

Whatever he and Rey shared, it was something Ben took very deeply. It was why he needed to stop it while he could. That level of devotion and need is too dangerous to get attached to. Possession of anything was risky when you fear it getting taken away. Those feelings are a quick and easy path to the dark side and when it came to Ben, that was Luke’s biggest concern.

Ben has always had something dark in him. It’s always been his conflict, warring with their bloodline that, Luke admits, might actually be cursed. That is why he really started this whole Academy so he could train him and anyone else who may have the Force within them. This entire temple was built in hopes of training a new age of Jedi, but the worried uncle side of him knew he
was building it in hopes of saving Ben from whatever lurked within himself.

And this kid hasn’t made it easy.

But as he looks at Ben now, his brow furrowed even in sleep, Luke feels as if he doesn’t know him at all. He’s always been so distant, even with the other students his age.

Until Rey came along.

Luke doesn’t know how he missed it. He should have suspected something earlier. But again, there was the side of him that was happy to see his nephew have a friend for once. But the true nature of their relationship was too intimate. If something went wrong, it would be the final push Ben needed to fall to the dark.

It was what drove his father to the dark. The premonition of his mother’s death drove him to submit to Palpatine.

He wouldn’t risk that with Ben. He couldn’t. So, it seemed best to just remove Rey entirely. He supposed it was not a selfless decision like Jedi are meant to make but he believes he acted in a way that was the most constructive to the training of his students. Not their feelings.

And the girl was smart. He has no doubt that she may return one day, having earned her freedom and answered for her crimes.

And when she does come back, hopefully, Luke will have taught Ben some control.

But that day was a long way off and currently, Ben won’t want anything to do with him.

“How much longer will this sedative keep him under?” He asks 2-1B who was attending to some screen on the other side of Ben’s motionless body.

“Given his mass, I would say another two hours or so.”

Luke nods. “Very well. I’m going to try to go on with the day,” he says looking to the chrono, realizing it was nearly morning and he needs to alert the students about what happened in the vaguest way he can even though he knows they heard pretty much everything last night. “Notify me when he wakes.”

“Yes, Master Skywalker.”

Luke takes one final look at the nephew who may as well be a stranger, wishing he knew what to do.

How does he help someone who doesn’t want help?

He supposes that for now, all he can do is protect Ben from himself as well as protect the other students. Ben wouldn’t be taking this well and Luke needed to keep a close eye on him to make sure he didn’t lash out like he did last night when he summoned his lightsaber to his hands.

Just then, as he steps back out into the open halls of the temple, he sees Boris sitting on one of the chairs that no one ever uses and he frowns.

“Boris? You should be in your hut. What are you doing here?”

“I just...I wanted to make sure everything was okay. Ben seemed...well, you know.”

“He’s fine. Just sleeping it off, like I told you.”
“Yes, I know but it still...I don’t know. I couldn’t sleep so I thought I’d wait here. I’m sorry, Master, if I–”

Luke holds up a hand. “No. You didn’t do anything wrong. It’s fine. It’s natural to be concerned about your classmates.”

“They’re my friends,” Boris clarifies.

Luke thinks that Boris and Ben would have been unlikely companions but thinks that the young Chadra-Fan was just trying to be nice.

“Boris, can you do me a favor?”

“Uh, yes, sir?” He sounded unsure but Luke asks him anyway. He didn’t really want to go back down to the huts or look inside the place where he previously saw Rey and Ben tangled on his bed unclothed.

“I need Rey and Ben’s lightsabers brought to me. Can you go to their huts and retrieve them for me?”

“You’re confiscating Ben’s lightsaber?”

“Yes,” Luke answers briefly, not wanting to divulge too much.

“Alright. I’ll be back in a moment.”

“I’ll be taking them to the vault so meet me downstairs when you come back up.”

“Yes, Master Skywalker.”

Boris Rowa-Que knew he was not the most attuned to the force or that he was even remotely the star pupil of Luke Skywalker’s Academy for Jedi in training. But that didn’t stop him from enjoying every day and feeling grateful for having a chance to train among so many other talented people. And to train with Luke himself. The legend!

And in the handful of years that Boris had been at the school, he had never doubted Luke for his actions or choices. He thought that Luke was an incredibly smart man. Brave and courageous. He was everything that Boris wanted to be. His hero as a boy and now his teacher! It was sometimes too good to believe.

But last night was the first time that Luke had planted doubt in his mind. The first time that he looks at his Master as someone who was capable of making mistakes. Bad mistakes.

He tried to tell himself that he didn’t have the whole story. From what he could gather, it sounded like Rey had killed a man on Jakku before she arrived and Luke was upset that she had lied about it. Boris wasn’t sure of the circumstances about it but Ben seemed to think that if Luke let her leave, she would be in extreme danger. And given the state of the man and saying how Rey was a slave, Boris was inclined to believe Ben. He didn’t think Rey should have been anywhere near that man.
Which led to the other issue. One that Boris admittedly had suspected before.

Ben and Rey’s relationship.

Ever since he arrived at this Academy, Boris seemed to understand, as did most of the other students, that Ben just wanted to be alone. He carried a lot on his shoulders. He shared the same bloodline as Luke and his mother Leia. And he was the son of the infamous Han Solo! It was the kind of background that Boris had dreamed of. But the more he got to know Ben, the more he realized that maybe he shouldn’t envy him. Ben never got along with Luke or his parents and at first, Boris thought he was being ungrateful and rude. But the more years they had been here, and the more parent’s nights where neither Han or Leia showed up, Boris realized that Ben had a lot more going on than he expected.

Which is why Boris had been so surprised at how close he and Rey were. Ben usually stayed clear of everyone, but not with Rey. He sat with her every day and sometimes when Boris glanced over, he would see how Ben would look at her.

Ben looked at Rey like she was...well, like she was everything.

Boris kept his suspicions to himself, somewhat glad to see that something had changed in Ben. But he didn’t know if it was real or just something he imagined. If it was real, then he figures it was their business, not his. Even if he knew that they weren’t allowed to have connections like that.

But then last night had changed things. It seemed he was right about that after all. Ben and Rey were together. Or at least had been together.

Before Luke sent her away.

Regardless of how upset he might have been about them being with each other, Boris couldn’t believe that Luke actually let that foul looking crolute take Rey away. In force suppressant binders!

It was barbaric!

And then Ben was horrified, screaming and crying. Boris tried to help him but he had been so furious and driven by anger and then summoned Luke’s lightsaber, igniting it and looking ready to strike anyone down that kept him from getting to Rey.

It had kept him awake all night.

And he wanted to talk to Luke about it but he couldn’t quite find the words. He felt almost afraid of him, knowing that he actually sent Rey away. Rey!

Rey was so kind and so powerful. In the short time she had been at the Academy, she’s proved to be one of the best students and that still didn’t sway Luke. He still let her get taken away. It was concerning and Boris wasn’t sure how to act around the person he usually looks up to as an icon.

So, that’s how he finds himself running his errands instead, heading down the hill to retrieve Ben and Rey’s lightsabers that would be going into the vault until they can be returned to their owners.

Boris really hopes that Rey can come back one day. The thought of her back on Jakku, although he didn’t know much about the planet, sounded horrible.

He goes to Ben’s hut first, looking to the bed where apparently they had been caught. The sheets were rumpled the pillows still had impressions from two bodies. Boris looks away, feeling like he’s invaded in on their privacy, even if they weren’t even there anymore. He finds Ben’s
lightsaber on the desk and quickly leaves, feeling guilty for some reason, quickly making his way to Rey’s hut.

As he steps inside the small space, he approaches her desk, picking up the lightsaber left behind.

And laying open there beside it is an open sketchbook. And within it is a very true rendering of Ben, beautifully done.

Ben was portrayed with a soft smile on his face and flowers in his hair and behind his ears.

Boris has never seen Ben look so at ease or so happy. Ben had always seemed so uncomfortable with himself. Within the first year that they arrived, Ben had been the once who seemed to grow another inch every month. He was tall and gangly and always seemed unsure of himself. Something that had changed slightly but Boris always noticed about him.

But in this drawing, Ben looks comfortable and serene. He doesn’t look like the boy who used to eat alone or stomp out into the woods in the middle of class because he was angry. He looked like the kind of Ben that Boris always thought he should be.

And he can tell how Rey genuinely sees Ben as beautiful and portrayed him as so.

*They must have really loved each other,* Boris thinks to himself.

He feels as if he’s invaded their space again, so he closes the sketchbook and moves away, holding the two lightsabers in his hands.

They don’t belong to him, so they don’t have the same feel to them that his own lightsaber has. But he can’t deny the strange energy that he feels within them. He’s held a few of his friends lightsabers and could tell how all of them felt different and attuned to whoever built it.

But these two were different. They felt so similar. Almost magnetic, like if he brought them close enough, they would fuse together.

Curious, he tries that but nothing happens and he shakes his head, feeling foolish and tired.

And he is genuinely worried for Rey wherever she was, as well as Ben who was going to feel so broken when he finally woke back up.

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Ben feels groggy. He knows he’s awake but he still feels like he could be sleeping. But there’s a bright light above him and even with his eyes closed, it seems to blind him. So he tries to sit up or turn away. His head was killing him.

He has a horrible lingering feeling in his stomach and he feels how he does when he wakes after a horrible dream. Frantic and confused and uncomfortable in his own skin. Like he’s trapped in himself and can’t do anything about it.

Rey? Where was Rey?

That was the first question to emerge in his mind and that was all he needed to shoot up and open eyes.
“Rey!” he croaks out but as he spins all around, he falls off an exam table and face-first onto the floor. He was in the med bay. Why was he in the medbay?

“Master Solo!” he hears BX call out and suddenly the droid is rushing forward and trying to help him off the floor. “Master Solo, please move slowly. You need to readjust after sleeping off the sedative.”

The sedative. Of course. He remembers everything now. He remembers Luke walking into his hut and finding him and Rey on his bed. He remembers hearing the engines approaching the temple. It was Plutt's ship and he had come for Rey.

And he will never forget how Luke, his uncle, let Rey get taken away.

His lip trembles as he thinks of her, frightened and alone and probably on her way back to the place she had been imprisoned on for most of her life.

“Master Solo, don’t cry. It’s alright,” BX tells him, patting his back. “All will be okay.”

“It’s not okay, Beex!” Ben sobs, standing up from the ground but feeling like the weight of the entire atmosphere is suddenly so heavy as he staggers against the table.

“I know you must be worried about Madam Rey. Admittedly, I am too. But she is very smart and very strong. I’m sure she’ll be alright.”

Ben doesn’t really care about what the droid has to say. BX is trying to make it seem like things aren’t so bad, but they are and Ben doesn’t want to hear anything of the sort. He knows it’s meaningless.

Fuck, he feels sick. His hands are shaking and he can’t really breathe. He needs to find her. He needs to be with her. He told her she wasn’t alone and he meant it.

But now they are both alone and although he tried so hard to keep her here, he feels so guilty. He feels like he lied to her. Like he’s failed her. He’s let her down.

And now she’s gone.

Yeah, he definitely feels sick.

Quickly, he ducks around and vomits into a small bin beside the table. He can still hear BX talking but he thinks he might be speaking to 2-1B who has suddenly emerged.

His throat burns, now just dry heaving. He’s blinded by the tears in his eyes and he doesn’t think he’s ever felt so bad.

“Master Solo? Can you hear me?” Ben hears 2-1B ask. He nods but still doesn’t look at him. He feels so dizzy and if he opens his eyes he might just vomit again.

“Master Solo, you’re in a bit of a shock. Just try to calm down alright?”

“Fuck,” he breathes out, at a loss. How the hell was he supposed to calm down? He brings his hands to his face and it’s then that he realizes he’s shaking.

“Master Solo, try to sit back and relax. You need to take slow and steady breaths. Beex, try to help him back, I’m going to notify Master Skywalker that he has awakened.”

“Of course,” BX answers calmly.
“No!” Ben snaps out. “I’m not fucking talking to that prick.”

“Master Solo!” 2-1B says, shocked. “You shouldn’t speak like that!”

“I don’t care! He let Rey go!” He cries. The truth of it crashes against him once more and he cries once more. “He let her go,” except this time it’s more of a whisper. A pathetic whine that made him sound like such a child. But he doesn’t care about what he sounds like or how much his throat burns or how panicked he felt. It was nothing compared to whatever Rey must be going through and how much her heart must be breaking.

BX says something that is probably meant to be comforting but Ben doesn’t hear it. He rises from where he was slumped over and makes to his feet.

He feels so vulnerable and wrong and he just wants to get away. So he ignores BX and 2-1B’s calls and rushes out of the medbay.

He steps out into the hallway and sees how the sunlight was streaming in. It was the next day and already he can hear other voices echo through the temple’s halls.

He doesn’t care about them. He doesn’t care if they all know or how they must see the tears on his face as he races by.

“Is that him?”

“Holy shit, there he is!”

Voices gossip and whisper and call out to him but he keeps going.

He doesn’t know what to do or where to go, knowing he doesn’t have a ship. He can’t get off Oquinn.

So, he goes the only place he can think of, hoping to get away from all of this.

He runs to their beach, thinking it might help him calm down.

But it doesn’t, and suddenly the place he’s come to love so much, this place for just him and Rey, doesn’t have the same energy it did before. Like this place itself knows that she was gone and everything is at a standstill and it’s grown weary.

“Oh, Rey,” he cries out. “I’m so sorry.” He’s still shaking. “I’m so sorry, sweetheart.”

Ben stays there all day.

He tried to meditate for a while, reaching out for her and trying to find her but he couldn’t. Her energy was nowhere to be found and it made him cry even harder.

So, now hours pass and he just lays there in the sand, looking out to the water she loves so much and thinking of the day he first taught her how to swim. It had been the first time that they got so close to each other, leading up to the end of the day where he hugged her so closely and almost gave in to the temptation to kiss her.

He’s spent all day trying to think of what to do. Trying to think of how the fuck he gets away from here to go after her, but he would be shot with another sedative or dragged by the droids at the
security gates before he even got started. And there was no ship readily available at the Academy. Luke has some ships prepared for evacuation purposes but they’re on lockdown at the security gates as well. By now, Luke likely knows how desperate he feels and has all the security droids and regulators on extra alert. An escape attempt now would just mean that tomorrow morning he would wake up just like he did today.

Crying and almost shitting himself as reality sinks in as he staggers off an exam table after R2 spikes him again.

*Fucking droids.* He’s had it with everything.

The suns set and night cloaks the beach. He tries not to think of the next string of memories that come to mind. The ones where he and Rey would come here after light’s out when it was dark just like this. How it seemed like he could never get close enough. How her hands were so small but could somehow hold him so completely.

Just then, Ben hears a twig snap in the forest behind him. He doesn’t turn. He doesn’t sit up. Even if it was that fucking Marmaw, he might let it eat him. But it’s not.

He reaches out and senses how it’s his uncle, trying to keep his distance. Maybe even watching him for who knows how long. And still, Ben doesn’t care. He’s not going to even look at the bastard.

“What the fuck do you want?” Ben spits out, facing forward.

“I’m making sure you’re not dead.”

“I might as well be.”

“Ben,” Luke says his name in a tone that Ben has heard so many times. It’s how he says his name when he thinks Ben is overreacting.

“No!” Ben sits up, still refusing to look at him and staring out at the ocean. But that doesn’t mean he can't yell at him. “No, I’m not going to let you try and pretend like I’m being irrational, or that I’m the one who fucked up. You did this! This is your fault!”

“Maybe I wouldn’t have to resort to such methods if you would just be honest with me!”

“Oh, you mean if I told you flat out about how I felt for her? You would have taken that better if I scheduled an appointment with you instead?” Ben scoffs sarcastically. “You never would have fucking respected it or even thought about how we feel. You probably still would have found a way to get rid of her even if that kriffing psycho didn’t track her down.”

“That’s not what I meant.”

Ben doesn’t follow up. He can feel himself getting upset again. His throat tightens once more, a sure sign that he’s going to cry again and he doesn’t want to do it in front of Luke.

He hears the old man walk closer, maybe even sitting behind him in the sand and looking out at the ocean too.

“I meant that you knew that she killed somebody. You knew about it and you didn’t tell me. After I trusted you with the task of training her. To which you not only concealed information, but you then engaged with her in the most inappropriate way imaginable. You never think about the consequences, not just for you but for her too. For all I know, you could have taken advantage of
Taken advantage of her? Ben repeats back in his head, furious and outraged at the implication. This fucking asshole...

Ben stands up then, finally facing his uncle. His hands curl into fists and he wants so badly to hurt him. To hurt Luke as Luke has hurt him. But what good what that do him now? What good is it to be the problem child Luke thinks he is?

Hitting him wouldn’t save Rey, and that’s all that mattered.

“You must really think I’m a monster, don’t you? You want so badly to believe that all that bad stuff, all that shit from our family, lives in me. Then you’d finally have a good excuse for hating me the way you do, wouldn’t you? And don’t try to deny it. I know you hate me! If you didn’t, you wouldn’t have sent her away! You would have listened for two fucking seconds and thought about what you were doing. But instead, you sent her away, back there! To that place!”

Luke doesn’t say anything. He almost looks dead as he stares at Ben, finally letting him talk but obviously not really hearing him. Like he will discredit everything he says and revert back to whatever truth he wants to believe.

“You don’t trust me. None of you ever have. You. Mom and dad. You’re all afraid of me or something. You all think I’m going to end up like him. But none of you know me. None of you ever fucking listen. And none of you ever thought to ask me if this is what I really wanted.”

“Ben, you had so much power. You needed to learn control. You still do!”

“But that doesn’t mean I wanted to be a Jedi. That didn't mean I wanted to be like you!”


“I want to be with her!” he screams so loud that his voice bounces back to him as it echoes off the rocks around the cove.

Luke is quiet for a moment, considering this carefully before he answers. “You don’t know what you want, Ben.”

Ben shakes his head. “Fuck you.”

Luke ignores him. “You don’t know what you want and it’s my job as your teacher, as your uncle, to protect you from what you don’t understand, even if that means protecting you from yourself. If you give in to these feelings for Rey, there’s no telling to the tragedy it may cause.”

Ben closes his eyes, trying to breathe. Luke still wasn’t listening. He never would. It was pointless and Ben wasn’t in the mood.

He was too exhausted.

So he marches past the old man in the sand and back towards the temple. He was going to bed and he doesn’t even bother telling Luke. Luke seems to stay behind anyway.

Ben knew he wouldn’t be sleeping and instead he would just be strategizing about how the hell he was going to get out of here and get to Rey. And although he’ll probably come up with nothing and lay crying into a pillow, it was better than having to look at Luke. The man was dead to him.
Ben walks past his own hut and strolls straight into Rey’s instead, kicking off his boots and curling up on her bed, finding scarce traces of her there. It’s faint. Probably because she seldom slept in her bed these past few weeks, but he can still find her here.

Before he shuts off the light, he summons her sketchbook from the desk to his hands, holding it like he used to clutch a tooka doll in the night: tightly pressed against his chest. If this is the closest he could get to her, he would take it.

And as he cries into her pillow, as he predicted he would, suddenly his spine chills with fear as he hears something he hasn't heard in years.

*He thinks you’re a disgrace. A mistake. An embarrassment!*

It’s the voices. The ones he heard in his youth. The ones Rey heard too. She told him not to listen.

“Go away!” he covers his ears with his hands.

*He thinks you have Vader in you. You do! Prove it. Strike him down. Kill him. Kill them all!*

It asks him to be the monster Luke believes him to be. To be the next Vader that his family was always afraid he would become.

It’s terrifying.

There was a time, not too long ago, that Ben thinks he might have given in. He might have believed this voice and done anything it asked. Anything to claim that legacy of something he should have been ashamed of.

But Rey had heard these voices in his memories. She knew they were dangerous. She begged him to tell her if he ever heard them again. And now, the day after she’s been taken, they return. When he was at his weakest did they reemerge.

And if she were here, he would tell her. He would tell her they were back and she would hold him close and tell him she was there and to fight them off. To push it away.

Because as much as he hates Luke right now, he knows he wouldn’t kill him. He can’t. And he won’t listen to this voice.

Before Rey, he might have believed it. He might have allowed it to break him down and given in. He might have allowed it to consume him as he struck down the Academy.

But not now. Now he knows he doesn’t need to believe that. He knows he could be strong. He could be strong for her and for himself. For a better life, away from here, away from fear. Away from these voices stuck inside his head. Even if he doesn’t know just how he’s going to do it yet.

He tries to drown them out, thinking of everything he can feel from Rey within this small space. What he can’t sense he tries to remember. Of her words, of her touch, of her hair, of her eyes, of her body, of her love.

And for now, it’s enough to finally get some quiet. The invasive presence and sinister voice is gone but the effort of pushing them away leaves him exhausted and aching.

So, he finally succumbs to sleep, still clutching her sketchbook like his life depended on it.

And something in his gut tells him that it probably did.
Whelp, a mess as always. There was a bunch of stuff I was going to say here but I can't remember any of it so I may come back later and address it. Or if you have any questions let me know.

I realize that this story isn't super fluffy in general but thank you so much for reading and allowing me to put you through shit like this for you to still come back. I really do love you nerds<3!!

And although it’s angsty as hell right now and seems pretty bleak, they’re going to find each other soon and it’s going to be sooner than you think. Hold in there, peeps.
Wave of Mutilation

Chapter Notes

Sorry, this took so long. School is kicking my ass this semester! This is another one of those chapters where I could go back and forth forever and tweaking little things but I really want to get this posted so I can get back in the groove of things so, as always, yeet!

Although I’ve been planning for this story and I have (almost) everything worked out and where it’s headed, for some reason, it takes me forever and it’s driving me a little crazy. I don’t know. I probably made this too long of a story and put too much thought into making it angsty and dramatic but whatever. This is the way it is so I’m sticking to it. Sorry for the rant, but I appreciate all of you who are still reading and being patient with me, even after putting you through this shit show.

I promise it’s all going to work out.

Oh, and I love you.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Rey hopes this might be one of those never-ending dreams. The ones where you could never be sure if it was real or not but you would always wake eventually, flooded with relief.

But she has yet to wake up, and the longer it goes on, she knows she’s just kidding herself.

This was real. This was her life.

They arrived back on Jakku much sooner than she had expected, or perhaps that was all apart of humoring herself as well. The longer the trip, the more distance between her and this loathsome planet there was, then it could still be fixed.

But she was back.

It was hot. Hotter than she remembers or at least was used to in the months she had been gone.

It’s strange to think that this was all ordinary to her not so long ago, but the time she spent at the Academy felt like another lifetime. It reminded her of how she and Ben had seen each other’s memories sometimes. Sometimes she felt like her time at the Academy was just a string of memories from someone else entirely. Certainly not her. She wasn’t that lucky.

This, her current situation, was more what she should have expected and she wonders why she bothered getting her hopes up that things had changed for the better.

Her speeder had either been sold or stripped for parts, Plutt doesn’t remember. So, for quicker transportation, he tells her she can loan a small speeder to bring back a reliable haul.

But she doesn’t go scavenging at first. She heads back to the AT-AT, expecting her home for so many years to be in ruin.
And it is.

Everything has been stripped from the frame. Had she not seen the familiar and distinctive bodywork, she may have ridden by it completely. But she knows these sands so well and she wouldn’t have gone far before she realized what was missing.

She takes a moment walking along the remains. Most of it is junk and she can see why no one had been desperate enough to claim it yet. But then she sees a rather large steel panel that she thought might have been beneficial to someone.

That is until she walks closer and sees that it’s one of the panels she had scratched thousands of tallies into.

Her lip trembles. A cruel reminder of all the days long past. The tallies she made every day of her life had been the equivalent to the suppressant collar she wears now. Both kept her on Jakku although for many different reasons.

The first restraints she had were really of her own design.

Rey feels so stupid. It’s like a slap in the face, seeing how years of her life recorded on this panel ended up pulled apart and left behind in the sand, just like her. The imagery was everywhere and she feels so foolish to know that it’s been here all the time. Somehow she just managed to lie to herself for so long.

She hates it here. It makes her stomach twist and she needs to leave. And she will, she decides. She doesn’t care if what she did was considered wrong. She doesn’t care about atoning in Luke’s ways of becoming a Knight. She just needs to get off this planet and, hopefully, find Ben.

But she brings a hand to her neck, feeling the metal of the collar. Sand is trapped between the device itself and her skin, making it incredibly uncomfortable.

She fiddles with for a moment, finally out of Plutt’s sight, trying to figure out how it worked.

Wherever he got it, she doesn’t think they’re exactly state of the art. If she could somehow figure out how to deactivate it, then she could still be wearing it as Plutt demands but she could regain access to the force that she could use to escape again.

It’s risky and stupid and she’ll probably electrocute herself in the process but she doesn’t care. It gives her the faintest glimmer of hope that she should know better than to give into.

But she realizes that what kept her alive her the first time was the thought that someone was coming back for her, to take her away.

This time she would have to motivate herself and keep herself going. It was the only way she could really stay alive. If you don’t value your life in the sands, there’s nothing keeping you from getting killed.

She thinks of Ben, then. Her heart aches as she thinks of the look on his face when she last saw him.

If she gets off this planet, that future she’s dreamed with him still lives. There was still a chance. She had to believe that.

So, trying to fight the tears that had emerged in her eyes, she imagines herself in another time, in another place where she and Ben could live out that life they spoke distantly of not so long ago.
She will see him again. She believes that. And she hopes, more than anything, that he believes that too.

As she rides back to the outpost, or really anywhere in search of shelter, she can’t stop the tears that fly into her hair.

She knows he’s worried about her, but she can’t help but be worried about him. She hopes he’s okay.

She thinks back to that day he taught her how to swim. Before they went back to the shore, she had thought it would be funny to give him a scare by hiding beneath the water and jumping out. It was meant to be a joke, but he had gotten so worried. She’ll never forget the look of panic on his face when he thought something had happened to her. And that was when she had been fine.

She can’t imagine what he must be feeling now or how he might have acted. For one boy, there was so much he kept stored inside him and she was frightened what might happen if it were to all flood out at once. At the very least, she hopes he hasn’t hurt himself.

Ben sat in the mess hall at their usual table. He stares at the spot she’s supposed to be and his throat tightens.

He didn’t want to come up to the temple at all but eventually, his hunger won out and he figured that if he was going to get out of here, he needed to at least keep himself going...even if he had no idea how he was going to do that.

He doesn’t have much of an appetite but his stomach growls loudly, desperate for anything whereas his mind is desperate for something else.

He wants to eat quickly so that he could get out of there. In fact, he tried to get there early just to evade everyone else, but he’s having a hard time just chewing and keeping his food down as he thinks of how foolish he’s being.

Here he was unable to eat the food right in front of him when Rey was probably starving right now.

His lip trembles and he tries to keep it under control, glancing up to see if anyone was looking at him.

And for the most part, they have pointedly turned away, pretending as if he weren’t there. But then he catches Boris’ eyes and halts. The Chadra-Fan was looking right at him and seemed a little shocked that Ben was now staring back.

Ben looks down at his food, not sure what to do. After a moment, he glances once again to see if he was still looking to find Boris watching him with nervous eyes and a just a nervous smile.

Ben doesn’t smile back, not sure what Boris had to smile about and looks back down. If anything, it helps him quicken his pace as he tries to finish his food so he could get out of there.

He doesn’t think Luke will try to cross paths with him right now. His uncle seems just as resolved to keep him out of the common circles and away from everyone as Ben himself seems to be, although for different reasons.

So he manages to get down what he can, keeping his eyes shut, ignoring the taste as well as the sounds around him.
That is until he hears Rey’s name from behind him.

“Honestly, of all people that turned out to be a murderer, I did not expect that from Rey. I would sooner suspect an Ewok,” Hux says, making all his friends laugh. Ben’s fists curl and his teeth clench as he tries to tell himself to block it out.

Hux was speaking loudly and more obnoxious than usual. Ben knew this was all Hux just trying to get to him. He shouldn’t let him. He won’t let it get to him. Hux isn’t worth it.

“You know, for a girl so reserved, you’d think she would value the sanctity of innocence a little more. Instead, it turns out she was the one killing people before she got here.”

Immediately, Ben stands up and turns around, unable to ignore it and marches over to Hux’s table. But Hux’s smile just grows wider. “Oh, Ben! We’re so glad you came. You looked a little lonesome over there,” Hux says with a false sentiment. “Sit down. We were just discussing something rather interesting. It’s a matter of our dear friend Rey who has recently departed.” Hux holds a hand to his chest as if it ached.

“Stop it, Hux,” Ben says. It’s stupid but he isn’t capable of doing much else that also keeps his hands at his sides.

“Oh, you sound a little upset there, Solo. Try not to worry yourself. I’m sure she is quite alright. She was rather formidable after all. And as you know, it is dangerous for a Jedi, even one in training, to be so affected by something. It is best to keep your mind clear.”

Hux stands up, slowly walking towards him. There are so many things Ben wants to say and needs to say, but it gets trapped in his throat. He battles with his head. Part of him screams to punch him senseless and tell him what a cretin he was. Another part told him it wasn’t worth his time. And he only heeded it because that voice sounded a lot like Rey.

“You know that is what makes the Jedi so remarkable...innocence.” He gestures to all the students in the room, “We denounce attachment, emotions…intimate relationships. It’s our virtue that makes us who we are. Our vow of celibacy is crucial and I know Rey took that very seriously, just as much as the rest of us.”

“What are you doing?” Ben asks harshly, treading as carefully as he can.

“Just speculating. You see, if she was involved with another in ways she shouldn’t be, I think we would know. I think whoever she cared for would have gone absolutely ballistic when she was taken away. Gods, he probably would have screamed to the skies, chanting her name. Who knows, maybe even turned a lightsaber on Master Skywalker.”

Ben steps forward, blinded by his rage when suddenly he feels a stern hold on his arm. He turns to see Boris standing there, holding him back.

“Ben, ignore it. He’s just trying to rile you.”

Ben knows Boris is right. He knows he should listen. But Hux keeps talking.

“Why does this all sound so familiar?” Hux holds a hand to his chin. “I feel as if I’ve met this boy. So broken-hearted and obvious with his childish affections. Does anyone fit that description?” He looks to his table behind him but his friends aren’t laughing anymore. They actually look worried.

But it doesn’t phase Hux in the slightest.
“I suppose if there was a soul so weak to have felt anything for her, I would advise that he put it all behind him, especially now that we know who she really is,” he laughs. “All this time and she was nothing but a filthy urchin from Jakku. Starving for company as much as food.”

Ben shrugs Boris off as well as he can but now he feels more hands grabbing him and keeping him away, trying to turn him around towards the door. Keeping him from advancing on him. “Hux! Shut up!” one of them yells out.

“Stop it, Armitage! You got a death wish?” Someone from Hux’s own table calls to him.

Hux ignores it all and smirks as he finally says. “I wonder what kind of affections a murdering desert whore would seek out?”

That did it.

With a roar, Ben rips forward, everyone holding him back slumping to the floor. A mix of physical strength and his hold on the force giving him an advantage. Quickly, he strides to Hux who has shrunk down in fear as Ben swings his fist, crashing it upon the prick’s face.

He pays no attention to the pain in his knuckles or the screams of everyone around him. For that brief moment, all that matters is that he punched the fucker in the face for what he said about Rey.

But then that moment passes and he’s left standing aimlessly in a place he no longer belongs.

Everyone looks to him as if he was the Marmaw from the cave. As if he was going to strike wildly at them next.

He didn’t trust himself not to.

So he speeds away, heading for the exit and sprinting into the forest. He isn’t sure he’s gone far enough by hardly cares as he starts punching the tree madly, visualizing a mix of Hux and Luke as his knuckles hit the bark. He lets the pain carry the burden of all his feelings so his heart doesn’t have to.

It doesn’t make a difference. He stills cries helplessly to himself.

Rey is awkwardly hunched over a small table, trying to contort herself to see the mechanisms of the collar in a tiny mirror hanging on the makeshift wall.

E’di, the older scavenger woman she spoken to only a handful of times, had found her looking for shelter. And although everyone liked to keep to themselves on Jakku, E’di has offered to let her stay with her until she found something else. She said that she wouldn’t sleep a wink if she knew Rey was outside and roaming for a place to sleep with no supplies.

Rey thanked her into oblivion until it was clear that E’di had enough of talking and they were silent for hours until E’di said she was going to get some rest.

But Rey didn’t bother trying. She knew sleep would not come easy and she wouldn’t lie there feeling sorry for herself. So instead, she went straight to work of trying to figure out how the collar was keeping her force sensitivity dormant.

She’s already nicked her skin a few times trying to pry with the metal but for the most part ignores it. She had to keep moving forward.
She’s been fiddling with the locking mechanism forever but it doesn’t cooperate. She finally thinks she has it when the tweezers fall and she practically growls in frustration. Tears blur her eyes as she starts to lose all patience and focus she had sustained.

She grabs the bluntest object she can find and just ends up jabbing a thin tool into the mechanism with no success. Nothing happens. It was a last resort and an act of frustration as she slumps forward, finally letting her tears finally fall.

But then the device makes a low beeping noise at the hasty movement and suddenly, despite the clutch of the collar around her neck, she doesn’t feel the same restriction on the force in her body.

She doesn’t trust it at first, assuming she’s just getting ahead of herself.

But it’s like a sudden rush flows through her. A great breath of air after being underwater for too long. The pounding pain in her head recedes slightly as she centers herself and knows that something has changed.

Perhaps she deactivated it already and now she just had to find a way to get it off. It seemed old and rusty so it likely just got stuck.

Rey begins to study it, about to try and summon the force to break it open when she feels something else. Something very familiar and yet entirely new.

And it arrives accompanied by sobs, but they are not her own and by the sound of it, certainly not E’di.

Suddenly she thinks back to a night in Ben’s tent where she had awakened him from a nightmare. It sounded a lot like that. Too much like it, in fact.

Frozen where she stands, she starts to realize that she is not alone. Slowly, she turns around to see the large huddled form on the ground, trembling with fired and sobs.

She can’t breathe. She can’t believe it. But she would know that hair anywhere, along with those broad shoulders, and those big ears poking out ever so slightly.

Perhaps it was a mirage. A hallucination. Rey expects her dehydrated and exhausted mind would torture her like this, but she can’t find the restraint to care. She wants to know.

He hasn’t turned, so she walks forward quietly, her palm held out, anxious to feel for herself if she will find the warmth of him or if she’ll walk right through him like the vision he must be.

But then her palm is settled firmly against his back. Heat from his skin melds with hers and she knows it’s not a mirage. She knows it’s really him...even though she doesn’t know how.

At her touch, he stops crying and his head lifts slowly. Yes, he feels it too.

Driven by the hope of seeing his face, she breathes out, as well as she can without a sob overtaking her voice, his name.

“Ben?”

Chapter End Notes
Force bond, bitches!!!
Bonded

Chapter Notes

This chapter is shorter than my usual ones but I wanted to publish something after taking so long to update.

YEET!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He had forfeited from punching away at the tree as he had been blinded by his tears and winded by his sobs. He felt like a child, alone and afraid and just wishing for comfort. Wanting for nothing but to just feel her in his arms again.

So he had collapsed to the sand, drowning in the stinging pain from his now bloody knuckles and trying to pretend he could be more numb than he really was.

But then something changes. Something in the air feels different as if the sound of the tide or the sway of the trees has silenced. An eerie stillness surrounds him and he feels like everything might have stopped although he could still see for himself it was there.

But it evolves, and it morphs from a feeling of fear to one of sanctuary, even if he doesn’t know why and he tries to slow his sobs so he could figure it out.

Before he can, Ben feels a warm hand on his back. It’s gentle and comforting in a way no one at the Academy would treat him. No one but Rey.

And as he catches up with his surroundings, he wonders if he’s really lost it because he swears he could feel her. He hears a gasp at the contact on his back, and it wasn’t him. A sound of similar disbelief to his own. Because it couldn’t be her. It couldn’t be.

But then he hears her breathe out his name. “Ben?”

And he breaks. He doesn't care if it isn’t real, he has to know. He spins around, his sobs caught in his throat as he sees Rey crouched before him with silent tears running down her face.

He hears a strangled noise escape his throat as he frenzies to wrap himself around her, pulling her to him.

She clings to him tightly as he brings her into his lap, as close as they can get. Both of them are crying and running their hands everywhere to assure themselves this was real.

“Rey?” he finally croaks out. She certainly feels real. “Rey, oh my god, you're...” He pulls back just enough to take her face in his hands, looking into her eyes and seeing the familiar flecks of gold entwined with hazel and his heart speeds up as he knows that despite the impossibility of it all, this was her.

This was his Rey.

“You’re real.”
“Yes, I…” she looks around for a moment confused, her brow furrowed. “I don’t know how but–”

“Neither do I,” he finishes for her, not willing to spend another moment apart and crashing his lips to hers. “But it’s real. It has to be,” he says against her mouth, frantic and messy as he kisses her fiercely, holding her tight.

Her lips are dry and her skin is warm to the touch. She was still wearing his tunic he hastily wrapped her in before they left his hut to meet his uncle but it was coated in a thin layer of sand.

As he pulls away finally, just enough to account for all this, he thinks to ask, “You’re still there, aren’t you?” His voice cracks.

“I’m on Jakku,” she nods.

“I’m still at the Academy, on Oquinn…but it looks like you’re here.”

She grips her fingers in his hair, “You look like you’re here…but you’re not…but it’s still real. I don’t understand.”

A galaxy apart, but somehow she was in his arms. The force feels strange like it did that day they first touched. A connection new to them but not as foreign as it probably should be. It feels natural and loving and so fucking beautiful that Ben’s tears start again.

“I don’t care what it is, just that I see you and…” he looks her over, taking note of the lack of wrist restraints but the remaining presence of the collar. She’s got a bruise that has bloomed on the side of her face, too close to her temple. He forgets what he was going to say as he reaches up to caress it lightly, inspecting it with the pads of his fingers.

“Rey…I’ve been so worried. I-I’m so worried they’re hurting you or that Plutt is going to force you to-”

She brings her fingers to his lips before he could say it. “No. Never again.”

“But what if-”

“Plutt says he needs me as a scavenger. For now, that’s all I am. That’s how he can make the highest profit off me. From the shit I drag in.”

Ben is the slightest bit relieved to know that at least Plutt wasn’t going to force her into doing that kind of work. But it was still dangerous. There were still beings on Jakku who likely took what they wanted when they felt like it. The risk was still too great.

And he’s already wasted enough time crying about it.

Besides, she shouldn’t be there at all in the first place. But that was going to change. He wasn’t going to let this be permanent.

He’s about to tell her that when she notices his knuckles and gasps. “Ben! What happened?” She lifts one of his hands very tenderly, cautious of the wounds as she inspects them. “You’ve been angry, haven’t you?”

His lip trembles, knowing he can’t deny it. He nods.

“A tree?” she questions, no doubt thinking of that time she found him on this very beach after he had let anger get the best of him. The same night they first kissed.
“A tree,” he confirms. “And...Hux’s face,” he admits, looking down. He doesn’t feel ashamed for punching him. The prick deserved it. He just feels ashamed that he couldn’t quite keep himself together and it’s resulted in this way. He should have just ignored him and walked away.

He expects her to tell him something along those lines, but she just brings his hand to her lips, kissing his knuckles and softly whispering against his skin. “I’m so sorry, Ben.”

He has no clue what she apologizing for but he turns his hand around so his palm rests on her cheek as he looks her straight in the eye.

“I’m coming for you.”

Her mouth hangs open and her eyes go wide as she looks at him as if he’s spoken another language. “Ben?”

“As soon as I can slip away where I know I won’t be stopped, when I get a clear shot, then I’m coming for you.”

“But what about—”

“No. Nothing else matters. I don’t care about this place or who I’m supposed to become. If I’m meant to become just like Luke than I would rather be fucking dead. I hate him for what he’s done,” Ben tells her, his voice rising more than it probably should. “And he of all people aren’t going to stop me when I come for you.”

Rey shakes her head and buries her face in his shoulder. He frowns in confusion. He thought she would be relieved to hear that he intended to come for her.

“Rey?” Does she doubt him? “You know I mean it,” he pulls away to look into her eyes that leak big tears onto her dusty cheeks. “Rey, tell me you believe me.”

Her lip quivers and her eyes shut tight. “I want to. I do.”

This time, he shakes his head. “Then what is it?”

Her eyes stay closed and her head falls against his shoulder. “I...I thought they meant it when they said they’d come back. I believed it, even if they probably never even said it,” she says and suddenly Ben realizes what she means.

_Her parents._

She holds him even tighter then, speaking before he could try to think of something to say. “I went to my old AT-AT today. It was all scraped...pulled apart and trashed. The parts that had no value were left behind to be blown away or buried in the sands.”

He listens closely, caught on her every word and transfixed by her voice even when it’s filled with hurt.

“And one of the things I found was the panel full of tallies. All the marks I made for all the years I waited for them to come back was just fucking wasting away there like it was garbage and...and it was garbage. Everything here is just waste and I—”

Ben holds her hands tightly in his, trying to stop her. He could see where this was going and he won’t let her think that about herself. “No, Rey. You’re not like anything else on Jakku. You’re strong and powerful and the fact you ended up there was not your fault, just as it is now. And that’s
why I’m coming for you. I’m coming and I’m going to take you away and I don’t even care if you
don’t believe me,“ he tells her with hot tears racing down his cheeks. He reaches then for the
disgusting collar around her neck and with a slight wave of his hand, it unlatches from her neck and
falls away. “I’m not going to let you think about yourself that way. Not when it isn’t true.”

She gasps as the metal is free from her skin and brings a hand to her throat. Her tears still flow but she seems to finally hear what he’s saying. He winces at the impressions and redness the collar left behind and he looks down to it in his hands, about to break it when suddenly
he hears a twig snap in the trees behind him.

He spins his head in attention and can faintly hear someone approaching but he doesn’t know who.
He turns to look back at Rey so they can think of something but she’s gone. The weight of her on
his lap lifted in loathsome vacancy.

“No,” he chokes out, his hands pawing at the air she had been occupying just a moment earlier.
Just as suddenly as she had appeared, she had vanished. Whatever kindness the force had granted
them to see one another, it had just as quickly taken it away and suddenly the gaping hole in his
chest tears open once again.

The figure emerges from the forest and has come to stand behind them but Ben doesn’t bother
himself to turn around. All he can think about is that Rey is back on that place and his need to get
to her intensifies, stalling his tears and making him straighten up with resolve.

“What do you want?” Ben grits out, expecting Luke to have chased him out here once again but is
mildly surprised when he hears a different voice respond.

“I...uh...just wanted to make sure you were okay.”

Ben turns to see Boris standing nervously on the sand, his eyes moving back and forth from Ben
and the small waves, his discomfort evident.

Boris’ question seems ridiculous but he suspects the Chadra-Fan already knows that because he
gives a sigh a moment later. “Nevermind. I know you’re not okay. I just wanted to make sure you
were still...breathing I guess.”

Ben doesn’t respond, mainly because he doesn’t know how. But then Boris’ eyes travel down to
notice his bloody knuckles. Ben thinks of moving them out of sight, away from imposing
questions, but he also doesn’t bother. He won’t hide who he is, especially since Boris just saw for
himself how he pummeled Hux in the face. There was no point to pretend and Ben honestly didn’t
think he could, not when his mind is swimming with escape plans and possibilities.

“I’m fine. You don’t need to babysit me,” Ben answers standing up and walking back through the
forest, planning to go to his hut. He needed to organize. He couldn’t spend his time sulking
anymore. He needed to take action.

But he hesitates when he hears Boris jog after him. “Ben, wait.”

“What?” He spins back around, not in the mood for distractions.

“I have some emergency bacta patches in my hut. Might be safer than chancing it at the medbay.”

“Hardly matters now if Hux is already there. He probably already told on me and Luke will find
out anyway. Besides, I don’t need them. My hands are fine,” he insists, ignoring the slight sting
returning to his knuckles. They were hardly a priority.
“Still, might save you some time. I know I’m not the only one who would say Hux was asking for it and maybe fell on his ego causing that black eye.”

Ben doubts anyone back there would actually cover for him. And if they did, Luke wouldn’t believe it anyway.

But another part of him, the part Rey inspires in him, helps him appreciate it anyway. It’s difficult to face this, the possibility that he needs help. But the stakes are high, and he needs to get out of here. So, even if Boris only means to give him bacta patches, Ben finds that he will seize the proverbial hand Boris has offered.

“All right, then. Thank you.”

Boris looks a little surprised at first but quickly chases it away before nodding his head and falling into step beside him. “Of course. Don’t mention it.”

Chapter End Notes

I'm so sorry this is taking so long. I've been so busy lately and my brain has had to completely rewire my priorities and unfortunately, the fanfiction has been left on the back burner. But I'd love to update when I can. I still love writing these two as well as all the other stories I wanted to share with you.

This chapter is hopefully a good ease back into writing for me so I can try to finish it but the next few weeks are especially looking pretty swamped so I'm aiming for winter break to devote some time to it.

If you're still reading, thank you so much! I love you guys.
Wish That You Were Here

Chapter Summary

And now I'm reaching out with every note I sing
And I hope it gets to you on some pacific wind
Wraps itself around you and whispers in your ear
Tells you that I miss you and I wish that you were here

"Wish That You Were Here"
Florence+The Machine

Chapter Notes

Hi...so...I know it's been a while. Honestly, after I saw TROS (THAT FLAMING DUMPSTER CATASTROPHE THAT KILLED ME) I lost a lot of motivation for writing these two because even if I was writing them happy together, it still felt so devastating because apparently, we're never going to get that and I can't tell you how gutted I was (I guess I don't need to tho because I'm sure a lot of you felt the same way).

But you know, I'm just living in my safe little bubble of reading fanfiction and AU's that keep me distracted so I don't have to think about THAT clusterfuck. The lovely writers and overall community of Reylo that we have has been pretty much the only thing that has kept me sane.

So, I feel like I should do my part in this fandom and help us heal from that total bullshit ending...so here you go. I present to you an update of a story that is still in a bit of a rough patch but will definitely have a happy ending because I'm not that evil.

Anyways, I was going to sleep on it and publish it in the morning but I'm feeling impulsive so I'll post it now. It feels kind of intimidating because it's been a while since I've updated but I gotta do it sometime...so YEET!! Thanks for coming back if you did!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Boris isn’t sure what to do as he watches Ben sit on his bed, mending his hands with the bacta patches he kept in his drawer for emergencies. 2-1B gave him his own private supply since he tended to bruise easy. Boris never expected that Ben Solo, of all people, would be in use of them not long after he smashed Armitage Hux’s face and then likely pummeled his knuckles into tree bark...but Boris knows there’s a first time for everything.

They haven’t spoken much since Ben agreed to accept his help. Mainly just nodding and pointing and Boris briefly telling him it was fine if he sat on the bed. Boris sat at his desk, words caught in his throat as he tries to think how to best address the situation. There is much he would like to talk about with him, including his own personal doubts that have arisen since Rey’s absence.
However, saying them was another thing and from what Boris has observed over the years, conversation was not high up on the list of things Ben Solo enjoyed.

“How do they feel?” he asks, trying to at least stop the lingering silence.

“They sting a little, but the bacta helps a lot,” he says, looking up to give him a small nod. “Thank you.”

Boris nods back but the hut falls back to silence. Boris desperately tries to think of a topic, if only to ease the tension. “You know,” Boris clears his throat, “I’ve never spent much time at that beach before but it really is beautiful. I forget sometimes all the nature we’re surrounded in. I can see why you like it,” he says, trying to keep things mild at first. He didn't know how short of a fuse Ben had these days and he wasn’t entirely sure what he was thinking.

He hears Ben sigh at his comment. “As long as I’ve been going there, I never really noticed how beautiful it was either. Not until I showed it to Rey.”

Boris is wary to travel into Rey centered conversation with Ben at first, but then he realizes that he was being far too tense and if he was treated Ben with distance and uncertainty, he was no better than anyone else at this Academy.

“I can imagine she did. She seems like the kind of person that can find some kind of beauty in everything.”

Ben actually chuckles at that. “Yeah, she...she tends to do that sometimes...without even trying,” he says, his eyes fading with remorse when he finishes speaking and Boris doesn’t need the force to know he was thinking of Rey and where she was now. She likely wasn’t trying to find the beauty in Jakku.

Boris knew very little of the planet other than the battle stories from before he was born and the fact that it was an unforgiving climate. To think that Rey not only grew up there but was there right now made his stomach turn.

Boris notices how Ben’s hands are mended but he has yet to get up and leave. He remains on the bed looking down at his feet with cloudy eyes. Boris knows better to ask if he misses her. Of course he misses her. So, probably speaking too freely, Boris decides to ask something else.

Except it wasn’t too much of a question.

“You love her, don’t you?” Perhaps too bold but he’s made it this far...

Ben looks at him then, his eyes wide at first, as if he might get angry, but it passes a moment later. His face softens and slowly he nods.

“Yes,” he answers with absolution. “She’s...she’s everything to me.”

Boris has suspected that but comprehending it was another. Personally, he had difficulty understanding the concept, but to see how Ben speaks of Rey or just how he would look at her was proof enough. Ben meant his words.

“I’ve been so worried about her,” Boris admits. “I couldn’t believe it, the way Luke let her go with that creature. And the things they were saying...about what she did...I couldn’t keep up with it all and before I knew what was happening, she was gone and Luke just let it happen.”

Ben’s nostrils flare when Boris says Luke’s name. His carefully applied bandages struggle to
remain where they are when he clenches his fists in anger. “None of them listened to her, or even bothered to understand why she did what she did.”

“So it’s true.”

Ben stands up briskly, his eyes shining. “If you knew what she has been through, what she’s seen, and what that man was sending her to, you would know she had no choice. She did what she had to do to survive. I know what happened…” Boris thinks he’s finished when softly he breathes out the words, “I saw it for myself.”

That gives Boris pause. “What do you mean, Ben?”

Ben has been considering his options. Formulating in whatever way he can. He still has chills from when he saw Rey in the forest not even a half-hour ago. He knows he needs to get away from here, only he can’t do it alone. Not when Luke will be breathing down his neck at every turn.

But he thinks, just maybe, Boris could help him. It seems like it could be possible, and if only Boris understood what was truly going on, perhaps he could see the value in helping him escape. He could tell that he cared for Rey’s wellbeing and was also horrified by Luke’s decision.

And so he decides he will at the very least try.

So Ben dives right in. “We...we’ve seen each other’s memories. It happened when we first touched.”

Boris blinks a few times, processing Ben’s words. “You mean with contact, you saw into each other's lives?”

“Yes,” Ben admits.

Boris blinks in surprise. “Wow, I didn’t know that was possible.”

“Neither did we...but with Rey, everything is different. It’s not like the books say. There’s something between us. Something big...So much so that–“

Ben stops himself, biting his lip.

“What?” Boris asks eagerly, his eyes even wider than usual.

Ben looks to the curtain, ensuring that they were still alone. “Boris, I need to tell you something. Normally, this is the kind of thing I would keep to myself but if I do, it won’t do Rey any good and I need to do whatever I can to help her which I know you want too.”

“I do.”

“So I can trust you? You won’t tell anyone what I’m about to tell you?”

“I swear Ben.”

Taking a bigger chance than he has the confidence to take, he reveals to Boris the truth of his connection with Rey.

“The force has...bonded us. We’re linked, Rey and I. Moments before you found me on the beach, she appeared to me from where she was on Jakku. I could feel her in my arms. She was real.”
“What? You mean she was here?” Boris asks confused.

“She wasn’t ‘here’ here, but for just a moment, she was with me. We were connected and she told me that she was back to being a scavenger and won’t be used as a pleasure slave. She sat on my lap and cried into my shoulder as I held her and—“

Ben looks down at his tunic and points to the spots in the fabric. “These are hers. Her tears.” Ben yanks at the fabric on his shoulder. He looks to Boris to see confusion and wariness. His heart drops in his chest, feeling stupid. Of course Boris would think he’s crazy. What else should he have expected?

Ben sighs in defeat, heading for the exit. “Nevermind, forget I said anything.” It wasn’t likely anyone would believe Boris if he ran off and told-

“What, Ben, where are you going?”

Ben turns back to the Chadra-Fan, surprised once again.

Ben and Rey surpassed everyone else at the Academy when it came to the Force. The chances of them being capable of this, combined with their feelings for each other didn’t seem so steep after all.

And Boris still couldn’t shake the energy he felt from their lightsabers he had carried up to Luke.

“Ben...listen, I don’t totally understand. I’m not nearly as powerful as you or Rey...but I know that whatever exists between you is real and if the Force bound you across the galaxy, honestly, that kind of makes sense. More sense than Luke had when he sent her away in the first place.”

Ben steps closer, away from the curtain. “I don’t really understand it either, but I do know it was real.”

“And she’s alive? She’s okay?”

Ben shrugs, “She’s alive, but she needs help. She needs to get off Jakku.”

“You’re going after her, aren’t you?”

Ben doesn’t answer at first, but he seems to have confided enough already where his hesitance doesn’t linger as long. “Yes. I’m going to find her. But I need to get out of here first and after everything, Luke sure as hell isn’t going to let me even use the fresher by myself.”

Boris took Ben’s words in, knowing what lied between them.

He’s asking for help. Or trying to.

Boris knew to help Ben would be against his training and everything that Luke has taught him since he arrived. But after what Luke did to Rey in the first place, Boris isn’t sure if he wants to do anything that Luke would do anymore. Obviously, the man’s judgment was flawed.

“What do you need?”

Ben smiles, stepping even closer and talking quieter, probably paranoid they would be heard. “I need a ship and as much time as I can get before Luke realizes I’m gone. If he discovers too soon, he’ll already know where I’m headed and I need to get her someplace else before they can follow in pursuit.”
“It’ll be tricky...but I’ll help you. Anything to get Rey of that planet. And we’re going to have to think of a way to get both of your lightsabers back too.”

“Shit, I forgot about that. Do you know where he put them?” Ben asks him.

Boris winces slightly. “He put them in the vault.”

Ben slumps his shoulders and closes his eyes in exasperation. “Fuck.”

“I know,” Boris says. “But I think we can figure it out. If all this means that Rey can be safe again then we’ll do whatever it takes.”

Ben looks to him with an expression he’s never seen from him. He looks sad at first glance but there’s something that almost looks like gratitude gleaming in his eyes and his trembling frown. “Thank you,” Ben says, his voice breaking as if he might cry. “I can’t tell you what this means to me. To both of us.”

“Don’t thank me yet, Solo. I’m going to need to do some serious coding if we’re to get you past those droids at the gate and into a ship. Just know I’m willing to try.”

“That’s what matters,” Ben says, and Boris can’t help but give him a small smile.

Hours later, Ben is back in Rey’s hut, laying on her bed.

He’s spent the remainder of the day trying to keep track of his thoughts. He would have preferred to write everything down, but he can’t trust that Luke won’t find it and stop him before he even makes any real headway.

So, he tries to make it as realistic as he can, keeping tabs on everything so he can try to get Boris up to speed with what he’s thought up when they meet tomorrow. Given everything it's going to take, it was going to be pretty busy and undoubtedly frustrating.

Which means he should be falling asleep. He should be resting so he can face the new day with a new hope he hasn’t felt any hint of since Rey was taken from him. But he can’t. He can’t help but wonder more about how the Force connected them and the chances of it happening again were eating away at him.

What he wouldn’t give to see her now. To see her and tell her to hold on just a little longer.

He had snuck up to the cafeteria a little while ago, grabbing some food packs and filling his largest canteen with cold water. He then raced back down to her hut, fully intending to carry provisions at all times, knowing that at any moment he might see her, and when he did, he was hoping that the Force would be kind enough to let the items stay with her.

He had placed them in her satchel along with two extra tunics and some clean basics. He probably should have been ashamed rummaging through her drawers but he had thought only of how she had been stuck on Jakku in nothing but some sleep trousers and one of his large tunics, recalling how she hadn’t even been wearing a breast band underneath. He thought it would only help to make her more comfortable.

Ben laid on the bed, clutching the satchel to his chest. His eyes were closed but he was more in meditation than sleep, trying to will the Force to connect them again. He wasn’t sure why the force has connected them in such a way, but he knows it was profound, going further back than the bond they had just discovered.
He remembers when they first touched hands in the forest and how their kyber crystals came from the same place in the cave on Illum. The Force was throwing them endless signs that they were meant to be together.

But Ben thinks that regardless, no matter what interference the Force would have had for them, he would have fallen for Rey anyway.

But the force had interfered, and Ben was going to use this strange and incredible chance to their advantage. So, Ben laid there, trying to believe that soon enough, the Force would grant him its earlier kindness and let him see Rey.

Because he wasn’t going anywhere until it did.

Rey was in an old Star Destroyer. She was scavenging for...well for anything at this point.

She’s not wearing the collar that she had successfully turned off and Ben had quickly removed, but she kept it clicked on her belt for when she would later face Plutt at the outpost. She knew she would need to wear it around him or it would only cause more problems for herself. But until then, she was glad to at the very least be allowed to breathe a little easier.

Unfortunately, that was one of her only current advantages.

E’di’s kind contribution of a quarter portion hadn’t held her over, despite how it used to. She used to be able to go much longer with even just half a quarter portion in her belly, but she supposes her life and diet at the Academy had changed that.

She had tried to reassure herself by thinking that her system would adjust once again but that only made her feel worse as she considered how long that would take and how long she would realistically be here.

She believed in Ben. She knew he would stop at nothing to come for her. He loved her. But she also believed that Luke would be difficult to get anything past now. She was worried about the chances he had while his uncle was undoubtedly keeping a close eye on him.

Trying to rid her mind of those thoughts, she reached for her canteen, only there was no more water in it. As she held it up, she discovered the leak at the bottom that had drained away her only source of water for the day.

“Fuck,” she cursed, trying to resist the urge to cry.

She has no idea how she held so much hope for so long when she was here the first time. She had believed in the delusion that her parents were coming when she should have known not to. And yet, now, fully knowing how determined Ben is to come for her, she wishes she could somehow instill the same sense of childlike hope she used to have.

Except the more she thinks of Ben, the more she wants to cry.

Why was everything so hard for them?

She covers her mouth, thinking if she kept her sobs in then maybe she wouldn’t have to confront how upset she really was. But they come out anyway and all Rey could hope for in that moment was to see him. She wanted the Force to grant them the same kindness it had previously. Rey wanted to see him again. It hadn’t even been that long since she had seen him last but she missed him so dearly. And she knew if he was here, it would give her the reminder she needed to keep
And as if the Force had heard her thoughts and her fears, suddenly her skin shivers with goosebumps, uncharacteristic in the Jakku heat but alarming her attention to who is now with her.

*Ben.*

And given the look on his face, she knows he was wishing for the same thing.

He is quick to lunge for her, clutching her tightly to him, burying his face against her neck. She can feel his tears on her skin and that is all it takes for the sob to leave her throat as she wraps her arms around his middle.

She doesn’t know how long they stay like that as they cling to each other, both monumentally relieved that they were together again. Rey tries to memorize everything. She doesn’t ever want to forget how it feels to be held by him.

He’s so much bigger than her and she loves how he seems to hold her completely as she tucks her head against his shoulder.

She loves how he smells. She can’t quite describe what it is, only able to describe it as distinctly *Ben.*

There’s a hint of the forest they would walk through everyday, as well as the breeze of the ocean from their beach. She tries to inhale it as much as she can, much preferring it over the dusty sands and endless scent of sweat that comes with Jakku.

Eventually though, Ben pulls back, looking into her eyes. “Rey, I don’t know how much time we have with this. I still don’t really understand it, but I’m not about to take it for granted.”

He spins around and grabs ahold of something. “Now, there’s no guarantee this will work but I’ve packed your satchel with things I thought you might need. Hopefully, when this ends as it did before, it will stay with you if you keep hold of it.” He says, quickly lifting it and settling it over her shoulders, ensuring it was connected to her.

“I-I want to make sure you’re eating enough and drinking enough...Just until I come for you,” he tells her almost frantically, probably worried she was going to disappear at any moment. He does pull out a canteen from inside the bag though and passes it to her. Rey takes it from him, quickly bringing it to her lips.

The water is cold and refreshing and it seems to soothe the dryness and roughness of her throat.

She has the presence of mind not to drink too much at once. She takes some deep breaths when she pulls it away, noticing how Ben’s hands always keep hold of her like he was frightened she would vanish. She opens her eyes to find him watching her closely. There’s a mix of relief, sadness, and fear on his face. The tears in his eyes still present.

She reaches out, placing a hand on his arm. “Thank you, Ben.”

“It’s not much, but I just thought that...that I could try to-”

“Ben, it’s amazing. I wouldn’t have thought of it,” she says, placing the canteen back inside her old familiar satchel. She takes a look at what else he’s packed for her, noticing the food packs she knows he likely stole from the kitchen. She notices a bar of soap that is such a relief to see. She feels so filthy.
She also notices some clothes he packed for her which she is extremely grateful for. It was so thoughtful of him to put everything together.

“Thank you, Ben. This is incredible,” she tells him, her voice still rough. She feels him press a kiss to her temple.

“Oh, I forgot.” Ben turns a little, summoning her sketchbook to his hands. “I didn’t put this in there,” he said, holding it out to her. “I’ve been keeping it close to me. It’s comforting to just keep hold of it, knowing that it’s yours and just flipping through the pages.”

At first, she reaches for it, but she stops. Ben is waiting for her to take it and looks confused when she doesn’t. “What’s wrong?”

“I-I think I want you to keep hold of it. I know you’ll keep it safe...and that way, when we see each other again, for real, you can give it to me then.”

Ben looks down at the hardbound cover, running his hand past it tenderly. “Are you sure?”

Rey nods. She knows she won’t have the time to draw while she’s here, nor the inspiration. Besides, she can see that it has offered Ben the smallest sense of comfort in her absence and he would benefit from it more than her, at least until he can give it to her in person.

“I’ll keep it safe, I promise.”

She brings a hand to his cheek. “I know you will.”

He melts against her palm and she wonders if he’s just that sweet that he’s ignoring how sweaty she is and how she inevitably must smell. She had a more efficient hygiene routine in her AT-AT but since she’s been sharing with E’di, Rey didn’t want to further impose on her limited facilities.

Ben reaches for her other hand then, entwining their fingers. She can tell he wants to say something and she tries to focus everything on him. She already was, but if she devoted everything, maybe the force would let him stay longer than he did the first time.

“I think I made a friend today,” Ben suddenly says, ever so softly.

She wasn’t expecting him to say that. “Oh?”

“Yeah. When the bond closed so suddenly earlier, I think it was because we were interrupted. Boris followed me out to the beach and was approaching. I spun around but by the time I looked back at you, you were gone.”

She remembers the connection had ended rather abruptly, and Ben had looked a little panicked when it did. She realizes now it was because Boris had been nearby. “Boris?”

“Yeah, he...he wants to help, Rey. And normally, I wouldn’t trust anyone with something so personal to us, but...I trust him. He’s lost confidence in Luke after sending you away. He said so enough but I can even see it in his eyes. I could hear how worried he was for you,” Ben says, bringing a hand up to tuck her hair behind her ear.

Rey feels a great sense of admiration for the Chandra-Fan boy who had comforted Ben. She knew most of the others at the Academy steered clear of Ben and she’s relieved that somebody was trying to reach out to him and be there for him when she could not.

“He believed me when I told him about this,” Ben says, gesturing between them.
“You mean you told him of our connection? This bond?”

Ben nodded. “Like I said, I never would have told anyone, but…Rey, we don’t have a lot of options. If I’m going to get out of here, I don’t think I can do it alone. Boris says he’s going to help me deal with the droids at the gate and from there I’ll take one of the emergency ships. I mean, there’s still a lot of shit to figure out and realistically I’m not sure when I’m…” he trails off looking guilty and shaking his head. “Rey, I don’t know how long it’s going to be but I’m not going to let it be too long. I’m coming for you as soon as possible. But still, I hate to ask you to hold on for as long as you can. I know I’m only going to have one shot at this.”

“Ben,” she says, clearly enough that he knows it means to look her in the eyes. “I believe in you. I know it won’t be easy. I know it won’t be tomorrow. But I know you’re coming and I know, with some strange pull of the Force, I can see you from across the stars. I think that can give us the strength to hold on for whatever time you need.”

She can see the physical effect it has on Ben for him to hear that someone believes in him. She knows it’s a relatively foreign feeling for him. She knows the members of his family haven’t given him much reason to have confidence in himself. She thinks back to what Luke had said about him the night Plutt took her away.

“This is a dangerous path, one that I do not trust Ben is even capable of treading. He’s already conflicted enough.”

Rey couldn’t disagree with him more. She looks into his eyes and doesn’t see the face of a boy who was conflicted. He was determined and she knew how far he was willing to go to prove it.

And she is so proud of him.

“This is all going to be over soon,” he says softly.

She nods, ducking her head to rest against his chest. She mumbles into his tunic. “I’d kiss you if my breath wasn’t so atrocious.”

Ben scoffs. “Honestly, if you think that’s going to stop me,” he jokes, pulling her face to his to peck her sweetly on the lips, giving her a small smile when he pulled away. “If it makes you feel better though, I did pack your toothbrush.”

Rey sighs in relief. “I really love you, Ben Solo”

“I love you too, sweetheart.”

Chapter End Notes

I don't care what anyone says, Rey is not a Palpatine. To say that Rey’s parents sold her because they loved her is such a contradictory statement! Like wtf?

In this story, Rey is still Rey Nobody because if I were to swerve off course of that now, after everything I have established, that wouldn’t make sense. But apparently, SOME PEOPLE think that retconning the shit out of a good ass story is all part of good storytelling!! Looking at you, Disney Lucasfilm!!

In conclusion, I am still bitter and that's just the tip of the iceberg folks.
Anyways, I love you and thank you for reading.
Rey tries to face each day with the determination she needs to sustain as well as she can.

Naturally, her favorite times of day are when she sees Ben and it makes the rest of her day bearable knowing that she had someone like him who cared for her the way he did.

He was truly the best person she’s ever known. She knows he doesn’t quite believe that about himself but she hopes that over time, she could help him see just how much he means to her.

She adjusts as well as she can when it comes to getting back to scavenging. She collects what her daily finds (always junk) before heading to Niima Outpost where Plutt gives her scraps in return.

Luckily, Ben’s food holds her over as well as the clean cool water in the canteen that he refills every time she sees him. She tries to conserve enough of it to give herself a makeshift bath with the soap bar he had put in her bag but it’s not ideal. Despite her efforts to keep clean, it does not compare to the hydro showers that she had gotten used to at the Academy so she goes to bed never really feeling clean. Still, she is grateful to E’di who was letting her remain in her home. She had been so kind.

That evening, however, she came back to see E’di eating her day’s rations from scavenging. They didn’t talk much. E’di preferred to sit in long silence but Rey couldn’t fault her for that so she endured it when they existed in the same space.

But that night, Rey was startled as E’di started to make conversation. “How you holding up?” her voice as coarse as the sands outside.

Rey clears her throat, fighting against the restraint of her collar. She only took it off when she was alone, not wanting to make anyone suspicious and although she trusted E’di, she wouldn’t really know where to start when it came to explaining the nature of her force sensitivity.

“She’s fine…” she answers, wondering what to say. “Thanks to you. I really appreciate all you’ve done for me.”

“Don’t mention it. I have the space and you’re a pleasant guest.”

Rey smiles, “I promise this won’t be for too much longer. I’ll be out of your way soon.”

E’di frowns, turning to look at her fully. She hardly made eye contact so Rey was a little surprised at her sudden intensity. “What do you mean? You’re not in my way. I think it might be safer if you stayed here instead of finding a new place to sleep. I think it’s best we stick together,” E’di explains.

“Oh, right. I agree, I think that’s smart. I just meant that I may not be around for...” Rey stops herself, unsure how to explain and uncertain if she should even try explaining it to her. She’s sure
if she tried to relay it, E’di would think she was insane.

But before she can even try to formulate her thoughts, she hears E’di give a big sigh. “Oh, Rey. Don’t tell me you’re still doing this to yourself.”

“What?” Rey asks, confused.

“You can’t still think that you’re parents are coming back for you. You can’t put yourself through this anymore.”

Rey’s jaw goes slack. She had spoken with E’di about her parents and why she originally had been left here at such a young age. She also had explained her epiphany the day she finally left. She knows now her parents were never coming for her and were likely long dead, but E’di still must suspect that she was giving in to her childhood hopes and delusions.

“I-I’m not,” Rey stammers.

“Then what are you ‘waiting’ for? Your parents were not who you wanted to believe they were and I don’t blame you for that, but you’re only hurting yourself if you think that someone is coming for you.”

“But-” Rey snaps, “someone is coming for me!” It fires out, her need to defend Ben even to E’di of all people, very palpable.

E’di shakes her head. Resigning from the conversation. “You are welcome here as long as you want, Rey. But I think you should know by now that Jakku is a place where people go to be forgotten. You’re here because someone didn’t want you anymore. I hate to say it but whoever you think is coming for you, isn’t. So do yourself a favor before you waste your life the way I’ve wasted mine waiting for people that I thought loved me too.”

With that, E’di stands up and leaves the room. Rey watches as she goes with silent tears running down her face.

Rey retreats to the little nook where she’s been sleeping and tries to distract herself with literally anything she can before she realizes it’s useless and she bursts into sobs, covering her mouth to stay quiet. She curls into the rough blanket and tries to remind herself that in this case, E’di was wrong. E’di was hurt and damaged in her own way and that is why she said those things.

It didn’t change the fact that there really was someone that loved Rey and she would not doubt him. He was coming and everything was going to be alright. She believed that.

But for some reason, that didn’t help her stop crying. It was like everything, all the stress and the frustration, won out at once and she just succumbed to feeling shitty.

Ben is in the library.

Whenever the rest of the class was practicing their lightsaber forms, he would be told to go to the library and read through all the texts that Luke had hand-selected for him to write essays on.

Of course, Luke didn’t trust him to be by himself so R2 and BX were tasked with keeping a close eye on him while he worked. And then about every fifteen minutes, Luke would personally come to check and make sure that he was actually doing his assignments.

Ben rolled his eyes as he saw Luke walk past the doors to see him sitting at the table with all the books and texts laid out in front of him while he worked on his banthashit essays.
Luke attempts to discreetly whisper something to BX, but Ben can hear him say, “You can go get started on lunch if you want, Beex.”

“Thank you, Master Skywalker. And I assure you, Master Solo has been working very hard.”

Luke doesn’t respond to the droid’s praise but walks away, catching Ben’s eyes right before he leaves and Ben feels a sudden rage rush through him.

For the most part, Luke has chosen books that he finds loathsome because most of it basically is exaggerating how intimate connections and forming relationships was a quick ticket to the dark side.

Needless to say, Ben rolls his eyes and just tries to write down what he can so that Luke doesn’t give him a hard time. Or at least, a worse time than he was currently giving him.

For some reason, he wonders if Luke has told his mother. He wonders what she makes of all this and he can’t help but wonder why she hasn’t at least tried to talk to him about it. But he wasn’t going to ask Luke about his mother. He wasn’t going to talk to Luke about anything ever again if he didn’t have to.

So he sighs, looking down at the texts. He actually found a book that was fairly interesting. Admittedly, it was a very brief section and it wasn’t in the bracket of pages that Luke had told him to write about, but he became somewhat fascinated with the topic of Force Healing.

Although he would much prefer to try and find something, anything, that might be able to explain the connection between him and Rey. Anything that might sound similar to the Force bond that they share but no one has ever heard of. Or at least not either of them...or Boris.

Just then, the hairs at the back of his neck stand up straight and he recognizes it as the bond opening.

Panicking slightly, he looks to R2 at the door. He bolts out of his seat just then, “I need to get another book. I’ll be right back.”

R2 makes a series of beeps and whistles, giving him the affirmative to sneak behind the shelves and search for the supposed book. But Ben doesn’t even really bother to listen to his reply because he practically races for the back of the library, keeping his satchel on his person in case Rey needs more food or water. He had taken to keeping provisions on him at all times in case the bond opened like this. He makes it to the back corner, hidden by the many tall shelves of the room, allowing him the barriers he needs to hide from the astromech.

And as soon as he takes a deep breath, the bond opens and she is revealed to him. She’s laying down and her back is to him and he almost wonders if she’s sleeping, but then he sees she’s shaking slightly and he drops to his knees to find that she’s crying.

“Rey?” he says, trying to stay as quiet as he could.

She looks surprised to see him, probably not noticing the bond had opened. But all he can really focus on are the big tears on her cheeks, streaming from her red eyes. “What happened? Are you alright?”

He feels frantic, his mind jumping to horrible conclusions as to what has brought her to this.

Her lip trembled as she reaches for him, wrapping her arms around his neck and holding tight.
He hugs her back but his anxiety is still palpable. “Rey?” he asks her, his voice still low.

“I’m sorry. I’m fine.”

“You’re not,” he tells her, knowing well enough she was just trying to deflect his worry. “Tell me.”

“I-I just-” Rey begins but Ben suddenly hears the distinctive roll of R2’s wheels approaching. He quickly put a finger against her lips.

“One second,” he whispers to her.

The little droid whistles out his name. “Yeah, I’m here, Artoo. I’m fine, just looking for the right one. I’ll be back in a minute.”

Rey seems to understand then and just takes the moment to lean against him and he runs his hand past her hair, letting her slump against his chest.

R2 beeps, offering to help but Ben is quick to answer back. “No, really, I’ll be done in a minute. It’s on a high shelf anyway.”

The droid seems to take offense at the insinuation that he was short but Ben can only be relieved when he hears him whir away back towards the front of the library.

He focuses back on Rey. She seems to have stopped crying and was wiping away at her eyes.

“Rey, what’s wrong? D-Did something happen? Did someone hurt you?” he asks, the ferocity in his voice making it rise which doesn’t help when he should be whispering.

“No, no nothing like that,” she is quick to ease his worry. “I’m...I think I’m just feeling frustrated and overwhelmed. I didn’t mean to freak you out.”

Ben doesn’t know what to say, mainly because he knows how she feels. There are moments where everything seems to catch up to him and no matter what he can’t stop the tidal wave of thoughts that keep him from calming down. He realizes that Rey must have had one of those herself.

He holds her tight, his lips brushing his temple. “Everything’s going to be okay.”

“I know,” she says, her voice a little shaky and he hopes she believes it. “I know it will be. It’s just...”

“I know. I know it’s hard. I feel it too.”

“I just want this to be over,” she tells him and Ben feels so hopeless. So he tries to help her the only way he can in that moment. He reaches into his satchel and passes her some more food and just gives her the whole other canteen he keeps with him instead of refilling hers.

“I’m sorry, sweetheart.”

“Wha-Why are you sorry?”

“Because...” he can’t even say it. “This is all I can do for you right now...and this is all my faul-”

This time Rey is the one to cover his mouth, a small fire in her eyes. “Don’t you dare say that!”

“It’s true,” he shrugs, his own eyes starting to prick with tears.
“It’s not. Ben, y-you are...you’re so...” she tries to say something but keeps stammering, obviously frustrated. “Ben...” she begins again but then something else passes over her face and suddenly she brings her hands to his face and pulls him down to her lips, kissing him passionately. He gasps at first but quickly kisses her back, pulling her closer.

They stay like that for a while and for the first time since she was taken away, Ben isn’t thinking about how horrible and terrifying things are. He isn’t thinking how she’s actually on Jakku or that he’s in the library hiding from an astromech.

He’s only thinking of how much he loves her and how good her lips feel against his.

Selfish, he knows, but he couldn’t help but revel in it for just a moment.

And when she pulls away, he feels almost in a daze. But she has a certain clarity in her expression as she gazes into his eyes. “You are amazing and you’re the best fucking person in this galaxy.”

Ben chuckles, feeling unworthy of her praise, looking down. She lifts his chin. “Don’t blame yourself for this. I believe in you no matter what. Try to remember that if you don’t believe in yourself.”

“I will...I do,” he whispers. “I’ve never been able to feel deserving of anything good and I think I just assume everything is my fault.”

“It’s not!” she insists.

He smiles. “I think you’re right. I always believe you and I think with that, I can start to believe in myself.” She smiles at him, her eyes still glossy. “Because no matter what, I’m going to come for you. I’m not going to stop until I find you again and I can hold you for real.”

She nods. “I know,” she says, hugging him tenderly and he feels a great sense of comfort when he feels her comb her fingers through his hair.

It makes him think back to this morning when he had collected some blooming flowers on the way to the mess hall. He reaches down into the satchel at his side and pulls out his journal where he had tucked them in to keep them safe.

He had picked them for her, after all.

He opens it, revealing the pretty little purple flowers that he knew she would like, picking one up and placing it over her ear like he had envisioned doing so that morning.

She looks up to him with the most Rey like smile she could give him. One he hasn’t seen in far too long. He kisses her forehead before looking back down at his journal.

The bond had opened with her curled up and crying, desperately hoping just to find sleep. He does the same sometimes but he spends his nights in Rey’s hut. He is surrounded in things that keep him comforted of her, especially her sketchbook that he flips through when he needs something to help him calm down.

She didn’t have anything like that and he wanted to change that. So now, he looks to his journal. He knew it was filled with his ramblings and thoughts but it was a keepsake and an almost direct timeline of how he fell in love with Rey.

So he decides that he will give it to her, hoping he wasn’t just humiliating himself and giving something to comfort her with. “Here.”
She looks at it confused as he holds it out between them. “Is that your journal?” she asks.

He nods. “Take it. When you...when you feel alone and the bond won’t open...I don’t know, maybe it can help you the way your sketchbook helps me.”

She looks surprised but there’s a wonderment to her features that he treasures for a moment before placing it in her hands, ensuring that her fingers cling to it tightly so it stays with her when the bond closes.

“Fair warning though, it’s pretty thorough and I talk about you... a lot. The first few entries are pretty rough since they are from when we first met and I was being, well you know,” he shakes his head, thinking back to his first impressions of her. Things have changed so much between them. It hadn’t even been that long but it feels like a lifetime.

Rey chuckles, opening it to brush her fingers past the paper and the little flowers he had tucked there. “Thank you, Ben. I take good care of it.”

He brings a hand to her cheek, about to kiss her again when he hears R2 whir from the front of the library and he hears the doors open.

Fuck, he thinks, Luke was coming back to check on him.

Suddenly the bond closes leaving Ben alone in the dark corner of the room, his arms still held out where he had been holding her. He wished they could have said goodbye but then he snaps out of it all and knows he needs to get back to the desk.

Quickly, he grabs a book from the top shelf and hustles back through the maze of books to return to his seat. R2 whistles something about him taking a while.

Ben spews the first explanation that comes to mind. “Sorry, I opened it to make sure it was the right one and started reading it back there. I got distracted and didn’t realize it had been so long.”

Ben tries to look busy and resume his work which he does right as Luke ducks back in. He doesn’t speak to R2, just makes sure that he’s working before he leaves again and it isn’t until the door finally closes behind him that Ben finally takes a deep breath.

It’s then that R2 beeps again, and Ben interprets it as, “You sure seem to talk to yourself a lot when you read.”

Ben just shrugs, willing to accept that as R2’s conclusion.

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Finally, the lunch bell rings and Ben is quick to sort out the books on the table and sort out his essays (although they were shorter today, for obvious reasons) before making his way to the mess hall. Luke stands at the entrance with an expectant look until Ben hands over the work he had done without a word. If Luke had any comments on the length of his passages, Ben walks past him quickly enough that Luke must decide to just ignore it, not wanting to start conversation.

Besides, even if Luke had tried to start anything with him, Ben doubts he would have been able to listen. He’s been a jumble of emotions since he saw Rey in the library.

As relieved as he was every time he saw her, he also felt like the end of each bond left him even more desperate. It left him only more frustrated that this was still going on.

Things needed to progress faster.
Ben wanted to find Boris and tell him they would need to meet later. They never ate together in the mess hall. Everyone would surely realize that they had suddenly started hanging out more and Ben figured it would cause nothing but trouble for the Chadra-Fan. Especially once Ben had escaped and Luke would without a doubt suspect that Boris had assisted in some way.

He didn’t want to cause Boris more trouble than he already has so they usually just met before light’s out so they could coordinate their ideas.

So, Ben nods to him, walking past his table before moving to head for the table that he would always sit at. The one that he and Rey used to occupy.

And then Xid and Soldar swoop in, each walking on either side of him. “Looking for a place to sit, Solo?” Soldar asks in a mocking tone.

“You can always sit with us, Benny boy. We can give you some tips on how to get your lightsaber back,” Xid says.

A few days after Luke had locked up Ben and Rey’s sabers in the vault, he had returned the sabers back to Hux and the others. Apparently, with Rey’s absence, their punishment had expired and it’s as if none of it ever happened, despite how they could have killed her.

Ben had tried no to throw a tantrum when he had seen Hux walking around with his saber back on his belt.

*That fucking prick.*

But then Xid and Soldar redirect his anger back towards them as more shit spews out of their mouths.

“Oh, you know, Xid, I’m not sure how much our advice would help him. Skywalker seems pretty mad with him. Might have had something to do with how he had been messing around with the girl he was supposed to tutor.”

“True, Soldar. Very true. That’s hard to come back from in these parts I’m afraid to say, though I certainly can’t blame him for trying,” Xid says and Ben narrows his eyes at him, disgusted at his tone.

“Leave me alone. I’m not falling for this so go bother someone else.” He has seen their routine plenty of times now. It was how they all operated. Finding a way to rile him up so he takes the first punch. He was already lucky enough that nothing had come of the whole Hux situation after he punched him in the mess hall. He didn’t want to have to risk facing Luke for something as stupid as this.

Ben moves to sit down, resolving to ignore them, even when they followed him with their own trays, insisting to bother him.

They blabber on for a while, trying to strike a reaction out of him but he tries to just keep calm and center himself, pretending that Rey was sitting across from him the way she used to at mealtimes.

But then Xid’s voice cuts through his focus with words that he can not ignore.

“You know, Solo, I can’t help but envy you. You have to at least give me some of the details.”

“Excuse me?” Ben grounds out.
“Well, you know...surely you two were doing something that night Luke found you in your hut. How was she?”

Ben grits his teeth and stands up from the bench. He wasn’t going to sit there and listen to this. Both of them seem amused that they somehow got to him and he hates the smug look on their faces.

“What’s the matter, Solo. You don’t want to talk about it? I thought, given your history, that would have been your favorite topic. I can only imagine how you felt when you would get her right where you-”

Ben slams his tray back onto the table furiously to stop his words. Xid actually looks taken back and his eyes go a little wide at the outburst. It gains the attention of everyone else in the mess so Ben speaks quietly when he finally responds.

“If you ever speak of her like that again, I don’t need a lightsaber to strike you down.” And with that, Ben turns away, discarding his tray.

He makes to leave but Luke is standing in the doorway, supposedly having seen all of this. The two of them stare each other down. Luke undoubtedly had witnessed the interaction with Xid and Soldar. There’s nothing but distrust in the man’s eyes.

Ben can only suspect that Luke no longer thinks of him as his nephew in the same way that he no longer thinks of him as his uncle.

“Is there a problem?” he asks in a way that makes Ben’s fists clench.

But he shakes his head and grits his teeth, trying to keep on top of it all. “Not at all, Master,” he says back.

“Good, then you can help Beex with the dishes.”

The man walks off, heading back up to his quarters and Ben is surprised at the restraint within himself to refrain from screaming, _fuck you_, as loud as he can.

Ben went to help BX with the dishes but the culinary droid seemed to take pity on him and told him that the dishwasher was efficient enough and he preferred to use it anyway.

Ben shrugged but was grateful the droid was probably trying to do him a kindness.

Ben noticed that since Luke has been implementing as many punishments as he can, BX has been even kinder and more vocal with his compliments than usual. He suspected that the droid didn’t quite agree with Luke’s methods but would never outwardly admit to it. BX was too nice.

So he doesn’t really mind when Luke makes him do stuff with BX. After all, he had been the culinary droid that he had spent whole days with as a child. He much preferred him to the nanny droid that his mother would leave behind sometimes.

“If you could though, I would be very appreciative if you could take the trash to the chute,” BX asks.

“Sure, Beex.”

Ben grabs the two bags on the floor and steps out the side door into the open air. He takes the lid
off the chute and throws down the two bags. He stalls for a moment longer than he usually would, for the first time actually observing where the trash was going. There was a lot of it. It was getting full.

And he realized that the entire time he’s lived here, he’s never known where the trash goes after it goes into the garbage chute.

Walking back inside, he makes sure that Luke isn’t around before he speaks to the droid.

“Beex?” The droid turns to look at him. “Where does the trash go?”

“Ahh, well, there’s a service that works a ways away from the Academy that comes through once a month to collect the waste.”

“A service,” Ben repeats. “When...What time of day do they come? I’ve never seen them?”

“Oh, it’s all quite routine. Usually, they remain at the gate and I send it all over on a small hovercraft after I finish with the dinner trash on the night they come so it’s usually pretty late.”

“Hovercraft?”

“Well, yes. They come only once a month and being the size of school that we are, we do produce a large amount of trash in that period of time.”

“Does the hovercraft come back...I mean, is there a point where they switch it over into their ship...or something.”

“Of course,” BX says as he carries on with his daily tasks, thinking that Ben’s question was purely for curiosity’s sake.

“So...I noticed the trash was pretty full. When do they come to pick it up next?”

“A week from today. If we fill it up before then I can always contact them and they can come a few days ahead of time but we’re usually alright. We tend to only fill up too quickly right after Parent’s Nights.”

“Interesting.”

Ben stands there, his arms crossed, his mind working away as he takes in this information. It seemed almost too easy, but he knew better than to get too far ahead of himself. He thought it would be best to run it by Boris first. He would tell him if he was being ridiculous and unrealistic.

“I think I can handle everything from here, Master Solo. Feel free to return to your studies.”

“Thank you, Beex.” Ben couldn’t thank the droid enough.

He can’t help but think that he just found a solution.

“Whoa, slow down,” Boris says holding up his hands and scooting his chair a little closer to where Ben was sitting. Ben had come into his hut wide eyed and determined, speaking of a rather outlandish concept that he still couldn’t wrap his mind around.

So even though they are alone, Boris tries to keep his voice low. “I’m sorry, you’re thinking of smuggling yourself out through the garbage?”
“Beex explained the whole process to me. I don’t think it’s that crazy.”

“Ben, that seems too risky.”

“All of this is risky. Besides, how else am I going to get to the main gate? Do you know how far it is from here?”

Boris sighs. “Fifty miles…at least. And it’s fairly inland. I was going to suggest maybe taking one of the hydro speeders but you would still have to walk for miles to get to it once you’re on land.”

Ben shakes his head. “This is the only solution that would realistically give me enough time to get away from the Academy unnoticed while also giving me a solid enough headstart before Luke discovers I’m gone in the morning.”

Boris is starting to see the logic in it, even if he thought it was a little strange. “Alright. You said that will give us about a week?”

“Yeah, Beex said a week from today and he said he sends it off after dinner when he’s finished cleaning everything up.”

“But we still need to make sure you have your lightsabers. Honestly, I have no idea where to start with that. The vault is probably the best-protected thing on this entire planet. It’s encrypted for Luke’s palm. Only he can open it.”

Ben knows this too and looks frustrated as he brings a hand to his forehead, resting his face there for a moment. It was overwhelming.

So, Boris tries to give him some more positive news.

“I think we’re in pretty good shape though when it comes to getting you into one of the ships at the gate. Now, usually, if one of the emergency shuttles is activated, Luke would be notified and then he would know too far ahead of time of your departure. The main thing I’ve been trying to organize is coding a data chip to give you. It will confuse the system to count over the missing ship. This would also mean that the droids there will do the same since they all operate on the same algorithm. I was doing some research on them and I was almost offended that for all these years, the droids that have been ‘guarding’ our school are pretty low tech…but in this instance, it gives us the advantage.”

“You did all of this from your holopad?” Ben asks, impressed.

Boris shrugs. “I like this kind of stuff. My mom is really good at it. She showed me a lot of tricks when I was younger.”

“Sounds like you’ve been busy. I can’t thank you enough. Do…do you think it would be ready in a week?”

“Definitely. I’m almost done with it. The only thing I’m a little worried about is the vault. I’m going to take some time tonight to brainstorm some ideas…hopefully, we can figure something out.”

Ben nods, “Alright then, I guess I’ll leave you to it.”

“See you in the morning, Ben.”

“Yeah, see you. Don’t stay up too late,” he says, ducking out the curtain.
Boris returns to looking at his holopad, working away.

Ben returns to Rey’s hut. He brushes his teeth and kicks off his boots, collapsing onto the bed and wincing when he hears a big creak beneath him.

He reaches for her sketchbook then, knowing it will help calm him after a long day of ups and downs.

He tries to savor the pages but ends up flipping to his favorite one as he did almost every night.

He lays the sketchbook flat, first looking at the left page where she had been practicing hands. A variation of his hands and hers. All of hers were of her right hand (her left-hand busy drawing), doing various gestures. His hands were more involved as she would really study them. And as beautiful as they were, he couldn’t drag his eyes away from the page on the right where she had drawn, to actual size, their hands together. They were gently holding the other. His much larger than hers.

He liked to line up his hand with the one she had drawn in the book, careful not to smudge the graphite as he liked to imagine he was holding her hand the same way he had the day she drew it.

He thinks of their interaction from earlier when she had appeared to him in the library. It broke his heart to see her cry like that. He was relieved that she seemed to relax once they could hold onto each other for a few minutes and at the very least he was able to leave something with her that he hoped would bring her company the way her sketchbook did for him.

His eyes begin to close as he laid there on his stomach, his hand still trying to reach hers through the paper. Worried he could damage the drawing, he closes the book, bringing it to his chest and throwing the blanket over his legs.

He falls asleep thinking of her words. Words he hadn’t expected but still made him smile like an idiot.

*You are amazing and you’re the best fucking person in this galaxy.*

His chest almost seemed too tight to house his full heart as he drifted off to sleep with those words ringing in his head.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading. I promise this is actually going somewhere even though it probably feels like it's taking forever.
Luke sat in his quarters, staring at his holoprojector.

It was off, but he still stared at it, hoping he would soon have the courage to turn it on and contact his sister.

He meant to contact her right after the incident but the more time that passed, he can’t seem to do so. She had called him a few times, wanting to discuss taking Ben somewhere for his birthday but Luke hadn’t answered and resorted to just messaging her instead, telling her that things were a little swamped and maybe they could organize something in the future. Luke had given no indication of the things her son was actually going through and he feels like he’s lied to her. And now it’s been far too long for him to try and claim that he’s just been too busy and overwhelmed.

He can’t help but think that Leia would have handled it a lot differently. But he had only acted the way he did to try and keep Ben safe from himself.

Still, he had sent Rey away, and it wasn’t sitting very well with Luke. And if he felt like that, he could only imagine how Leia would feel once she found out.

Luke knew how conflicted Ben was. He knew that if he didn’t separate him from Rey, he would only be aiding his dependence on her and the moment things didn’t go right, Ben wouldn’t handle it well. It could be the final push he needed.

Not that things were currently going very well but Luke wanted to believe that they were at least striding in a more balanced direction as Ben had to face repercussions for his actions. But everything Ben does seems to be underlying with rage. Luke tries to reason that it was just because Ben hated him right now and whenever he was around him, Ben was monumentally pissed off. But Luke had seen him interacting with Xid and Soldar in the mess hall a few days ago and he could sense that temptation, the impulse he had to reach for Xid and hurt him.

Luke couldn’t trust Ben. It was the main reason why he had returned the lightsabers back to everyone except Ben. He figured it was best to make sure everyone was able to defend themselves in case Ben gave them a reason to.

Luke did what he believed he had to do.

But he also couldn’t help but feel guilty for sending Rey away, despite his intentions of trying to help them both detach themselves from this relationship they had harbored for each other.

Luke looks to the chrono. It was late. Even later in Chandrila’s time so Luke knew that tonight would be like all the others. He wasn’t going to call Leia.

But still, he sat there, his mind wondering what to do now. Or rather finally confronting what he has been putting off. Facing the truth of his nephew.
And considering that he would most likely be asleep, Luke decides to take a walk down to Ben’s hut. He has been so frightened within the past few years that Ben’s mind had been too absorbed in the dark and he knows that he could confirm it for himself, but he’s been too afraid to check.

He does not want to face the reality that his nephew is too far gone. Luke doesn’t want to even consider what he would have to do if he discovered the true threat that Ben could be capable of becoming.

But he knew he’s put it off too long. A true Jedi would handle this well, ensuring the protection of the rest of his students.

He arrives at his hut, ensuring that Ben was asleep. It was actually Rey’s hut but he has seemed to claim it as his own. At this point and Luke is so tired of getting mad at him so he kind of just let this one thing slide, not wanting to give Ben another reason to despise him when he seems to find comfort here.

He feels closer to her here.

Luke enters quietly, seeing the tall figure on the bed, his back to him. He approaches, seeing how Ben was holding a hardbound black book to his chest.

Luke solemnly recognizes it as Rey’s sketchbook.

Luke refocuses, knowing he was getting distracted. So, he holds out his flesh hand, about a foot away from Ben’s head, trying to reach out and sense for himself what he could see. He needed to see the kind of future his nephew was destined for.

If he were to call Leia, it would only prolong this and it needed to be done. He needed to know what lurked within his student as unattached as he possibly could. He could not think of him as his nephew, as Leia’s son, or as young and innocent Ben Solo as he tries to see what possibilities could lie ahead of them with what toils in his mind.

At first, he sees darkness. He sees anger and fear and snippets of lonely moments from his youth. He sees him screaming at his mother, snapping at Han, turning Luke’s own lightsaber against him, threatening Xid, and even punching Armitage in the face. Something that looks fairly recent but Luke does not recall happening. Ben exists in quick spirals, exposing his darkest moments. The ones that made Leia resort to sending him to the Academy in the first place.

And then Luke hears a sinister voice. One that tries to reach out to Ben in his weakest moments, tempting him in a way that Luke knows only the dark can do.

You could be so much more powerful. So much more than what you are, you spineless coward.

Whoever was speaking to him could sense Ben’s dark tendencies. Something that was getting increasingly worrisome, given everything that’s happened lately.

Luke sees himself with Ben and he can almost feel the overwhelming hate and betrayal from the memory alone as Ben screams at him for sending her away and then it shows them again arguing in the forest. All the while the same sinister voice speaking over the memories.

He thinks you have Vader in you, the voice roars. You do! Prove it! Strike him down. Kill him. Kill them all!

Luke can only imagine what kind of devastating future lies ahead of all this and for a brief moment, he wonders if it could all be stopped before it even started. If any future containing this voice and
Ben’s darkness was possible, the galaxy would surely suffer. It crashes all around and Luke starts to instinctively reach for the lightsaber on his belt, thinking only to spare Ben from such pain and suffering he would likely receive as well as inflict.

But then it all goes still as suddenly as it had started, focusing on Ben as he laid on the same bed he was laying on now. He was crying and panicked, no doubt hearing the voice telling him to commit those horrible acts.

Ben shook his head and Luke can see that he’s trying to keep it away...all on his own. The snippets of the endless anger and sadness cease. Ben had found something and he was trying to ground himself, keeping the dark and the voices at bay.

Luke was baffled, wondering what was happening, but suddenly there’s a strange new glow. A strong and beautiful light that exists within him.

And suddenly, it shifts into something else entirely. It starts at the shore, the moon reflecting off the water. Ben is looking at the waves. He’s looking at the sand. The trees swaying behind him. And then he’s looking to the girl next to him.

Rey.

Luke takes his hand off his lightsaber, focusing entirely on what he was seeing. This was a memory in itself. This had happened just a few miles away at the beach they would go to train at and do who knows what else.

Rey looks to him, a smile on her face. She reaches out to hold his cheek, her thumb gently caressing the lines of the smile he was giving her in return.

Luke sees them in a series of movements and memories, similar to how the darker ones were presented, but there is something much softer about these ones.

He sees them train. He sees them laugh. He sees them swim. He sees them lay on the sand and look at the stars together, hands entwined. He sees Ben sitting with flowers in his dark hair while Rey drew him, a smile still on both their faces.

Luke has never seen Ben look so happy.

He then sees them in the Falcon, speaking closely, something about their crystals and their connection. Luke’s brow furrows in confusion, unsure of what they said, catching the tail end of their sentences.

But then sees them snuggling closely, holding each other as they slept with total peace among their features. More so than Luke had ever seen from Ben in his entire life.

It suddenly returns to the first scene Luke was shown of them. The two of them on the beach. Rey holding his face as they smiled at one another. But this time he hears them speak.

*You look happy,* Rey tells him.

*I am,* Ben answers.

And before it all ends, it goes back to the Ben who was previously shaking and crying, trying to push it all away, but he’s breathing again and in these happier moments that helped him balance himself, he found rest.
He hadn’t fallen to the dark.

Luke pulls his hand away, feeling like he’d been hit by a freighter. He certainly hadn’t expected that. But as he recenters himself, Luke looks down at the real and present Ben only to find two dark eyes looking back at him.

“What the hell are you doing?” Ben asks sternly, definitely not pleased to be woken up.

“I-I was…” Luke shakes his head, backing up. “It’s nothing. Sorry to wake you,” he said, quickly leaving the hut and making his way back up to the temple, trying to process what he had just been witness to.

Rey was sitting in an old officer’s quarters in a decrepit old Star Destroyer. It was permanently at an angle (given how it had crashed) so nothing was flat but she had found a place to sit and just flip through Ben’s journal he had given her.

Rey absolutely loved it and it helped her forget about her current surroundings.

_I don’t really know what to do. I’m still kind of shaking. She kissed me. She kissed me and now I know that I’m doomed._

_I love her. I know I do. I don’t how I’m supposed to just go about our lessons, pretending like I’m not hopelessly in love with her or how whenever she looks at me, I get lost in her eyes and the brightness of her smile._

Rey smiles at the page. She had been the same way after they had first kissed on the beach. She didn’t know how to act around him after that. After she had fully confronted her own feelings.

Suddenly, she feels that familiar thrum in the force that she’s come to associate with the bond. She sits up, wondering where he might appear when she sees his broad shoulders on the other side of the room. She can tell he’s distracted because he doesn’t seem to notice she’s there. She approaches him quietly, noticing his ruffled hair and the lines imprinted on his face, as if he had just woken up.

“Ben?” she says softly, reaching for him.

His head spins to look at her and he gives a soft smile. “Rey,” he breathes out, scooting closer to take hold of her. She hugs him but pulls away to look at the strange expression on his face.

“Ben, are you alright?”

He looks like he’s trying to respond but doesn’t know how. His mouth closing and opening, trying to form the words. She runs her hands over his arms, trying to comfort him and letting him know to take his time. She didn’t want to rush him.

“The strangest thing just happened,” he finally says.

“What?” She immediately asks, his vague answer doing nothing to ease her worry.

“Well, it’s the middle of the night here. I was sleeping but then I woke up to find Luke in the hut, standing over me with…” Ben shakes his head, searching for the words, “with this weird look on his face. I couldn’t quite make out what it was, but he looked kind of startled.”

“What was he doing?” She asks, confused.
“I asked him but he said it was nothing. He apologized for waking me and left immediately after. I’ve been up ever since.”

Rey tries to consider what Luke was doing but can’t think of anything sensible enough. Especially since she’s come to think Luke doesn’t exactly operate with sensibility at this point.

Ben’s brow furrows as he considers his uncle’s odd behavior. “He’s been such a pain in the ass but that was just...weird.”

Rey nods in agreement, moving to lean against him as they sat beside each other. Ben brought his arm to rest around her shoulders, the gesture feeling natural and comforting all at once.

They stay like that for a long moment, just happy to be in contact with the other.

“How’s Operation Trash coming?”

Ben snorts, burying his face in her hair. “Good. Only four more days.”

He had told her a few days ago that he had found a way to get to the gate unnoticed and that Boris was helping him code a data chip that would help him sneak away on one of the emergency shuttles.

“The only things we’re having trouble with is getting the lightsabers back. Boris and I don’t know what to do with the vault. At this point, I’m considering that if we can’t get to them, maybe it’s best if I leave them behind. I don’t want to risk getting caught this close to getting out of here.”

Rey understands what he means and she wouldn’t fault him for it if he did leave them behind. “I think that’s smart. We can get by without them. I think we’re pretty resourceful,” she says, nudging him playfully.

Ben yawns then. “Ben, you should go back to bed. You’re exhausted.”

“I’m fine,” he insisted, his eyes looking drowsy. She urges Ben to lay back down, remaining beside him, gently brushing her fingers past his face and through his hair, trying to help him find rest.

“I’m not even tired,” he argues again, his eyes totally closed at this point. He turns his head to place a lazy kiss against her wrist that tickles. She laughs at him, leaning down to kiss his cheek.

“I’ll see you soon, Ben.”

“Soon,” he breathes out softly.

And as he falls back asleep, the bond closes. But Rey doesn’t allow herself to be sad this time. She’s too excited.

Four more days. She could do that. This truly was almost over.

Luke didn’t sleep very well. How could he?

He could see nothing but the constant replay of the moments he had borne witness to in Ben’s mind. And he is still shaking as he thought of that brief moment where he had reached for his saber, nearly making such a grave mistake.

Luke knew his nephew has felt conflicted. There was no hiding that. And although there was
conflict in Ben’s mind, Luke was not prepared for the sense of balance Ben has been able to find with this girl.

With Rey.

Rey who Luke himself had practically banished back to the planet where she had apparently been a slave her entire childhood.

No wonder Ben hated him as strongly as he does now. He had taken away the light in his life and left him with nothing but the darkness. And yet, Ben clung to the light she helped him see and tried to keep himself balanced in the moments where he was the most afraid.

As much as Luke thought Ben had been teaching her, Rey had helped Ben embrace the light that had always existed in him. Luke couldn’t help but be so proud of him for that.

Luke also couldn’t help but hate himself as he thought more of what he’s done. His guilt has been a gradual thing but suddenly it washes over him much stronger than before. Not just for sending Rey away but for how he’s acted towards Ben, especially just a few hours ago when he could have--

Luke can’t even stomach what could have happened if he hadn’t been stopped by those sudden bright memories of Rey in Ben's mind. He can bear to think what would have happened if he had activated his saber. He feels almost nauseous.

Ben, his nephew. How had he allowed himself to fail him so badly?

And now he knows that when he tells his sister, he will have no excuse for his actions. He hadn’t done what was best for Ben as he had previously believed. Instead, he had done the worst thing possible. And now he doesn’t know how to fix it.

And he’s baffled by the strength of their connection. True, he only saw it in Ben’s memories, but it’s as if they were magnets. And then he recalls the few words he caught of theirs as they spoke of their crystals. Something that prompted them to think there was a powerful link there.

Suddenly, he recalls how both of their sabers were downstairs in the vault.

Hoping he could slip by unnoticed by any early risers at the mess, Luke sprung out of bed, slipping on the first pair of shoes he could find and making his way downstairs. He is quick to enter the vault and grab the sabers he had gingerly placed on the shelf before ducking out again and locking it behind him.

He walks briskly back for the stairs, ignoring any incomers, hoping they weren’t paying any attention to him. Luke rushed back to his room, cradling both of the weapons in his hands until he was back sitting down.

He felt a little too frazzled to invest too much energy into them now, but there is an undeniable symmetry to them. As much as they are different they are the same. The crystals almost feel like an extension of the other and Luke has never experienced anything like it before. Especially not with something as personal as a lightsaber and the kyber crystals within them.

He has no idea how he didn’t notice it earlier. Especially because he recognizes that the energy is strong with the Force.

For the first time, Luke considers the possibility that their relationship went beyond just two hormonal teenagers who were overloaded with new awakening feelings. He was reluctant to label it as anything else, but it seemed like the evidence proving him wrong was lying in his hands.
Fuck, Luke thinks. *What have I done?*

He doesn’t know where to go from here. Suddenly, he thinks of his sister and impulsively enters her contact code. He is relieved when she answers. She’s also still in her pajamas but hers are much more regal than his own.

“Luke!” She beams, so happy to finally hear from him. “I’m so glad you called.” Luke doesn’t answer. He just looks down at the lightsabers in his hands, trying to think of something to say. “Luke? What’s the matter?” Leia asks, no doubt seeing the look of loss on his face. “Is it...is it Ben? Has he done something?”

No, I have, Luke thinks but doesn’t say that. He should have thought this through. This doesn’t feel like the kind of conversation they should have on a holoprojector.

“No, I have, Luke thinks but doesn’t say that. He should have thought this through. This doesn’t feel like the kind of conversation they should have on a holoprojector.

“Oh, I don’t even know where to start...but I think you need to get here. I think at this point, you would be a better help to him than me.”

Leia must see it in his face because she somehow knows not to bring up whatever long list of political things she needs to do. She must realize how serious this is and suddenly, her happy temperament from when she first greeted him is long replaced by a seriousness he sees from her far too often.

“Of course. Let me call you back in a few hours and I’ll figure out when I can leave.”

“Okay. I’ll be waiting.”

He’s about to sign off when she speaks again. “Luke?”

“What?”

“Just tell me...is it too late? Have I lost him?” She asks, her voice shaky and frightened of what Luke might say. The fate of her son riding in his response.

Luke shakes his head. “No. He’s...He’s alright.”

*He’s going to be,* Luke wants to say but doesn’t.

“But he’s been through a lot lately and I certainly haven’t been any help. There’s a lot we need to talk about but I think I should wait until you’re here. It all seems like too much.”

“I understand. I’ll try to arrange everything as soon as I can. Hopefully, I can make it in a few days. Do you think it can wait that long?”

Luke nods. “As long as you get here soon, I think we’re all going to be okay.”


And with that, the projection fades and Luke slumps back against the couch. He sits there for far too long. Long enough that R2 rolls in, telling him he was late for morning lessons.

So he got dressed and placed the two sabers in the drawer of his desk.

Before he followed the astromech out, he caught his reflection in the mirror, and for the first time since he’s built this Academy, doubt fills his mind. His students trusted him to not only teach them well but to look out for them.
Rey had trusted him to do that and he had sent her away.

He’s not sure if Ben ever trusted him to do that but he certainly never would trust him now.

And if he’s failed his two brightest pupils, what good could he do for the rest of the students? What good could he do for the future of what was meant to be an entirely new generation of Jedi?

Luke wasn’t sure, but they were waiting for him regardless. He could only hope that Leia got here soon so he could express this to her.

Boris has waited for hours, personally amazed at his patience and the need to be discreet. He wasn’t sure if Luke had seen him or not early this morning when he had been rushing back upstairs but Boris was certain that Ben and Rey’s sabers were in the Master’s hands.

Boris couldn’t help but think that the man had looked somewhat troubled or at the very least, a frazzled.

Boris had tried to tell himself that perhaps he was just worried about being late to class and needed to hurry so he could finish getting ready, but then he had been extremely late to the lessons as all the students waited there for him. It took great restraint to steer clear of Ben all morning, knowing that the thing that had troubled them most for the past few days might have been solved.

Luke eventually did come to class, but he was clearly not feeling like himself. Other students had come to the conclusion that he might have a cold or something and Boris could only pretend to agree when Osi asked for his input.

Luke had then excused them after only an hour, saying that they could take the day for independent study and they could choose what to focus on. It was then that Ben looked right at Boris from across the room, a silent request to meet up with him at the earliest convenience. But they at least had anticipated that Ben would need to partake in his usual chores and punishments, but Luke had excused him from those as well.

Needless to say, something strange was going on with their Master.

But at least it seemed to be to their advantage so as soon as Boris was alone, he rushed down to Rey’s hut where he knew Ben would be waiting.

He entered unannounced but he knows Ben could sense him coming in anyway. He steps in, finding Ben’s back to him as he seemed to be writing something at the desk.

“Ben,” Boris starts, the excitement in his voice.

“Hmm?” he asks, finally putting his pen down to turn to him.

Boris couldn’t hold back a smile. “Ben, I saw Luke take both yours and Rey’s sabers out of the vault this morning. He took them to his room.”

Ben looks excited too at first before his brow furrows and he asks, “To his room? What the hell is doing with them?”

“I don’t know. He looked a little frantic. He was still in his pajamas.”

Ben nods at first but it gradually changes until he’s shaking his head in confusion. “He’s been acting so strange. Just last night, I woke up to find him standing in the middle of the room. As if he
was watching me like a creep."

“That’s just odd. What is going on with him? And then this morning? He practically gave us all the
day off, including you! After how he’s treated you for weeks and now this?”

Ben is quiet for a moment as he considers all of this but finally speaks, his voice quiet and worried.
“You don’t think he suspects anything, do you? You don’t think this all just some game if his? I
definitely wouldn’t put it past him.”

“I have no idea. But I guess for us, now all we have to do is to find a way to sneak into his room
and swipe them while he’s not there. It’s still going to be difficult but I think it’s better than dealing
with the vault. But we have to do so close enough before you leave or else he’ll notice they’re
gone. You would be his first suspect at that point.”

Ben nods, knowing that was true.

“Something’s going on for sure though. I mean, after last night, and now this morning...I don’t
know what to make of it. At least it’s all almost over.”

They were down to the line now. The final stretch.

Rey was going to be off Jakku soon enough.

Rey drags in the finds for Plutt. It’s nothing incredible, which is then confirmed by the quarter
portion he gives her, but at least he doesn’t complain about it.

She turns away to leave when he hollers her back.

“Oi, come back here, girly.”

Rey goes tense, looking at him carefully. She tightens her hand around the strap of her satchel.

“I got a new collar for you. It’s a better model and it doesn’t look like it was stomped on by a
bantha. That one looks like shit and I don’t want it to crap out on me.”

“But I-” Rey starts.

“No, don’t give me no strife. Come here. Or else my associate will be inclined to shoot you,” he
nods over to a large creature beside him, holding a rifle of some sort. It looks pretty old and
weathered but Rey doesn’t doubt it can still fire.

The line of people waiting to trade in their hauls get rowdy and scream at her to hurry up and
suddenly she finds herself stepping forward.

“I’m gonna take off the other one first. If you try to pull anything, Vlad here will blast ya.
Understood?”

“Yes,” she says quietly.

For a split second, she wonders if she could force push them both back as she had once before. But
that was just wishful thinking. She looked all around. There were dozens of people. More so than
she usually saw at Niima. Dirty and angry people, driven to near madness with hunger. Most of
them were just like her. Slaves, scavengers, or held prisoners either to Plutt or themselves. She
didn’t want to hurt them by accident just because they were in range.
And Rey tells herself that it would only complicate things. Ben was coming for her. *Only four more days*, they had said just earlier that afternoon. She wouldn’t risk jeopardizing that.

So she steps closer to Plutt, knowing, for now, this is what she has to do.

He has her turn around and his stubby fingers snag the collar and pull her closer so it chokes her ever so slightly. Although, knowing him, he was doing that on purpose. Plutt takes it off (perhaps not noticing that she had practically destroyed the mechanism) and snaps for the other man, Vlad, to pass him the new collar.

As soon as Rey feels it make contact with her skin, she can feel how different it was to the old one. This one was thicker, and the instant that it clicked shut at the nape of her neck, she knew getting out of this one would be much harder.

The Force within her goes silent.

When he’s done, Plutt knocks her on the back of the head with the palm of his hand, the signal for her to get moving. “Alright, get out of here. Can’t you see I’m busy? Vlad, get on out there and get everyone back in line!” he shouted to the larger man.

Vlad’s only response is a gunt as he goes out and tries to get everyone back into formation.

Rey gathers her things, looking to the collar Plutt had thrown into the scrap pile before she leaves. As she mounted the speeder, heading back for E’di’s homestead, she realized that until she could work out some kind of solution to get it off, the bond wouldn’t open. She wouldn’t be able to see Ben.

And she couldn’t help but feel a severe sense of dread within the pit of her stomach.

Still, she tried to reassure herself that tomorrow would mark only three days left until Ben was on his way. Surely she could hold out alright and Ben would find her just fine.

Still, she could not help the twinge of panic that began to manifest in her mind, now unnervingly quiet without the force or the comforting hum of their bond.

Ben waited until Boris left once again to return to his letter. He had addressed it to Luke, knowing he would find it once Ben was gone.

He’s trying to remain civil and sound as calm as he can. And somehow he’s still enjoying it, imaging what Luke’s face would look like once he’s realized what’s happened.

Ben reads over it once he’s done, smirking to himself as he thinks of one final thing to add.

He lets the ink dry as he sits back, stretching.

He looks to the chrono. Sometimes if they were lucky, the bond would open around this time since she was usually getting ready to lie down or at least was back at the homestead she had been sharing with the other scavenger woman, E’di, that Rey had told him about. Relieved he had no chores or stupid essays to do, he moved to the floor as if he was going to meditate. He crosses his legs and closes his eyes, eager to tell Rey of all that has progressed since he saw her last. He also summoned his pack closer to him, realizing that he had been so tired and distracted by Luke’s odd behavior when he saw her last night, he forgot to give her more food and water.

He reaches out, thinking of the bond, breathing deeply and hoping that when he next opened his
eyes she would be there.

Only the bond doesn’t seem to be working. He tries not to be too discouraged. He knows it can be held accountable for many things and it shouldn’t make him immediately worry.

And yet, that’s exactly what it does.

But he takes a deep breath, knowing that the bond would open eventually and he should just relax. Sensing the sudden spike of unease within him regardless of his efforts, he figures he should take the time to meditate anyway. He needed to stay calm and focused in these final days if this was all going to pull through as well as they have planned.

*It was nearly over,* Ben reminds himself.

Chapter End Notes

We're getting somewhere, folks! Hang tight!

Honestly, I dived headfirst into this chapter. I really want to get Ben and Rey back together so I'm trying to get faster at this shit. I hope it's not too confusing, let me know if you have any questions or comments. I love the feedback.

As we embark on reuniting them, it may seem rough at points but they are going to be fine! They are going to end up happy and alive and together because I won't settle for anything else...
Farewell To The Fairground

Chapter Summary

Jakku sucks.

But Ben finally leaves so that's...that's good.

Jakku still sucks.

Chapter Notes

First off, thank you to everyone reading. The comments are amazing and I love you all. I've gotten a big wave of kudos recently and I'm so happy to see that people are enjoying torturing themselves with this story, lol.

Secondly, I apologize for the emotional rollercoaster I'm about to put you through. Just to be safe, there is some brief depictions of blood in this chapter due to an attack from a wild animal.

Now that I've officially stressed you out, enjoy:)

As usual, I've read it over too many times and I'm itching to get the next one started so I'm just going to post it and fix it later if I find any grammatical errors.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Rey has become so attuned to having the force as a conscious and constant part of her that being shut out of it again made her feel like she was missing one of her hands.

She had spent the past few nights trying to wedge her way out of the new collar but it was no good. She had more nicks on her neck than the mechanism did at this point. She had tried to tell herself that everything was still okay. She knew Ben was coming so she supposed that they could make do without the bond.

She can only imagine though what Ben must think. She hopes he hasn’t been too worried since the bond hasn’t activated. She wished there was some way to tell him she was alright.

In her final days, she’s having a hard time focusing on something as meager as scavenging. She hopes that Ben and Boris haven’t been caught by Luke. She really hopes that he would know to leave the sabers behind in the vault if it would compromise everything.

Of course, he would have the sense to do so but she can’t help worrying about every little thing now. At least mentally. When it came to scavenging she’s been a mess. She’s brought in nothing but trash and for once she agrees with Plutt when he snaps at her for dragging in total crap, He hasn’t given her any food so Rey has been living off of the food packs that Ben had given her, not that she wasn’t before but now she relies on them entirely, which was getting nerve wracking
because she only had so many left.

But still, she only had two days left at the most and she’s gone longer than that without food before. And there was no reason for her to be overthinking it anyway. She would be fine. But her mind trails off, inventing things to worry about so she can distract herself from other things she’s worried about because apparently, her mind has resorted to torturing her.

She should probably try to meditate, even just to try and calm down, even though she can’t reach out to the force. But instead, she just kept busy, trying to get through the day so this could all be over faster. At least that’s the logic she’s tried to apply to it.

Where she had come to expect the bond and have those few moments just to see Ben, she realized how much it calmed her. Now, her mind never shut off as it viciously regurgitated everything that she really didn’t want to worry about.

Eventually, Rey looks down to what she’s gathered and figured it would have to be good enough to call it a day. It was starting to get too late in the day and it was a long ride back. Rey packs up and begins weaving her way through the tight spaces of the Star Destroyer she’s navigated since she was a young girl.

Rey lands on the base level but sighs to herself as she knows she still has a long way to walk until she can get to where she had entered and hidden her speeder outside. She cursed the massive ships briefly before getting a move on again.

In these moments, she allows herself to think of something better, not wanting her worries to crowd her now. She wonders where they will go once Ben comes for her. They’ve spoken of seeing the galaxy. She’s only ever seen Takodana, Illum, and Oquinn. All vastly more beautiful than the rock she was currently stranded on. She could only imagine what else the rest of the galaxy looked like and she smiled, imagining all she and Ben could do.

Suddenly, through her happy daze, she heard an ominous creak from behind her. Rey stopped in her tracks, her heart already beating out of her chest. She slowly turned her head to scan the ship behind her. At first, she didn’t see anything, but she didn’t need the Force to know something was wrong. The hair on the back of her neck stands up as she tries to look to the shadows, wondering if someone was watching her.

She wonders if this is just part of the paranoia she’s currently been living in lately and that’s why she was so panicked. She wonders if that’s why the shadows seem to move.

But then she hears the low rumble of something so primal that she knows it’s an animal. Confirmed seconds later by the sudden emergence of one glowing red eye spying at her from the darkness.

Rey gulped, her eyes blowing wide as it stepped forward, revealing the form of a massive wolf. And although she’s never seen one before, she knows well enough it’s a skinwolf.

Skinwolves weren’t native to this territory. People said that they lived in the lands further North of Kelvin Ridge. But she had heard other travelers speak of them and their carnivorous appetite and their ability to withstand great blows because of their odd skin, covered in calloused warts and boils that created an armor hard to penetrate.

It sounded almost too monstrous to be real and Rey always had a suspicion that they might have been a myth.
Fuck, she thinks. Definitely not a myth.

Rey remained very still. It seemed to only be keeping it’s distance because it was wondering if she was going to bolt or not.

It didn’t look very good. She’s heard they travel in packs but this one seemed to be alone. It looked very skinny, his ribs protruding from his sickly looking skin and what seemed to be a missing eye.

He looked desperate and hungry. Something Rey had seen in many people’s eyes before, but this was different. Rey knew she had to get out of there, and fast, or she never would.

Rey holds out her hand, trying to show some sense of understanding. To show she means no harm, which seemed almost counterproductive but she only had one idea and she needed to go with it.

She slowly reached into her bag and pulled out one of Ben’s food packs. The animal snarled, looking displeased at the crinkling noise but she tried to act quick as she unwrapped it and threw the food over to the wolf.

The snarling ceased for a moment. He inspected the food on the ground, unsure at first but then taking it into his mouth.

Rey started to set down all the things weighing her down as she reached for the next food pack and threw it across the room. Before long, all she has left is Ben’s canteen and Ben’s journal. And she was keeping them for sure. So she throws the food, trying to keep him as far from her as possible, and yet with every piece he ate, he seemed to be getting closer.

Looking anywhere she could for an idea, Rey spied a small crawlspace. One she knew she could fit through but the wolf could not. She’s not sure if it would take her back to the big room she came through this morning but it seemed like a safer bet than just trying to make a run for it. Although the wolf looked weak, he would definitely outrun her. So, she slowly moves her feet, breaking apart a piece of bread so that it would take longer to run out of before she was empty-handed. The wolf must notice she’s almost out of food because he starts snarling again as he begins to corner her.

Rey hurls the last piece as far as she can before bolting the other way and making her way for the crawlspace, hearing nothing but the ferocious panting of the wolf she knew was chasing her already.

She jumped as far as she could, her fingers catching the very ledge of the small chute. She tried to pull herself up quickly, but the wolf caught up and stood up on his hind legs to try and pull her back down. His claws scratching her legs. Her mind goes into full defense mode, kicking and shouting and still trying to pull herself up. She feels something strike across her torso but ignored it, knowing she had to block everything out but getting herself up on the ledge and to safety.

Gathering all her strength, she looked down, stomping her foot into his missing eye and the wolf whimpered and recoiled, the wound obviously still tender. The wolf let go and Rey climbed up and huddled into the small space, her heart in her throat and nothing but her heaving breaths filling her ears.

She takes a moment to gather herself and ensure that the wolf couldn’t follow her. She looks down at her legs. There’s a collection of cuts there but they don’t seem too bad. Nothing major. Wondering how she managed to get away with nothing but scrapes, Rey made to leave.

But she hisses as the movement alerts her to a severe pain across her abdomen. She looks down at herself and even in the dim light of the air duct or whatever she was sitting in, she could make out
the blooming red stain against the fabric.

She pulls up her shirt and sees four long streaks that have been clawed deep into her skin and all the blood to go with it.

She instantly feels dizzy, not from the sight of blood, but rather the loss of it. She knows she needs to stop it quickly or she would likely die. It was much more serious than the more superficial cuts on her legs.

It is the thought of their future and everything they have yet to do that gives her the focus she needs to apply pressure to the wound, even though it’s painful and hard to do with just her own shaky arms. She tries to plan that later she could use the tunic to make it into strips for a makeshift bandage to wrap around her middle.

Still, she had to stop the bleeding.

Rey wasn’t ready to give up. Not now. Not when they were so close.

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Ben was sitting on the floor again. He had tried meditating again but there was nothing to find so he just sat there, his head curled down and the tears streaming from his eyes.

He looked beneath the curtain and saw the early blue glow of morning start to come through.

He was leaving tonight. And he should be beaming, but all he could think about was that Rey hasn’t appeared to him through the bond in days.

He had tried not to let it get to him at first but the longer the bond was dormant the more the panic began to grow in his mind.

He has been terrified that something happened to her. Endless scenarios were running through his head almost constantly.

He was so distracted he didn’t even sense that Boris was approaching and nearly jumped out of his skin when he entered. “Whoa, sorry. Didn’t mean to scare you.”

Ben held a hand over his chest but answered quietly. “It’s fine.”

“Are-uh...Are you okay? You look a little…” Boris doesn’t end up saying anything but Ben can read between the lines.


Boris’ ears twitch at the news. “What does that mean?”

Ben shakes his head. “I don’t know what it means...and it’s fucking terrifying.”

“I’m sure everything is fine. Maybe it’s just not working as well because we’ve all been so stressed. Maybe if you try meditat-”

“I have. Endlessly. I can’t reach her and or sense her at all,” Ben tells Boris, looking at the ground.

Boris doesn’t say anything for a long moment and Ben knows he’s trying to think of something helpful to say. But there’s not much to go on.

“I’m sorry, Ben. That sounds scary.”
“I just don’t know what it means and I’m afraid that…” tears well in his eyes and he can hear his voice cracking. “…that it might mean she’s hurt or something and I feel so helpless.”

“Ben, you’re not helpless. Today is your last day and tonight you can leave. You’ll get to Jakku soon and I’m sure once you do you’ll find that Rey is fine and you were worrying for nothing. If you panic like this, then you’ll start to get nervous. Try to just stay calm. The most you can help Rey at this moment is to remain relaxed and to ensure that when that garbage leaves tonight that you’re with it.”

Ben considers his words for a moment. He doubts he could stop himself from worrying, but Boris was right. If he was this panicked, he wouldn’t make it far before something went wrong.

He takes a deep breath, nodding his head and looking back to Boris. “You’re right. Thank you.”

Ben stands up, running water over his face and trying to pull himself together, knowing that it would be his last day at the Academy.

Something he’s been hoping for for a long time.

“Besides,” Boris adds a moment later, “Rey is tough. She knows how to take care of herself.”

Ben smiles, knowing that was true.

E’di had expected Rey back at her home hours ago. It was getting so late and the darkness had fallen over the sands, making them even more dangerous than they were in the light.

The older scavenger tried not to let it bother her as she ate her half portion and returned to her own business. But as time went on, worry started to creep in on her and she couldn’t relax, thinking of Rey still out there somewhere.

E’di has always felt a responsibility to the other women of this planet that were here due to consequences beyond their own. She had felt a responsibility towards Katarina but hadn’t been able to help her in the end. When she met Rey, she wanted to try to keep her from that fate.

Rey was a sweet girl, but E’di could see parts of her younger self in the girl. She was too hopeful. She was waiting for something that would never come and it was better to face reality now than realize how you’ve wasted your life believing in a lie.

E’di had tried to tell her that recently but speaking, or rather communicating, had never been the woman’s strongest suit. They haven’t spoken much since then. Actually, they don’t speak much anyway, but now the silence seems to have a tension E’di hadn’t noticed before.

She knows she had been too hard on her but she’s truly realizing it now that she seems to be gone. E’di had grown accustomed to her company which is something she didn’t think she could ever be capable of doing again. She’s kept people at a distance for a reason.

But now she just wants Rey to come home. Suddenly all she can think about is poor Katarina and E’di feels her heart wrench in her chest as she imagines Rey meeting such a fate.

Terrified, she decides she’s waited long enough and she had to go look for her.

But as soon as she got her backpack on, she heard the arrival of a speeder outside.

Rey.
She races out to see the speeder the girl had been using since she came back to Jakku with Rey on top of it, but her head was down.

“Damn it, Rey! You scared the shit out of me!” E’di said marching up to her. She didn’t really move and E’di thought maybe Rey was ignoring her. So, E’di reaches for up, urging her to look at her. “Where the hell have you-” E’di stops as the young girl practically falls into her arms, slumping off the speeder. E’di goes silent as she suddenly sees the makeshift bandages around her middle. “Oh, Rey,” she gasps. “Wha-What happened?”

Rey gives a pained groan in response and her eyes are quickly closing. E’di brings a hand to her face but finds that she’s burning up.

“It’s going to be alright,” E’di assures the girl who likely couldn’t hear her anymore and was in tremendous pain.

She carries her in and sets her down, scrambling to get anything together that could possibly help her. “I’m going to help you. I will,” E’di says, mostly to herself since Rey looks like she’s passed out.

E’di works frantically, trying to ignore the tears in her eyes.

Luke sat in his office. The two sabers that have been taunting him the past few days still safely tucked in the drawer. He’s trying no to spend too much time with them because they only exaggerate how much he’s messed up.

He really wished that Leia could arrive earlier but he knows she will likely be there in the morning. He was hoping she could come immediately and he had told her that as long as she came soon, they would be okay. But he’s been stuck with his guilt and his stress for a while now and he was dying to get everything off his chest.

The past few days at the Academy were certainly far from his best and hopefully not as bad as his worst. He would meet with them in the mornings and then give them the remainder of the day to study independently. But Luke was a kid once too so he knows most of them were doing total nonsense and not studying. And for some reason that was comforting to Luke.

He hoped they were taking the opportunity to just breathe and pretend like they were all normal kids for a while.

Luke has done a lot of thinking in the past few days and he’s feeling at a sort of crossroads with how he has approached this entire Academy.

And it has certainly not helped him get any sleep.

Still, he preferred staring up at his ceiling rather than going to morning lessons and seeing Ben. The guilt was like a rock in his stomach and he could hardly look at him without tears pricking at his eyes.

He wanted so desperately to speak to him, to try and tell him how sorry he was and how he planned to help him sort all of this out once his mother arrived, but Ben would storm past him, never looking him in the eye and trying his best to ignore his uncle.

And Luke couldn’t blame him. He could only hope that with the arrival of Leia, Ben would be more inclined to bear with him just a little longer so they could try and get everything back on track.
Luke can’t stand that this is what he’s become. He hates that he’s secluded himself in his room because he can’t trust himself not to hurt his students the way he hurt Ben and Rey. But still, considering what he sent Rey to and subjected his nephew to as well, Luke knows that this is not punishment enough for himself.

He would have to face the true repercussions of his actions eventually, but until then, he would wait until he can properly try to help those he had wronged.

*Tomorrow, Luke vows to himself. Everything is going to change tomorrow.*

It was always easier to put things off until the next day when you could safely cocoon yourself with your denial in the present.

Suddenly, R2 whirs inside with loud beeps, telling him that there was an altercation in the mess hall.

Luke didn’t even know it was dinner time. He’s been so lost in his thoughts.

“What kind of altercation?” He asks, unamused.

R2 responds with something along the lines of, “Boris accidentally dropped his tray on Armitage’s lap and now he’s screaming at him and things are getting a little escalated.”

Luke sighs, getting out of his chair and making his way down to the mess hall with a groan.

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Ben waited until he saw Luke close the door with R2 to sneak in through the window. He had watched him as he just sat at his desk staring blankly at nothing.

Luke had been so strange within the previous days. There were moments that Ben thought he almost looked a little...sad. But Ben didn’t really care about whatever it was that had made Luke feel the way he did.

Luke had made it clear he didn’t care about Ben’s feelings so Ben wouldn’t care about his.

Ben found their sabers tucked into a drawer of his desk. Picking up Rey’s was like a breath of fresh air. He could pick up a small sense of her signature there and after not seeing her for days, he finally felt like he could relax a little bit. Even just to have this small part of Rey back was so encouraging.

Ben turns back to leave out the window, taking one last look at the room. He had been asked in here many times. Most of the time it was so Luke could give him some sort of lecture or because his mother wanted to talk to him. But now, he doubts he’d be in here ever again.

Ben looks to the holoprojector for a moment before he leaves. He’s spoken to his mother many times on that projector. He thinks back to all the times she apologized for being unable to come visit. All those times she asked him why he wasn’t behaving for Luke or why he was causing so much trouble.

He wondered how she would feel once she knew he was gone. He wondered again if she was aware of any of this. Even if she wasn’t though, she hasn’t seemed to bother reaching out to him anyway despite Luke mentioning how she had been interested taking him somewhere for his birthday.

Ben’s birthday was in two days.
He figured by then, he and Rey would have managed to get to a safety planet. He knew they would probably be moving around for a while and they would naturally need credits.

Which Ben happened to have a lot of. It was just sitting in an account that was linked with his mother’s. Whenever he spent the money, she was alerted on what it was and where it was. Of course, he never bought anything since he was living at the Academy, but he knew how it all worked.

But once he became eighteen, he knew that those alerts would stop. He would have to give specific authorization if he wanted to share that information with his parents.

Ben had been reading up about it, ensuring that wherever he and Rey went, his family couldn’t track them down.

He puts one leg over the windowsill, ready to leave. He brings his other foot around to get out but in cramped situations, he really was too big. He accidentally kicks the edge of a small cabinet right next to the window and it jostles a little.

“Fuck,” he curses, reaching out a hand to stop an object from falling onto the floor with the help of the Force. He sets it back on top but it powers on and Ben realizes it’s a small photoprojector.

And it’s a photo of him with his parents and Luke on his tenth birthday. The same birthday that Han had got him the blaster and his mom had got him that calligraphy set.

The one that he knows Rey had seen for herself.

Ben studies it closely for a moment, trying to get a look at himself. And ten year old him looks pretty miserable.

There was a time when Ben had assumed he was destined to be miserable all his life. He thought he deserved it and that only the voices in his head would accompany him in his infinite loneliness.

By now he knows that wasn’t true. He was allowed to be happy. He was allowed to live the life he wanted with the girl he loved and that reality sure as hell was way better than the reality he thought was always waiting for him when he grew up.

Because he was free to make his own choices now. Not his parents. Not Luke. Not even that horrible voice he’s heard since he was young. Only him.

And he chose Rey.

He powers off the small projector and made his way out of the window, closing it and scaling his way back down the temple’s roof.

He could hear the faint sound of Hux’s voice from the mess hall as he complained about the food on his pants. Ben laughed time himself, thinking of how Boris said he would create some sort of diversion and Ben can’t blame him for taking to opportunity to coat Hux in food just to see him get pissed off.

Ben almost wished he could have seen it but was still very grateful that Boris had been so willing to do so just so Ben could sneak into Luke’s quarters to retrieve their sabers. He couldn’t wait to return Rey’s to her.

He gulps a little as he thinks about how he just needed to find her first.
Boris rushes down the hill as quietly as he can. Cardio was never his strong suit but he knew if there was ever a time to run, it was now.

He had just finished speaking with BX who was loading up the trash from the chute, sure enough, into a small hovercraft. But he thinks it’s big enough for Ben to be in.

“So you just send the trash over to the gate and it goes to some other facility?” Boris had asked with false curiosity as he tried to assist the droid.

“Yes, they do. They recycle it and process it to make new things. It’s a very fascinating system actually.”

“Oh, you know, I have a few things to wrap up inside. I can probably fill up another bag. I’ll be back in a minute and we can send it over.”

“Sounds great, Beex.”

So that was why he was running down, hoping to get Ben up the hill in time so that he could hop in before it took off.

And when he rushed into the hut, he found Ben ready to go, sitting with his arms on his knees. He grabbed his backpack and followed him out.

“Ready?” Ben asked.

Boris nods. “Better hurry, Beex is almost ready to send it over. You got the sabers?”

Ben nods. “Yeah, all good.”

“And the data chip?” Boris double checks, even though he gave it to him earlier.

“Yeah, I’m all set. I have been for hours, Boris,” Ben says, some tension in his voice.

“I know. I’m just...I guess I’m just nervous.”

“Me too,” Ben said softly as they made their way out and back up the hill. Boris was a little out of breath but made it just fine. They kept looking all around to ensure that no one saw them and were both relieved when they made it to the back of the kitchen.

Ben took a look at the hovercraft for the first time and nodded a little, somehow approving of the trash transportation he would be laying in for a while.

He was ready to go. And Boris realized just then that this very well might be the last time he ever saw Ben Solo.

“Hey, Ben?” Boris starts. Ben looks to him. “Good luck with everything.”

Ben gives him a smile. “Boris, I can't thank you enough for what you’ve done for us. You’ve been such an amazing friend, first to Rey and then to me. I wouldn’t have been able to accomplish any of this without your help. I hope you know that. And you dumped your dinner on Hux so you’re practically my hero.”

Boris laughs and shrugs modestly but was honestly surprised at his sincerity, especially when he was giving him a small smile. Boris wasn’t sure if he had ever really seen him smile before.

“I really do hope that you two find everything you’re looking for. You deserve it.”
Ben nods, looking sincere. “Thank you.”

Ben hops into the small craft, still looking over the side so they could speak. “Boris,” Ben starts. “I know how to get ahold of you. Once Rey and I are good and clear, I’ll send you a contact number. Anything you need, let me know. I know Rey and I would drop everything to help you after all you’ve done for us...even if we were to help spring you out of this place,” he chuckles.

Boris looks at him for a moment, “I’d be glad to hear from you every so often. Just so I know you’re okay.” Ben nods in understanding. Boris smirks though, “But if you’re looking to do me any favors, might I suggest naming your firstborn after me,” he jokes.

Boris didn’t expect the actual laugh that was released from Ben Solo just then. Ben shakes his head, “I think that’s in the very distant future, but I’ll run it by Rey if the time ever comes.”

They both remain there for one last moment. Neither of them says anything, unsure how to leave things. But eventually, Ben just holds out his hand for Boris to shake. “Goodbye, Boris Rowa-Que. I hope we see each other again.”

“Me too, Ben Solo,” Boris says, shaking his hand. “Say ‘hi’ to Rey for me.”

“Of course,” Ben says, leaning back in the trash. “Now do me one last favor and help cover me in this garbage so Beex doesn’t see me.”

BX comes out a moment later, none the wiser that a six-foot-three boy was hiding under all the trash.

“Here’s the last bag of the month,” he says as he places the final bag on top and Boris helps him, making sure it didn't disrupt the mountain of bags he had situated over Ben. BX then presses a series of buttons on the side. The craft rises in the air and Boris watches it leave with a smile. 

_Good luck_, Boris thinks to himself. _Stay safe._

BX looks to him with a whir, perhaps noticing his expression. “Thank you so much for your assistance. I had no idea you were so interested in the trash and recycling process Master Rowa-Que. Perhaps I can give you more details later. But for now, I must insist you go to bed. It’s far too late and you likely have a big day tomorrow.”

Boris smirks as he thinks what a big day tomorrow would be for the Academy as they would soon discover one of their own students has escaped.

Rey had no idea how she got back to E’di’s. Sheer will she supposed. Still, she had no memory of actually getting back or how E’di seemed to bring her inside and start helping her with her wounds and apparently a fever she didn’t know she had.

The older woman’s voice had been going in and out, grumbling with everything she did, but Rey finally felt like she was aware of her surroundings at this point. So she looks to E’di when she asks, “Can you hear me?”

Rey nods, feeling how E’di’s palm lies flat against her forehead. She doesn’t comment on whether the fever was better or worse but the slight downcast of her eyes was answer enough.

The fever wasn’t going down.
“What did this to you, Rey?” E’di finally asks her, her voice softer than Rey has ever heard from her.

“Skinwolf,” she croaks, hearing her own voice for the first time and hating how it sounds.

“A skinwolf?” E’di repeats, her eyes going wide in disbelief. “Are you sure?”

Rey nodded again. “It was a lone skinwolf at one of the base levels of the Star Destroyer I was scavenging in. It looked just as the travelers described. I know that’s what it was. Massive and furless. Even had a red eye.”

E’di looks at her in almost horror. “Kriff, Rey. It’s a wonder you’re alive then. How did you get back at all? How did you escape?”

“I made it up to a small crawlspace, but he had gotten to me as I was trying to get up,” Rey looks down at her body to see it wrapped in makeshift bandages of fabric. E’di had made new ones for her and Rey deeply appreciates it. “I had to wait until the bleeding stopped to get moving. Once I did, I had to go slow so it wouldn’t start again. I worked my way out of the Destroyer as quietly as I could and I could only hope that the wolf wasn’t tracking me by the time I made it to my speeder outside. It took hours.”

E’di huffs a big sigh. “You are something else, girl.”

Rey gives her a small smile but it fades quickly, the pain starting to become noticeable again. She bites her lip and tries to think of something else. She looks around and notices the cracks of sunlight seeping through the structure. It was daytime. Rey looks to E’di in confusion. “You didn’t go out today?”

The older woman looks to her. “Course not. I wasn’t leaving you in this way all by yourself.”

“But what about—”

“Don’t worry about me, alright. Just focus on resting and getting better. I’m keeping a close eye on you so nothing will happen. Besides, I have a few emergency quarter portions stowed away. We’ll be fine.”

Rey looks to her strangely. E’di has never spoken to her in such a way. She was being so...comforting. It briefly reminds Rey of how Maz had treated her when she was at her castle. That was the first time Rey had wondered if she was being cared for in the way a mother might do for their child. And although she could almost expect it from someone like Maz, she certainly hadn’t expected such a gentleness from E’di.

“Thank you, E’di,” Rey manages, her voice unbearably shaky.

E’di gives her the closest she can to a smile (even if it almost looks more like a frown) and stands before moving away, muttering something about needing to fetch more bandages from her room.

Rey feels her head slump against the blanket, no longer having the energy to sit up. She starts to feel dizzy and panicked again as she thinks of where Ben must be. She tries to conclude if he would have left the Academy by now but she’s not really sure what time it was.

But he would be here soon and maybe they could go to some kind of medical facility where she could get bacta for her wounds and some medication for her fever.

It would be a day at the most for him to travel all the way to Jakku and find his way here. And
even though the collar was still around her neck, she knew that he was still able to find her.

So, maybe that meant just one last day at the most. Rey tells herself she could hold out until then. She could bear the pain and endure the fever and whatever else was going on with her because she couldn’t bear to think that she had come this far just to lose everything. Just when they were about to get everything they never had.

Her throat burns even worse with unreleased sobs, her eyes too dry for tears. She tries to bury it though. If she cried now, it would feel too much like giving up and she needed to hold tight to the hope she knew was still inside her.

So, when E’di comes back in, Rey points at her satchel and asks if she could pass her the small black book with the purple flowers sticking out of it. E’di does, marveling briefly at the sight of flowers and commenting on how bright they are.

Rey insists she takes one for herself and E’di gives her a soft, “Thank you,” staring at the little petals in awe.

Rey feels too tired to read it for now, but she holds his journal against her chest, playing his words in her head and trying to drown out the pain with thoughts of Ben.

As Rey falls back asleep, E’di watches her with worry etched deeper into her features than it usually was.

*She really was a sweet girl,* she thinks, looking down at the little flower she had given her. It only makes her heart sink further as she looks back down at Rey.

The girl wasn’t doing good. To know she had been attacked by a skinwolf was mystifying enough. E’di has no idea how she managed to even make it as long as she has at this point.

E’di suspects this is some kind of blood infection. Blood infections never ended well, at least not for the scavengers she had seen die because of it over the years.

She hasn’t let Rey see the wound on her stomach, keeping the bandages tight. She didn’t want to give her any more reason to worry and with the way the gashes looked underneath the bandage, it certainly wouldn’t make her feel any better.

Even if it wasn’t a blood infection, open wounds like hers certainly weren’t a healthy thing to have in the sands. Old ointment E’di kept in a kit and makeshift bandages weren’t going to perform any kind of miracles on Rey.

It was far too serious and E’di starts to accept that Rey was running out of time.

E’di could really only try to help and make Rey’s final moments as comfortable as she could.

She stays close as Rey sleeps, keeping a wet cloth across her forehead and making sure it didn’t drip onto the little book the girl clung to for dear life. Wherever Rey got it from, it certainly meant a lot to her.

Or rather, whoever gave it to her, Rey loved them very much.

Chapter End Notes
I know. I know. I'm the worst.

I know I say this every chapter but I mean it this time: Hold on just a little longer. Next chapter is when everything comes together.

BTW, Skinwolves, some of you probably know, were first introduced in the novel 'Phasma' and are native to Parnassos but since that was kind of a desert setting and I needed a creature large enough to do damage, I kind of pulled some fanfiction liberties with that and pretended they were on Jakku too. I tried to keep it pretty tame and not too graphic. I'm going somewhere with it. I'm not just torturing you for the hell of it. I know it hurts but you know it's all going to be okay.

Anyways, I feel like I'm forgetting something but I'll just end here and say thank you all so much for reading! Love you all<3<3<3!!!
Come Back to Me

Chapter Notes

Alright, I'm actually really nervous to post this but just gonna do it. Thank you all so much for reading and commenting! I'm so glad people are actually reading this!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Luke had just gotten a comm from Leia. She was at the gates, waiting to get verification to come through on her ship with C-3PO.

He granted her access, knowing she would be there soon.

Not wanting to overwhelm Ben when he came to breakfast, only to find his mother there, he figured it would be best to tell him ahead of time.

Luke just had to work up the courage to go down to his hut and tell him.

But he does, knowing if he didn’t it might only make things worse at this point. So he makes his way down the hill, thinking of a morning not too long ago, but might as well have been a lifetime past, as he had walked the path down to find Ben when he had overslept and was late for morning lessons. It had been the same day that Maz had first contacted him about Rey.

Luke almost chuckles to himself, thinking how opposed Ben had been to the lessons at first. He could hardly even have a conversation with Rey and Luke had held some sort of hope that he could try to make a friend for once that wasn’t the culinary droid. Ben had changed so much since then.

Or maybe he was always that way and Luke just hadn’t bothered to notice.

Luke approaches Rey’s hut, casting his eyes down, trying to think of what to say to the boy inside.

The boy who hates him.

He doesn’t think he should just barge in. Last time he was in there he was confronted with the truth of what existed in his nephew’s mind, and Luke felt undeserving to enter, again thinking of what could have happened if he had unclipped his saber from his belt and gone with his first instinct.

“Ben?” he starts, standing before the curtain. “Ben, can you hear me?”

Luke hears no answer but knows he shouldn’t expect one anyway. Ben wasn’t going to talk to him.

“Listen, Ben, I can only imagine how you feel about me...and I want you to know that I don’t blame you. I know I haven’t been easy on you...and I also know I’m the last person you want to talk to. But you deserve to have help as we all figure out how to go forward and sort this out.”

Luke looks down at his feet for a moment before speaking again.

“Look, your mother...She’s on her way from the gate. I asked her to come because I think I’ve really made a mess of this all on my own. I haven’t told her everything yet, but I can guarantee you that she will want to help you. Because I was wrong. I’ve been so horribly, terribly wrong about all
of this.”

Suddenly, Luke can hear the incoming engines of Leia’s ship and he knows she’ll be landing in a moment and he should at least try to make it back to greet her. Except, there’s still no answer from inside and Luke isn’t sure what that means. If anything, he was expecting Ben to shout back by now. But he hasn’t.

And suddenly Luke wonders if he had been sleeping this entire time and hasn’t heard a word he’s said. He rolls his eyes a little, realizing it was foolish not to check but he had been too afraid to go in and check.

He figures, even if it made Ben mad, he couldn’t hide forever and Luke should just walk inside.

“Ben, I—” he stops dead, seeing that Ben’s bed is not only empty but neatly made. In fact, everything in the hut looked to be immaculately clean and organized, as if no one was using it anymore.

Suddenly Luke’s heart stops in his chest as the realization hits him hard.

No, he didn’t. Did he?

Suddenly, Luke reaches out, closing his eyes and trying to sense where his nephew was. He bypasses all the signatures of his other students and even his sister, realizing that Ben was nowhere to be found. Luke had been avoiding the energy of his nephew in his guilt and had completely neglected the fact that he had disappeared entirely.

Luke holds a hand to his chest, stumbling slightly as he opens his eyes again. He had caught himself against the desk. He takes a few deep breaths before he spots a folded piece of paper waiting there.

And it was addressed to him.

Luke picks it up, unfolding it to find it filled with Ben’s near regal penmanship. Shaking slightly, Luke frantically begins to read.

Master Luke

I’m writing this letter to inform you that I will no longer be continuing my training. It has been made apparent that this life of the Jedi does not appeal with me and I have decided it would be for the best if I removed myself from this environment. Since you had no qualms letting Rey go, I saw fit to do so with myself, knowing there was nothing left for me here. At least not as the Padawan who has constantly disappointed you.

Where one must be truly selfless, I wish for too much in too selfish a way to become who everyone expects me to be. I cannot live up to the Skywalker legacy that you and my parents expected me to take on. And I think by now it is clear to everyone that I never wanted to anyway.

But I know what I do want. I can see it more clearly than anything else the Force has ever shown me, and I don’t think I should feel ashamed for it. I don’t think I should apologize for being truly happy for the first time in my life.

I understand that this may be upsetting to you, but I will remind you as you have made so evident to me: There is no emotion, there is peace. You have made quite clear it is expected of the Jedi to
deny their passions to meet their full potential. Without my passions and my emotions, I am not myself. I do not wish to become the Jedi that denies the things that make me feel complete. I do not wish to become a Jedi at all. I just wish to be Ben. I think Ben should be enough.

And on behalf of the girl I love, I hope you come to understand what you sent her back to. I hope it lives with you every day for the rest of your life, just as that desert will likely haunt Rey for the rest of hers.

I know you don’t trust me to make my own choices. I know you probably think I’m doomed to be just like my grandfather. But for the first time in my life, I believe in myself, and I found someone who helped me realize that I always could.

So if you or my parents are looking for hope, I would like to think you would take comfort in that. Although I didn’t become what you wanted me to be, I’m okay and I’m happy and where I know I belong. And if you still find that disappointing, then I guess we were never really family to begin with.

-Ben

The moment Luke finishes reading it, he quickly races out of the hut and makes his way back up to the temple.

The other students watch him curiously, seeing their master run like a maniac. He ignores their calls or the comments that are undoubtedly making them laugh but he speeds as well as he can, completely out of breath by the time that he makes it to the field where his sister was now walking down the ramp with C-3PO behind her.

She smiled at first, glad to see him in person after so long but Luke watches it fall, knowing she must not only see the panic on his face but likely senses his total shock in the Force as well.

Luke is winded by the time he’s in front of her and doesn’t even know what to say if he could speak.


He shoves the letter into her hands, the guilt, the regret, the failure crashing into him much harder than before as he finally manages to string some words together.

“It’s Ben. He’s gone.”

Ben sat in the cockpit of the shuttle, waiting to leave hyperspace, bouncing his foot nervously against the durasteel. He had tried to rest at least for a few hours but it had been no use.

He had tried to tell himself that maybe the quickly closing distance would help reveal Rey to him through the Force but things remained quiet.

He supposes he should be grateful that things had been going according to plan so far.

Ben’s trash idea had gone exceptionally well. Boris had been right in saying that the droids that were supposedly guarding the school were rather rudimentary. He had hopped out from beneath the trash before they passed it along to the processing service and quietly maneuvered his way to the control panel closest to the shuttle he planned to take. All without being noticed.
Boris’ data chip had done exactly what he said it would and within minutes, Ben had lifted off. He had traveled on low power mode for a few miles so that when he tried to leave the atmosphere, the droids wouldn’t alert to the noise.

Yes, it had all gone almost too well. Perhaps that was why Ben was convinced something was going to go bad.

And the continued silence of Rey’s signature was making him start to panic again.

He had been pleased to see the shuttle had a fresher and Ben had bathed, trying to get the smell of garbage off of him. But the stench had been a small price to pay to finally be free of the Academy.

After getting clean, he had tried to distract himself with some books he had stolen from the library last minute. Although he and Rey weren’t planning on becoming Jedi, there were still aspects to the Force that fascinated him and he wanted to learn more of. And maybe things that he and Rey could discover for themselves. Clearly they shared something incredibly powerful. So powerful, it connected them across the galaxy... just not recently, Ben’s minds threw at him. None of his distractions were working for long.

So, he figured it would be best to wait in the cockpit anyway and he jumped out of his seat as the signaling beeps alarmed him and the blue and white swirls of hyperspace ceased, revealing a large orange planet before him.

Rey was somewhere on it. All he has to do is find her...without the bond.

He is slightly dejected at the thought but tries to think with clarity and as much reason as he could. Even though he was tired and a little rushed, knowing at any moment, his uncle could embark after him to drag him back to the temple. Luke would undoubtedly know that Jakku would be Ben’s first stop.

But Ben was hoping he wouldn’t be staying long.

Ben descends on the planet, watching as the external thermometer climbed higher and higher the closer he got to the ground. He couldn’t believe how hot it was and he doesn’t know how Rey had existed in this climate for so long, it seemed so draining.

He finds a small village, consisting of little huts and little families and Ben supposed it looked tame enough to land near. The sands were picking up though with the wind and Ben observed how people were covering their heads and faces to protect them from the elements.

He figures he should do the same. He pulls a hood over his head and the collar of his tunic up around his face. He makes sure to keep the two lightsabers on his belt concealed, not wanting to reveal anything to the strangers other than he was lost.

He steps down the ramp and is surprised to see how kind the people appear. They all seem to be busy, going about their lives. Ben takes a moment to look around, wondering how to approach them. He stops when he notices a tall man standing near one of the huts in the distance. He was an older man and Ben thought he almost looked familiar, even if he could barely see his face. Ben wonders what it was that caught his attention or why he thought he might have known him, but is then pulled out of his thoughts as a younger man waves to him and rushes over.

“Hey there! Welcome to Tuanul. Can I help you with something?” the man asks with a smile in his voice, although it was hidden by the cloth keeping the sand out of his mouth and nose.

“Uh, yeah. Sorry, I’m looking for a place called Niima. Niima Outpost. Do you know where that
“Oh, yeah...Niima,” he says dejectedly. The mention of the outpost even depressing to the other inhabitants of Jakku. Something that made Ben’s heart sink further.

“It’s about a day’s ride by speeder to the west,” he gestures with his arm. “But by the looks of your ship, it shouldn’t take you long at all.”

“Thank you,” Ben says with a nod, taking one final look around. This place, although still stuck in the middle of a tempestuous desert, seemed a far cry from the environment Rey grew up in and was currently still a part of.

And Ben knows that if Rey’s parents had loved her, or felt any sort of compassion or sympathy for her at all, they would have left her in a place like this. They wouldn’t have sold her to a man that made a child work for food and water by scavenging the graveyard of war machines forever lodged in the sand.

The man walks off, joining a woman and small child as they carry on with their tasks. This could have been Rey’s life, and she probably never even known a place like this existed on Jakku.

Ben raced back up the ramp and fired up the engines. Sand fell from his hair into the controls and he groans.

“Fucking sand,” he mutters to himself as he heads west, all the while, still reaching out for Rey and coming up with tragically nothing.

Rey was hoping she would be feeling better today after resting for so long, but it seemed to have the opposite effect.

Today, it hurt to open her eyes. E’di had even hung up some fabric to block where bright sunlight threatened to stream in on her face.

“E’di, you don’t...” Rey trails off as she speaks, words suddenly so hard to manage. “...you don’t need to do all this. I’m...I’ve had worse. You should go out today. You didn’t go yesterday and I don’t want you to go hungry for me.”

“Rey, I’ve told you half a dozen times. I’m not going anywhere and that I’ve got plenty packed away for emergencies just of this sort. Now lie back down, you’re exhausting yourself.”

E’di had been so kind. Almost too kind, to the point where the older woman must have suspected that she was dying.

But Rey wouldn’t let that happen. She couldn’t. And she didn’t want to give in to worry the way E’di might have done and jumped to such a harsh conclusion.

She was fine. _Totally and completely stable_, she tries to tell herself.

But then everything seems to go downhill when E’di changes her bandages again. E’di snaps at her not to look but Rey does and is faced with the sight of her wounds and the sickening reality of how grim they had become. She had only seen it in the dim lighting of the crawlspace, but to see it now...it was bad and it felt like a slap in the face.

Rey had seen people die from much less on Jakku.
Suddenly, her persistence from earlier seemed so childish. No matter how much she may have wanted to live, that didn’t mean it would be so.

And suddenly a dry sob rips through her, the facade finally breaking. E’di runs a hand past her hair. “It’s alright,” she says trying to comfort her but likely hearing it for the lie that it was.

Rey knew she was running out of time. She only hoped she had enough to hold out for Ben. Even if it was just to see him one last time.

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Ben sees Niima on the horizon.

He wonders if he should land and walk there so he wouldn’t gain so much attention. But then again, this land is riddled with scavengers looking for parts. By the time he made it back, the ship would likely be useless or totally gone if someone knew how to fly.

So the ship would stay with him, he decides.

He approaches the outpost with disdain, knowing it was built on blood and hunger. And he knows that Rey had been there almost every day of her life, with an exception to the time they shared on Oquinn.

He would not let another day pass where Rey had to drag in junk in hopes of getting food in return. Today it was all over.

He sees a small closed-off area that had some rough looking ships in it. Most looked like they wouldn’t start, but there’s one he recognizes from the night Rey was taken.

Plutt’s ship.

And before Ben could grit his teeth at the sight, a large stubby creature appears from beneath a shaded awning, waving him down of where to land.

And Ben knows it’s Plutt.

His heart starts to beat loud in his chest, just the sight of the creature making him feel ill. But he contains his nausea, landing where he had directed. As he feels the ship shudder as it makes contact with the ground, Ben takes a moment to breathe, knowing that this is where it all counted. This is what everything was for.

And as much as he wanted to kill Plutt for everything he’s done, not even just to Rey but to all these miserable people he can see around the settlement, Ben knew he would need to keep himself in check. Rey was his first priority and he wouldn’t get distracted.

He wonders if Plutt would recognize him, so Ben returns the hood to his head and this time pulls up a small scarf to cover his mouth and nose so he wouldn’t have to hold his hand up the whole time.

He ensures the lightsabers are hidden underneath the fabric of the tunic, but wondering if he would need to use them. He would be ready if it came to that.

Taking a deep breath, he lowers the ramp and steps out. Plutt approaches him with an odd look on his face.

“Welcome to Niima. Lovely ship you have there, very clean. Don’t see the likes of this often
around here,” he says with a chuckle that makes him seem to quake with all his bulbous mass.

And Ben starts to feel anger boil within him. To hear him laughing, knowing the sick things he’s done, brings back all the things he knows of him. Going back to those first memories he had seen of Rey when they had first touched hands.

Plutt seems to notice that Ben doesn’t seem amused so he stops laughing. “What can I do for you? Niima is equipped with many services for a fair price or a fair trade.”

*Fair.* That’s what he was calling it.

“I’m looking for something. I was hoping you could help me find it,” Ben says as calmly as he can, trying not to let his anger come through.

“What kind of something?” Plutt asks, raising an eyebrow, but not in suspicion. It looked more like interest underlined with something twisted.

“Is there a place where we could talk?” Ben asks, figuring it would be best if they weren’t out in the open. “It’s a private matter. But, I expect my ship to stay here untouched.”

“Certainly. I have just the man for the job.” Plutt turns around and whistles, catching the attention of a gruff-looking creature underneath the awning. Similar in size to Plutt but not as...mushy looking. “Vlad, get over here and keep an eye on this gentleman’s craft. We’re gonna go talk business,” he says with a wink.

Ben follows Plutt into a tent that was not lavish by any means but by the looks of the rest of the outpost, Plutt had certainly saved the best for himself.

The Crolute sits down, offering him water from a spigot which Ben declines and Plutt just waves it off. “You know it’s been a while since I’ve had someone so dignified and important looking like you visit my little corner of the desert. You traveling around?”

Ben nods, “Yeah. Traveling.”

“Well,” Plutt says, leaning forward. “I know it can get a little lonely out there. You come here for company? That’s why you wanted to talk inside, huh?”

“Company?” Ben asks.

“Pleasure,” Plutt announces as if it was obvious. "You’re here looking for a girl to please you.”

Ben bites on his tongue, ready to scream. Instead, he remains calm and plays along. “It just so happens, I am looking for a girl.”

“Well, I wish I could send you somewhere now, but due to unfortunate circumstances months back, the Pleasure tent has been empty. However, if you’re willing to wait, I can arrange something awfully nice for you.”

Plutt leans forward, speaking quietly. “I’ve got a girl here, I don’t have much interest in her myself, but a human boy like you might find her worthy of something.”

He was talking about Rey. Ben knew it.

“This girl is a pleasure slave?” he asks, not ready for the answer but needing to know it anyway. What if this is why the bond hadn’t opened?
“Nah. She just a scavenger, for now, you see. Everyone has to make a living in their own way and she is awfully good at what she does. But she’s been coming up light lately and I think it’s about time she was reminded of her place in all this. Can’t have her getting too much freedom.”

“This girl, where can I find her?”

“Eh, don’t worry about that, I can have Vlad go out and pick her up. Little shit hasn’t been coming in the past few days so I was ready to drag her back in anyway.”

“No,” Ben shakes his head, slowly standing up. “No one touches her.”

Plutt’s face changes suddenly and his eyes narrow, trying to focus on him. “What did you say your name was again?”

Ben pulled down the scarf from his face and threw back the hood, “I didn’t,” he says through his teeth.

Understanding hits Plutt just then. “Oh, kriff. I remember you. You were that loverboy from that bullshit school,” he laughs again, his stomach bouncing, as he must think this is all a joke. “Oh kid, she’s really got a hold on you.”

“You don’t know anything about it,” Ben says smugly, unclipping his saber from his belt and igniting it, holding it close to his throat. Plutt’s eyes go wide, any traces of the amusement from a moment earlier dissipating completely.

“E-Easy, kid. No need to get hasty.”

“Tell me where she is.”

“I wasn’t kidding when I said she hasn’t come in a few days. She got all sore once I put that new suppressant collar on her and I figured she was trying to stick it to me by staying away.”

New suppressant collar, Ben thinks. That must have been why the bond hadn’t opened the past few days. He’s been going out of his mind wondering if something had happened to her but he realizes that maybe it had just been that.

Once he found her, he could remove it and the Force energy between them would return.

Ben tries not to let his sudden relief distract him from his current task. He looks back to Plutt.

“You’re a filthy, cruel, disgusting excuse for a being. You’ve made the lives of so many suffer. You’ve put Rey through so much pain…” Ben feels tears prick in his eyes. “And I would like nothing more than to make you feel that pain in return. I’d like to take my saber and spear it through your fat fucking heart…”

The man cries in fear. “N-No, please...don’t kill me.”

“I’m not going to kill you,” Ben says, knowing he wouldn’t. The man isn’t worth his time and he has a bigger objective to deal with. “But I am going to make sure you sit and watch as all the people you’ve subjected to hunger and pain start to rip and scavenge your tent for a change.”

“What?!”

Ben focuses, directing his energy to do what he can. He lowers his saber and waves his hand in front of the man’s eyes. “These people are no longer yours to torture. Anyone you think belongs to
“you, you will set free.”

His eyes glaze over a bit. “I will set them free.”

“All the food you’ve been keeping from everyone, starving them while they spend their days gathering scraps out in that graveyard, that food is theirs now.”

“It is theirs.”

“This place doesn’t belong to you. You are not the one that decides which of these people lives or dies...or gets sent to pleasure tents!” Ben feels like crying. Maybe he already is. “So you’re going to sit right here and waste away, watching this place you’ve called your own, leave you in the dust. Because you’ve caused enough pain...and I’m not letting you hurt anyone like Rey ever again. You understand?”

“I will sit right here and waste away,” Plutt says, the use of the Force swaying his mind and doing as Ben demands.

“And one final thing...You’re going to tell me where a woman named E’di lives.” That’s where Rey had been staying, she told him so.

“E’di lives about thirty clicks north. Set up in a broken-down old ship she broke down on when she first got here,” Plutt speaks like he’s on auto-pilot. A side effect from the mind trick.

“Thank you,” Ben says with false gratitude.

Before he leaves, Ben strikes down all the fabric of the tent revealing it to the daylight. It catches the attention of the people walking by. They look confused, seeing Plutt just sit there as Ben destroyed his place. But Ben lets them know what’s going on. “Take what you want. He’s not using it anymore,” he says, making his way for the concession stand where he had seen Rey trade things for food.

He knows that’s where Plutt keeps everything. It’s how he keeps his hold over all these poor people.

Ben strikes down the iron fence with his lightsaber, leading to Plutt’s side of it. People gasp behind him at the sight of the treasure that it all must be through their eyes.

All the parts they’ve lost to Plutt and getting little to no food in return. Parts that would likely fix all those shitty ships sitting next to the shuttle Ben had just landed.

And Ben also sees the massive pantry that kept all the portions Plutt had been so possessive of. But Plutt couldn’t keep it to himself anymore. Ben grabs an arm full of full portions and steps back outside, people in awe at the food he was carrying.

He steps right up to an old man, looking burnt by the sun and plagued by starvation. Ben leans down a little to get to his height and places the bundle of it in his arms.

“You don’t have to be hungry anymore,” Ben tells him and the old man bursts into tears.

“Th-Thank you. Oh, thank you so much.”

Ben turns away as he hears everyone rejoicing and passes around the ration packs and filling up their canteens as much as they want from the spigot in Plutt’s tent.
Ben felt his heart burst, knowing that he had helped them in whatever way he could.

He rushes back over to his shuttle, seeing how Vlad was charging for him with a confused expression on his face but still likely to try striking Ben down.

Ben held out his hand, freezing him where he was, the man’s eyes going wide in bafflement.

“You don’t work for Plutt anymore.” Ben tells him, hoping that with the freedom to chose, he wouldn’t be doing what Plutt had him do.

“I-I don’t work for Plutt anymore.”

Ben released him and he just slumped to the sand. He didn’t make to get up, he just sat there as if he had just had a major epiphany and he no longer needed to serve someone.

Ben looks away eventually, knowing that he had somewhere to be. He had someone to find. And he was so close to having her in his arms once again. He loads up on the ship with a smile, feeling a sense of calm he hasn’t felt in a long time.

This was almost over. Ben’s hopes and imaginations almost overwhelm him as he thinks of how much time they will finally have together.

“E’di,” Rey groans out.

“What is it, dear?”

“Ben is coming for me.”

“Ben?” E’di asks. “Who is-”

Rey doesn’t bother to explain. She doesn’t have that kind of time so she interrupts E’di, just hoping she would listen carefully. “Ben is coming. But I’m afraid it’ll be too late.”

“Don’t say that, Rey,” the older woman says.

Rey ignores it, determined in her words. “When Ben comes and sees what happened, I want you to relay a message to him for me. Something he needs to know.” She knows E’di doesn’t believe in people coming back for her but she seems to be humoring her for now. But that was okay. She would see. She would know Rey was right when Ben came.

“Of course,” E’di says, her voice the one shaking now.

“Tell him that I love him…and that I believe in him more than I believed in anything,” she tries to smile. “Tell him that he’s the most beautiful person in this galaxy and I would have had him forever if I could….And that no matter how dark it may seem or how hopeless it may get, he is not alone, and I will be with him always.”

“Oh, Rey, I-I think you should tell him yourself. I think you’re holding out real nice.”

Rey can hardly keep her eyes open but she reaches up, finding her palm against E’di’s cheek and holding it gently. “It’s okay, E’di. You don’t need to pretend anymore. I know it’s over. But I want to thank you for everything. You’ve been…” talking seems like so much work suddenly. “You’ve been such a good f-friend.”

Her hand falls back against the old blanket and her head slumps to the side.
Everything fades after that and Rey only sees darkness.

E’di sobbed, leaning beside the girl and trying to get her to wake up, but she knew it was over. Death had taken her and there was nothing she could do.

She stays like that for a while, although she is unaware of a thing like time just then. She can only focus on the still form of Rey and her eyes. They were still open but there was no life left in them, confirming E’di’s instincts. E’di reaches up and softly brushes her palm over her eyes, letting them close.

Tears run down her weathered face. “I’m so sorry, Rey. I wish you could have had something better.”

She waits there, unsure what to do first. She didn't know how to just move on from a thing like this. So she just watches he girl, brushing through her hair with her fingers, trying to offer her comfort even though it's too late.

But suddenly hears the sound of incoming engines. And it was big. A ship by the sounds of it. Certainly not a speeder.

Jumping to action, E’di gets up, grabs her crossbow, and bolts outside.

A large sleek looking ship descends before her and lands on the sand. Within moments, the engines power off and the ramp lowers. It’s been many years since E’di had seen such a fine craft but it doesn’t let her put her guard down as she hears footsteps making their way down.

E’di raises her crossbow, still feeling the tears on her face that haven’t dried. “Hold it right there,” she says as the figure makes his way down, skidding a little when he takes notice of the crossbow in her arms.

He holds up his hands. “I don’t mean any harm. I swear.”

He looked sincere. He also looks young and hopeful. He had that gleam in his eye. It instantly reminded her of Rey.

“Could this be the boy Rey was talking about?”

“Are you...” she pauses, not sure if she should feed into what Rey had told her. The girl had been likely delusional, but E'di let it be said, knowing it gave her some kind of comfort in her last few moments. But now this kid was standing here, and E'di couldn't help but ask anyway. "Are you Ben?” she asks lowering the crossbow slowly, knowing that regardless of his answer, he wasn’t a threat.

He nods, smiling with his teeth. “Yeah,” he says, lowering his hands. "And you’re E’di?”

She nods, unsure how he could know her name but ignores it for now. “You’re here for Rey,” E’di breathes out, not saying it as a question. She knew she would have to tell him and it felt like the wind was getting knocked out of her once more.

“Yeah,” he says with a chuckle, stepping closer. “Is she here?” he beams, looking over E’di’s shoulder, as if he might go find out for himself.

E’di wants to cry again. What a tragedy. The boy had just missed her. “I’m afraid you’re too late. She’s gone…”
Ben’s smile falters slightly. “Where did she go? Can I go find her?” he asks, turning slightly to look at the sands behind him.

E’di shakes her head at the misunderstanding. “No, Ben. She…” E’di’s tears start up again. “She didn’t make it.”

The boy’s face goes pale as he seems to take her meaning and his look of hope falls quickly, morphing into something else. As if he’s about to be sick or scream.

“Wh-Where-” he stammers, his lips already trembling.

E’di nods her head back to her home where she had left the girl. “Inside.”

Ben races past her into the small structure with a frightened look on his face, as if he could only hope it wouldn’t be true. But E’di knows that only heartbreak waits for him now.

_She didn’t make it, _the woman told him.

Ben wouldn’t believe it. The galaxy would not be that cruel. He couldn’t lose her. Not now. She was just sitting inside, maybe sleeping or reading through his journal he had given her.

But not dead. Not Rey. He wouldn’t...he couldn’t even imagine-

But then he’s inside and he sees her. He sees her lying on the sand with nothing but a thin and coarse-looking blanket beneath her.

Her head is turned away from him and he approaches her slowly, trying not to believe it. But as he falls to his knees and reaches out, he gently reaches out. "Rey?" he whispers, as if he could still fool himself she was just sleeping.

But then he brings his hand to her face, directing her to look at him. Her head slumps over to him, looking pale and gaunt and most certainly...dead. It’s then that the damn in his chest finally breaks and he sobs out in refusal, pulling her into his arms, hugging her tightly, half expecting her arms would encircle him at any moment.

“No, no, no, Rey, please. I’m here. I’m here now. W-We’re going to leave together and everything...everything’s going to-” he can’t even say it, his voice shaking so bad.

Tears fall from the tip of his nose onto her face and she doesn’t even flinch. His heart rips open as reality catches up to him.

He’s failed her. Every moment he’s looked forward to, everything they could finally have together in their future comes to a grinding halt. And he can only blame himself.

He didn’t want to let it be real. He wanted it to just be a bad dream. One like he had back at the Academy. The one Rey had woken him up from, holding him in comfort after.

"I'm so sorry, Ben," he hears E'di say from behind him. "She held out for so long."

"W-What happened?" he asks, his voice shaking with his sobs.

"There was an attack. A skinwolf, she told me. He caused the gashes...led to infection. I didn't have the kind supplies that could have done her any good and...now she's gone. But she told me to tell you that she loves you...and that no matter what, even in the darkness, you're not alone. She said she will be with you always."
Ben sobs again, holding Rey tighter. He could only imagine how those words would sound in Rey's voice.

*I will be with you always.*

And in that moment, Ben thinks of something else she had told him once. *Breathe and wait for me.* He thinks of that night he ran out into the woods to punch things after he had jumped to frantic conclusions. But he had been wrong and Rey told him that in those moments, he could breathe and wait for her.

Does he dare try that now? Does he dare allow himself the thought of her being able to find him once more? Could he just be jumping to similar conclusions now too?

He pulls back then, looking down at her. She looks so small in his arms for some reason. Smaller than she usually does. He sees the collar Plutt had spoken of and Ben quickly flicks his hand, unlatching it and sending it across the room. He didn’t want it anywhere near her.

As it leaves her skin, Ben suddenly feels the energy within her he’s been craving for days. It’s dwindling though, fading from him...but it’s not gone.

She’s still there. She wasn’t all gone. And he sure as hell wasn’t going to let her go any further. Not like this.

He settles her in his lap, holding the base of her neck with one hand and her stomach with the other. He pushes past the makeshift bandages, his palm against her skin. He sees as well as feels the wounds she had received from the wolf E'di had mentioned. He tries not to let himself start sobbing again or he would likely run out of time and he needed to focus.

Instead, he closes his eyes, steadying his breathing as well as he can as he tries to recall words from a passage he read not too long ago. It had been brief, but he had read only that it was possible with extreme focus and determination.

And Ben knew that he would never be more determined in anything as he would be with getting her to come back to him.

*Come back,* he hollers out in the near vacancy of their bond. *Come back to me.*

*I love you. You are so bright. You’ve shown me so much. You’ve given me hope for a future I never would have known. There’s so much I want to do and share with you. I wanted to show the galaxy you never got to see. I don’t want this to be where it ends. Please, sweetheart. Come back. Be with me.*

He pleads out as loud as his mind will let him. He isn’t sure if he’s doing it right, but even the texts didn’t exactly seem to know how to effectively pull it off. Perhaps it was all pure instinct.

And he nearly panics all over again when nothing seems to be happening.

But then he feels a warmth over the back of his hand. One he’s felt many times before. The feeling of a hand much smaller than his own. Ben opens his eyes, looking down at her. He holds his breath, seeing how her eyes flutter open, looking beautifully confused. But then she looks to him in surprise. A small smile of disbelief begins on her face as she tries to sit up. He helps her, supporting her as best he can but feeling slightly lost in disbelief himself, his hands shaking a little.

*Was this real? Was he imagining this?*
He watches her, slightly blurry with tears in his eyes, not bothering to question how it worked if it meant he had her again.

He feels her fingers gently brush his cheek as if she was unsure if it was real as well. But then suddenly, it’s like everything falls back into place as the energy between them opens, flooding with love and hope and balance and everything they’ve been missing. The bond had revealed them to each other when they were apart, but to feel the real thing, to know they are in the same space once again adds another spark to their contact and Ben can hardly believe it.

And just then, he hears the most beautiful sound of her voice saying his name.

“Ben,” she breathes out with one of her smiles that makes his heart leap.

It’s her. She’s real and alive and warm in his arms and he doesn’t miss the look of longing in her eyes as she launches forward and presses her lips to his. He is quick to kiss her back, pulling her closer and not even minding how it tasted of their tears.

She pulled back after a long moment, looking him in the eyes as he smiled at her, chuckling softly. It worked. He had force healed her. He never knew he was capable of doing something like that, but he would do it a million times over if she would look at him the way she was now.

He loved her so much. And he’s about to remind her of that when he hears another voice. Someone that Ben admittedly forgot was still in the room.

“W-What the hell just happened? Rey, you're...I mean he...” they turn to her, both somewhat amused at her confused ramblings. But then she waves her hand, dismissing all that. "Ugh, who gives a shit, you're alive, that's what matters!” she says as she dives forward and wraps her arms around both of them in a big hug.

Ben and Rey chuckle then, tears still in everyone's eyes. E'di moves away a moment later, gathering all the dirty bandages and taking them away. Ben automatically reaches for Rey once again, checking her over once more but sees that the wounds were all smoothed over. She looked all healthy again.

Ben smiles into her neck, knowing that the worst was behind them now.

*I'm never letting go,* he says to himself.

"Me neither," Rey says softly into his ear, and Ben is so happy that it doesn't hit him until a few seconds later that Rey had actually heard his thoughts.

Chapter End Notes

So...I threw in that one TROS moment...except wow, Ben heals Rey and doesn't die? Gee golly what a concept!

Best part is, they're back together and I think it's all up from here for them.

Luke on the other hand...lol, shit is going to get stressful for him after all his turdy behavior.
Chapter Summary

Ben and Rey are feeling pretty darn good right about now.

Luke and Leia, however, are not.

Chapter Notes

First off, THANK YOU for 500 kudos!! I feel so special!! I didn't think this story would attract too much attention because I know it's not everyone's flavor but I appreciate all the love and support. It's amazing!

Anyways, school started again which means these might be harder to crank out. But, I'm determined to finish it because I do have other stories I would like to write that hopefully can keep me distracted by how devastated I still am over canon bullshit.

**BTW, [[possible trigger alert]]
In this chapter, E'di gives a little bit of her backstory and it's not super chipper. There is a brief mention of miscarriage and just generally her tragic origins of how she ended up on Jakku. Nothing graphic but still, thought I would mention it.

Real quick, I kind of picture E'di as one of the vuvalini women from Fury Road. I thought it would be nice to give you a face to go with her since she's become such a bigger character.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

After Luke ran up to her and said what he did, Leia was stuck between shock and horror at the
news that her son wasn’t here.

Where was he? Was he alright? Had she lost him for good?

No. She wouldn’t let that happen.

Some of Luke’s other students seemed to notice the escalating drama so he had insisted they go speak privately in his office. She hadn’t said anything at the time but just started walking anyway, trying to keep her mind from spinning too much.

While he had gone to tell BX to keep everyone in the cafeteria for a while, Leia had taken the opportunity to read the letter, ignoring 3P0’s occasional comments as he argued with R2 about something.

Her hands are shaking by the time she finishes reading it, tears running down her face. She has no idea what she just landed into, but one thing was for certain...

Her brother has not been honest with her.

So when the door opens and Luke walks back in, Leia doesn’t hold back. “Do you want to tell me what the hell is going on? Because given what he wrote here, you have a lot of explaining to do.”

Luke seems to ignore her at first as he rushes over to his desk, throwing open the drawers but sighing heavily when he seems to not find what he was looking for.

He doesn’t say what is it though and Leia’s patience was running thin. Luke had said when he called her days ago that they needed to discuss things face to face. She thought at the worst, that meant Ben was flunking his studies.

She never would have imagined that he had run away, supposedly to go after Rey. At least that’s what his letter seemed to imply. The last thing Leia had heard anything about that girl, Ben was tutoring her. But her heart jumped to her throat as she looks back down to Ben’s words.

And on behalf of the girl I love, it says

And the worst part is, she has no idea where Rey is, but wherever she was, Ben seems to believe that it was Luke’s doing. Ben had said something about sending her away.

Everything jumbles around in her mind until it starts to hurt and she feels dizzy. But more importantly, Luke hasn’t responded yet.

“Dammit, Luke, say something!”

Luke looks up, his eyes shining with tears. “I-I’ve really messed up, Leia.”

“Tell me,” she insists, knowing she would find out one way or another.

Luke begins by telling her about Ben and Rey’s lessons and how at the beginning he thought they were just friends. He spoke of how Ben seemed really happy and engaged and Rey was a most promising student.

He spoke about how they went to Illum so Rey could make her lightsaber after the incident in that cave. How she had joined regular classes officially once they returned.

And then eventually, he knows he can’t avoid it anymore and he begins speaking about the night
Plutt came. He told her what the man had told him. About the man that Rey had murdered before she stole the Falcon and flew to Takodana. He tells her how Rey was sold to this man as a child and was technically a slave back on Jakku. Plutt told him that she was to be brought to answer for her crimes and how Luke was initially upset but how he had figured that this could become something of a trial for Rey to face. Something he had believed at the time would make her a better Jedi.

Luke had thought that at least that would help her understand where this was all leading but Leia wasn’t looking at him as he spoke. She stood in front of the window. He occasionally saw her shaking her head and he was sure he could hear her sniffling. She no doubts had her own opinions but she held them back for now. He asked her if she could wait until the end. He wanted to tell her what happened in its entirety.

Luke gives a sigh as he gets to the part where it all unravels. He tells her how he had found Rey in Ben’s hut that same night. The tow of them together on his bed, neither dressed, at least above the waist and realizing how they had been caught.

Luke tries to express the anger he held then. But he hears how he sounds and Luke knows it must seem like desperate excuses.

He eventually falls silent, knowing he has nothing left to offer and that the damage has been done. And Leia turns from the window, knowing it was her turn to speak. She walks over to him slowly, looking surprisingly composed.

But then that all changes as she slaps him across the cheek.

At the loud crack, 3P0 whirs in shock. “Oh my!”

“How could you?” Leia snaps at him, her voice so broken.

Luke stares at her feeling defeated and knowing he has failed her. For the first time in his life, his sister looks to him as if he was a cruel monster and he can’t blame her.

“I’m so sorry, Leia. I-I got so caught up in it all and I thought that I was doing the right thing.” That didn’t sound right so he tries again. “I thought I was doing what I had to do to help Ben. I was so terrified when I realized his feelings for Rey and I knew that when things went wrong, it could be all the push he needed to fall to the dark side.”

“So, you think a reasonable solution was to send that girl back to slavery? You don’t think that ripping her away from him might have been the push he needed to ‘fall to the dark side’ as you put it?”

Luke shakes his head, trying to remind her how frightened they have been of his potential for years. He had his reasons for acting the way he did. They weren’t good ones but he wanted Leia to understand why he did what he did. “Leia, you sent him to me for a reason. He’s always had great power but he’s also had a tremendous conflict. I was doing what I thought would keep him from succumbing to that. I see now that it was wrong, it’s not like I wanted to send Rey away, but I didn’t think he was capable of resisting this pull.”

“But you sent her away anyway, ignoring the facts right in your face! And what kind of message do you think that sends to Ben? In fact, what kind of message do you think that sends to all of your students? I’m surprised not more of them have run away after what you did.”

Luke huffs, “Yeah...me too, I guess.”
Leia shakes her head. “And what makes me so mad is that this has been going on for weeks. Weeks and you never once said anything to me. You never once answered my calls. You just sent that banthashit message telling me to deal with Ben’s birthday later. He’s my son, Luke. My son!” She holds up Ben’s letter, her lips trembling as she points to it. “And he thinks I don’t care. He thinks his family doesn’t love him,” she cries, slumping to the couch and hiding her face in her hands.

Luke doesn’t know what to say. It’s not as if he can try to argue against it because Leia is right. Ben didn’t feel any connection to his family, or at least that’s how he acted. The boy was undeniably from their lineage. He was far too complicated not to be.

Which would explain why he left to go find the only person that he thought loved him back.

Rey.

“We know where he’s going...but he’s smart, so they’re probably long gone by now. Besides...it won’t really matter anyway. It’s not like he would come back if we found him.”

“Maybe not. But if we found him, I would tell him that he never once did anything wrong, at least not with this. I’m proud of him for what he’s done. He found somebody that made him happy...I mean, kriff, I don’t even recall a time when he was ever happy for more than ten consecutive minutes and then after this...to know he’s been so devastated and I didn’t even know...Luke, it just isn’t fair.”

“I know it’s not. I’ve never regretted anything more.”

It falls silent for a moment and he knows Leia is already thinking two or three steps ahead, trying to decide a good plan of action. But she surprises him when she speaks again.

“So what changed? What woke you up from this and made you realize what a dumbass you were being? What made you call me?”

Luke sighs, “I went to his hut when he was sleeping. I tried to look into his mind and see what we were up against. These past few weeks he’s been so resigned from me. He wouldn’t even look at me.”


“I expected to see the darkness of his heart, and in a way I did, but then it was all chased away...all by the love he has for this girl. She...She changed him, or I guess, he changed because of the things she made him feel. I don’t know. But, I think I also realized that maybe he was like that all along, and when he met this girl, Ben realized he wanted to be the person that she could love.”

"ANd she loves him?"

Luke thinks back to the conversation he had with Rey the night she was taken back.

"If you want me to go, I’ll go, but I’m not going anywhere until I see Ben."

"Yes, I believe she does," Luke says and he can see that Leia’s face softens as if she was the tiniest bit relieved to know that Rey shared Ben’s feelings.

“Anyways, so, I saw all that going on in his mind and I called you. I thought you and Ben could work together, maybe organize some kind of trial or agreement for Rey’s case with the man she killed. But then Ben beat me to it and left. He’s going after her.”
Leia gave a small smile then. “I want him to be happy. And if he’s with this girl, it sounds like he will be…” her smile falls. “But I don’t want to live my life thinking I won’t ever see him again. I want him to know that he is loved and that I won’t shame him for his feelings. I don’t care what your rules are at this school. I don’t care what you have to say about it. I am going to find my boy and tell him myself that no matter what, he can always come home and that I love him dearly. He needs to know that he and Rey have a place with me if they need it.”

Luke doesn’t say anything, knowing there was nothing he could say. Leia had said it all, and he knew he would help her because he had caused this whole mess.

Leia sits up, her war face replacing the sorrowful one she had had just a moment earlier. She fiddles with the controls on his holoprojector and he watches her curiously.

“Who are you calling?”

“I’m calling my husband. I need to tell him what’s become of our son, something you should have done long ago.”

Luke has no objections.

Rey stands up for the first time in forever, stretching slightly but then losing her balance on her unstable legs. Ben catches her, keeping an arm around her waist.

_I got you_, she hears him say but his mouth doesn’t move.

_Can you hear me?_ She asks out, wondering if she’s gone slightly mad since she’s been resurrected which was an odd concept to comprehend in the first place.

_Yes. Something in the bond...it’s evolving, I think_, he answers, his eyes looking into hers. Rey chuckles slightly, further astounded at how everything was coming back together after being quiet for so long. And although she was surprised to know that Ben could hear her, she certainly could find herself getting used to the idea.

Ben smiles, likely hearing all that. _We can talk it about it later. For now, we should get out of here._

Rey pulls away then, her legs allowing her to walk finally. She moves to gather her things even if she doesn’t have much. Just her satchel with the canteen and Ben’s journal. She lost everything else in that Star Destroyer.

Ben passes her one of the tunics hanging over a hook. It’s then that she realizes she’s only in a breast band so she pulls it on, thanking him.

She marvels at her skin, amazed it had gone smooth and healthy again after looking so disastrous. It had all been so terrifying.

E’di tinkers in the other room, maybe finally cleaning up after looking over her constantly the past few days. Rey felt so indebted to her. She seemed like a different person entirely from the E’di she had initially met at the outpost.

And suddenly, Rey has an idea.

_Ben?_ She checks to make sure he could still hear her.

Instantly, his eyes find hers. He heard her.
I...I want to take E’di with us. She’s helped me so much and…

Rey thinks back to the night they had their argument and E’di mentioned about waiting for people that never came. This wasn’t where she wanted to be.

And I can’t leave her here. She’s waited longer than I have and I think we could take her someplace nice. She could start a new life. She deserves it, Ben.

Ben looks to E’di before he looked back at Rey. He nods eagerly before answering. Yes. Of course. We couldn’t leave her here after all she’s done.

Rey took his hand and they went to go tell the older woman their plan.

E’di could hardly comprehend the words Rey was saying. They were the kind of words she had waited most of her life to hear.

“We want you to come with us. We want to take you away from this.”

But the desert has been her only home for years now. She wasn’t sure she knew how to leave. Or if she did, what place would the galaxy have for her?

“I don’t think I can go.”

Rey’s face falls. “E’di, you can.”

“I only know how to scavenge. It’s been a long time since I was a part of the rest of the galaxy and for years I would have done anything to join it again. But it won’t take in someone like me. I think the only purpose I offer is out here in the sands.”

“That’s not true,” Ben said.

Rey steps closer, taking her hands and grabbing hold of E’di’s slightly larger and rougher ones. “E’di, please. You deserve to have a real home. Real food, real water. And you’ve done so much for me. Please let us do this for you. Let us take you away from here.”

Rey was so nurturing at times. She doesn’t know how she picked up that kind of gentleness living in the likes of Niima. It half reminded E’di of the kind of things her mother used to say.

And suddenly, it’s like she’s no longer able to keep hold of her emotions. Perhaps it was a mix of everything that had already happened that day, but she starts crying. She feels small and finds herself curling into Rey’s arms and nodding.

Maybe she did deserve something better. Maybe she didn’t have to waste away here any longer.

The three of them load up on the ship. Ben looks to Rey in the co-pilot seat beside him and for a moment, while the engines are warming up, he smiles to himself, thinking of how he could definitely get used to seeing this. She helps him start the sequence but he notices the grin that starts to spread on her face.

Knock it off, I’m trying to focus.

He laughs, likely confusing E’di who was sitting behind them. He turned back to the ship’s controls and prepares to leave. He makes lift off and they all take a big sigh of relief as they leave Jakku’s atmosphere and are faced with the starry sight of space.
He sees Rey turn to look at E’di and Ben does too, his heart wrenching a little to see that she had tears in her eyes from finally leaving a place that had kept her for so long.

“Is there a-a fresher or something?” she asks, her voice cracking a bit.

Ben points to the hallway. “It’s towards the back, on the right.”

E’di gets up and leaves in a hurry and Rey gets up to follow her a moment later, looking concerned.

“Rey,” Ben says softly, holding out his hand to catch her arm. “I think we should give E’di a minute to herself. She needs to process all of this.”

Rey nods, agreeing with him. “I’ll check on her in a little bit.” She moves back to the co-pilots seat, watching him fiddle with the hyperspace router. “You have a place in mind then?”

He nods. “We’re going to a place called Asobi. It’s just a few systems over but far enough that if anyone comes after us, which they might, they’ll look in the surrounding systems of Jakku first so Asobi is just out of the way enough to be pretty safe. There we can get some new clothes, trade the ship, get some food, stuff like that. But then I think we should move again. I don’t want to stay in any one place for too long. At least not right now.”

As he takes them into lightspeed, the blues and whites bathing them in a serene glow of soothing colors. “You thought of everything then,” she smiles at him, her eyes reflecting the sight before them.

But he looks only at her. “Well, I tried to. Once I picked you up I wanted to have something of a plan of what to do next.” He takes a deep breath before continuing. “I certainly wasn’t expecting to...to find you the way I did,” he hears his voice tremble a bit. Even though it was behind them now. He doesn’t think he will ever have the image out of his head. Rey’s lifeless body lying limp in his arms.

She stands up, wrapping her arms around him while he was still in the chair. Even if their minds weren’t linked, she likely would have known what he was thinking about. No doubt his face reliving the fear for a moment. He tucked his face against her waist and held her, tears threatening his eyes again.

“It’s over now,” she whispers against his hair. “We’re okay.”

He nods, pulling away to look up at her and feeling almost unworthy of the gentleness she holds for him, keeping her hand against his cheek. “I love you,” he reminds her.

“I love you, Ben,” she says, tucking hair behind his ear.

“You look so tired,” she tells him softly after a moment. Concern in her eyes as she looks at him closely. “You haven’t been sleeping, have you?”

Ben realizes that he is, in fact, exhausted. When the bond wouldn’t open, he hadn’t ever slept longer than an hour or so at a time. And then he hadn’t slept through lightspeed on the way to Jakku.

Ben considers all that happened in Niima, and then all the energy he must have spent bringing Rey back, he feels ready to crash. But he had kept going, ignoring it and it wasn’t until she spoke those words that he allowed himself to catch up to just how tired he really was.
He shakes his head. “I haven’t. But I think I could now. Are you tired?”

She hums, considering it. “Actually, not really. I think my body has slept enough in the past few days. But I would gladly hold you if you wanted to try and get some rest.” She looks to the navicomp revealing how many hours lightspeed would take. “We have time.”

He nods and lets Rey guide him to the other room where they settle on a cot. Rey sits up against the wall while Ben curls himself around her, resting his head on her lap and finding himself at absolute peace as she combs her fingers through his hair.

He falls asleep in the arms of the girl he loves for the first time in what feels like forever, And he knows when he wakes up, she’ll still be there.

And although they are both still in their clothes and they needed to bathe (which they might have done if E’di wasn’t in the fresher still) but Ben didn’t care.

He’s never felt more comfortable.

Han’s old face appears on the projector and he looks surprised to see her. She realizes she’s calling from Luke’s number so he was expecting her brother. “Leia, what’s going on? Are you at the Academy?”

“Yes,” she croaks.

“What’s wrong, princess?”

She’s so caught up in it all, she doesn’t even get bothered when he calls her that. If anything, she’s relieved to see him. Hopefully, he will feel the same way as she does.

“It’s Ben,” she says.

“What happened now?” Han sighs, expecting a different kind of trouble, most likely.

“He’s gone. He ran away last night.”

His eyes go wide. “What?!?”

She nods. “He’s gone after this girl, Rey. Apparently...I mean, given everything Luke told me and the letter he left behind, he loves her very much.”

“Wait a minute, I’ve met Rey. She was at the Academy. Where’s she at now?”

Leia looks over to her brother who was sulking on the other side of the room before turning back to Han. “She was on Jakku. The man who owned her came back for her and took her back. He claimed that she had to answer for her crimes. I guess she had killed a man by accident and, well, he tracked her down.”

“Kriffing hell. I don’t even know where to start with that, it sounds like such a mess. Is-uh...Is Luke there?”

At the sound of his name, Luke stiffens and walks out the door, likely knowing that she wanted to discuss more of this without him listening in. “No, he just left the room.”

“How the hell did he let this happen?”
“Well, I guess the night the man came, he found Ben and Rey in the same bed and kind of panicked. He was worried it would cause Ben to give into darker and possessive feelings so he separated them, practically throwing the girl back to the junkyard. And that’s why Ben left. He went to find her.”

“When did you find out?” Han asks next.

“About a half-hour ago,” she shrugs, looking to the chrono.

“And when did this all go down?”

“From what I can tell, over a month ago.” Han lets out a long breath at the news.

“This letter, Han. I read it...it’s heartbreaking. He doesn’t seem to think we believe in him. He thinks we expect him to become all these things that he doesn’t want to be and...and although I know we sent him here to find some peace with himself, I can’t help but feel guilty. I can’t help but think he’s right. I mean...we didn’t really listen to him, did we? In his eyes, he thinks we just got rid of him.”

“Alright, just calm down, sweetheart. First of all, we did what we thought was best for him. Besides, given how he was behaving, what were our other options?”

“But we never even asked him! We just told him what was happening and packed him up to go.”

_Or I did_, Leia thinks to herself. _You were off galavanting around at the time. No one had seen you in months or heard from you in weeks._

Han is quiet for a moment, looking down. He shakes his head, likely thinking of that time and perhaps considering his constant absence. “I don’t know what to tell you, Leia. I figured that he was better off with Luke than me. I never knew how to be a father to him. I never got it right.”

“But that doesn’t mean we just give up! We love him, and I need him to know that. I don’t want to go the rest of my life never seeing him again.”

Han doesn’t respond to that, but she can tell he’s thinking. He sniffs a little then and Leia does too as they both consider the wellbeing of their son. Something they haven’t done together for a long time.

“Jakku, huh?” he finally says.

“Yeah.”

“You want me to go look for them?”

She nods. “Yes. I’ll be coming too. I doubt they’ll still be there but maybe we can figure out where they went or at the very least I can arrest the bastard that put this girl through so much pain.”

“Okay. I’ll wait for you unless I get a lead on him. We can talk about this later. Try not to worry too much though. I mean, I met this girl. If Ben found her then I would say he’s in good hands.”

“Oh, good to know,” Leia says softly, wishing she had met Rey. She wishes more than anything she would have just canceled all her work a few months back and come to Parent’s Night. She wonders if that would have changed the outcome of any of this. Maybe Ben would have felt encouraged to reach out to her if he knew that she would listen.
Han speaks again, pulling her out of her thoughts. “See you soon, sweetheart.”

“Yeah, bye,” she finishes, ending the call. For some reason, she is reminded of a time where they used to say “I love you” with their goodbyes but suddenly, Leia can’t recall the last time she said those words to her husband.

Or the last time he had said those words to her for that matter.

Rey sat there for a long time, keeping a hold of Ben while he slept. She liked to watch the rise and fall of his shoulders, calm and steady. A stark contrast to how he’s been since she was taken.

He was always happy to see her through the bond but she could always tell how worried he was. Like he never gave himself a chance to breathe until she would hug him or something.

She was so happy to have him here, knowing that it wasn’t just through the bond and he wouldn’t disappear in an instant. He was here to stay.

She kept looking to the fresher door though, hoping that E’di was alright. She heard the water running for a while and Rey doubted there would be enough left for her to take one but she knew that they were nearing Asobi anyway.

But then, after what must have been hours, the door opened, steam escaping and a freshly cleaned E’di stepped out. Her hair was damp but combed through and her skin was free of dirt. She looked maybe ten years younger and Rey gave her a smile.

“You look good,” she whispered to her.

E’di smiles. “Sorry. It’s been a long time since I used a hydro shower and I almost forgot how dirty I was. The drain ran orange for a while. All the dirt still hiding in my wrinkles,” she gives a small laugh.

Rey smiles. She seemed better than before. She wasn’t crying anymore and Rey took that as a good step forward.

E’di takes a look at Ben, sleeping against her.

“So this is your boy, huh?”

Rey lovingly sets a hand on his head, her heart swelling to think that Ben was hers. “Yeah. This is Ben,” she whispers still, wanting him to get as much sleep as he can.

“Well, he’s awfully cute. And he really loves you.”

Rey grins. “I know. He’s...he’s unlike anyone else I’ve ever met. I never knew I could feel so much for somebody the way I do for him.”

E’di nods slowly. “I know what you mean.”

Rey looks to the older woman in curiosity, the statement stalling her a bit. She thought better of it than to ask, unsure if it was her place. But then E’di continues on anyway.

“I loved a man once. A man who I thought loved me back.”

Rey looks to her, listening intently, but her heart already picking up, knowing this couldn’t end well. She didn’t realize though that Ben had noticed her reaction through the bond and he stirred
awake, finding himself listening to the woman’s story, still curled up against Rey.

“I loved him so much. He was everything I thought I needed in my life. He was older, smarter, richer, and devilishly handsome. The only hard part was that he was married. And even though I knew that was wrong, and I shouldn’t have been seeing him, he would pull me back in. It was because he kept reeling me back that I had told myself that he loved me just as much as I loved him.”

E’di looks down to her weathered hands. Her voice shaky again suddenly, but no tears came. “I was so young then...and yet I was still a few years older than both you, but I had less than half the sense,” she chuckles a little, but it wasn’t meant to be funny.

“You see, it all changed once I got pregnant.”

Rey feels Ben tense up a little bit and it’s then that she knows he was awake and listening. She goes stiff too, not expecting that.

“All of a sudden, things were different. He kept me at arm’s length. He told me to tell no one, knowing it would ruin not only his marriage but also his career. Hell, I took him so seriously, I didn’t even tell my mother. I figured that if the circumstances were different, he would be happy. I knew it wasn’t ideal, but I was so foolish that I could only be excited. So you could imagine how ecstatic I was when he came for me one day.”

Rey knew this wasn’t going in a good direction. Somehow, E’di ended up on Jakku.

“He came and told me that he was leaving his wife. I guess, saying it out loud, that’s not something that should have made me happy, but it did. He said he had a few things to finish up but he wanted me to get away before I started showing. Said that some sun and relaxation would do me good and that he would be right behind me. So he sent me off in a ship with a pilot droid. And from then on out, I thought, you know...everything’s gonna be okay.

“But then the ship went on the fritz. We hit some major turbulence and fell out of hyperspace. The droid had malfunctioned as well and broke down right in the seat. I pushed him aside and tried to land it as best as I could, but by the time I crashed, I knew it would never fly again. And on impact, I figured that was when I lost the baby.”

Rey feels tears run down her cheeks, amazed that E’di could remain so composed while she spoke. Ben started to sit up a bit and she could feel how his hands were holding her even tighter now. E’di’s story was affecting him in a similar way.

“But you know, I...I survived. I was alright, or as alright as I could have been. And I figured that once he had discovered what happened, he would come for me. So, I made a home out of the little ship and survived by trading in some miscellaneous parts at Niima and getting portions and water in return.

But days turned to months...and by the time I realized the months had turned to years, I started to admit to myself that he was never coming at all. I still made excuses though. I tried to believe he was looking for me, or maybe he thought I was dead, who knows. But then, one day, I started to repair the old droid that broke down mid-flight and caused the whole mess. I was so lonely, and I thought at least I could talk to it from time to time. That was when I found out that it had been sabotaged. Its last order was to power down in the middle of lightspeed, ensuring the crash. And it was his name on the order. It was that bastard who let this happen. After that, I don’t think I was ever the same. And I guess...I guess that’s why I was so hard on you, Rey. I guess that’s why I told you to give up that hope before you hurt yourself beyond repair.”
She finally looks back up at them again. “But I was wrong. Ben came for you. He saved you. He brought you back from a place I didn’t know people could be brought back from. And I guess I would just like to thank you kids for showing me that there are some things that work out good. There can be good people out there. They aren’t all like that prick that left me to die in that desert.”

Rey urges Ben to sit up and he does, wiping his eyes as Rey rushes over to give the woman a big hug. “I’m so sorry, E’dì. I had no idea.”

“Of course, you didn’t. It’s not something I...actually, now that I think about it, you’re the first people I’ve ever told about it. All these years I’ve been chewing away at it in my head, but to say it out loud...I don’t know, it kind of helps. So, thank you for listening, I guess. I know its kind of a downer.”

“E’dì you can share anything with us. We’re your friends.”

The older woman smiles, looking between them as Rey moves back over to Ben, leaning against him a bit. She sees how he puts an arm over her shoulder, keeping her close.

She’s so relieved that Rey has this beautiful chance to live her life with someone who loves her. She’s been terrified that Rey would end up just like her. But now, ever since she left Jakku, although it made her cry at first, it’s like everything is different. Everything seems like it could be better. A brighter future for all of them.

And E’dì realizes that she may finally have the chance to live the life she never had. And she’s never been more grateful for anyone the way she was for the two young people before her.

*Her friends.*

Luke looks to the chrono, nearly groaning. “I have to go deal with the kids downstairs. I have to tell them what’s happening. I need to let them know what I’ve decided so they can prepare,” Luke tells her, knowing he’s already left them alone too long. They have likely discovered Ben’s absence by now and what it must mean. They were smart, or at least most of them were.

“I need to make a few more calls. I need to notify my colleagues that I’ll be on leave for the foreseeable future,” Leia says, already waving C-3P0 over to recite all the codes of the people she needs to speak with.

Everyone waited in the cafeteria for what seemed like all day. Boris had been surprised to see the arrival of Ben’s mother, Leia. She wasn’t able to make it on most parent’s nights so to see her on what was meant to be an ordinary day had been disorienting.

At first, Boris worried if they had already caught on, but then this morning, after seeing Luke sprint up the hill with a piece of paper clenched in his metal hand, Boris knew that Ben was in the clear.

After Luke had directed Leia inside, which everyone could see the look of terror on her face as she made her way up the stairs, no doubt realizing her son had fled. She went up to Luke’s office while their Master told them to wait in the cafeteria until he came back for them.

And since Ben was nowhere to be found, the other students had already gossiped enough, jumping to the conclusion that Ben wasn’t around. But it was mostly in jest, none of them thinking he could ever actually escape the Academy.
But suddenly, after what seemed like hours, the doors open again and Luke comes through.


“I’m not going to bother lying to you. I think you’re all capable and old enough to hear what I’m going to tell you and I don’t want us to hide things from each other anymore. Not after how I’ve acted.”

“What do you mean?” Osi looked to him curiously.

Like gives a sigh, “Ben has run away. I found his hut empty this morning, but he did leave me a letter of resignation.”

Voices rise at the news. BX is possibly the loudest. “Oh my goodness, Master Solo! Oh, I do hope he’s alright. I do hope it wasn’t my cooking that drove him to this.”

“Now, everyone just stay calm,” Luke holds out his hands, eyeing the droid with a strange look but then carries on. “Alright, obviously there’s a lot to discuss-“

“How did he do it?” Nourdi asks immediately.

Luke shrugs, not as bothered to have been interrupted as Boris might have expected him to be. “No idea. But I just spoke to the droids at the gates and after resetting their systems this morning, they discovered that a ship was missing. He somehow slipped passed them, must have hacked their systems and then left in the middle of the night. That’s about all I have right now.”

“So what happens? Are you going after him?” Pim asks.

Luke looks like he’s trying to answer, but nothing leaves his mouth. But then Leia steps in, the golden protocol droid whirring behind her and she looks to her brother. Clearing her throat, she begins to speak. “Hello. I know most of you think of me as Leia Organa or Luke’s sister, but before anything else, I consider myself Ben’s mother.”

Everyone goes silent as they watch her. She had a regalness to her that Boris had always admired. It wasn’t flashy, just very dignified.

“You can imagine how I feel just now. It’s quite a shock to discover your child missing, or in Ben’s case, run away...but I can understand why he thought it was necessary.”

“Has he gone after Rey?” Osi speaks again. Everyone must have been thinking it. That’s what Boris would be thinking if he wasn’t already aware of it.

Leia looks to the girl, nodding slightly before answering. “Yes, we believe he has.”

Voices rise again after that, mostly from Hux’s table but Luke gives them one look and they calm down a little.

“And although I respect his reasons for wanting to leave and I acknowledge the feelings he has for Rey, I would very much like to find him again. I would like him to know that he always has a home, no matter his choices.”

“But...he and Rey were like, well, you know,” Dono says to which more than just Boris rolls his eyes.

Leia stays composed though. “I understand that you all have lived under certain rules during your
stay here. And I can appreciate why Luke has enforced them since this is how the Jedi of the Old Republic did things, but I trust my son to make his own choices, which, admittedly, is something I wish I realized earlier. And if how he cares for Rey makes him happy, then that makes me happy too.”

“So, you want to find him just to...tell him you love him and that you’re not mad?” Nourdi asks.

“Yes,” she says confidently. Boris smiles to the woman, glad to know that although Ben seemed to perceive his family one way, maybe things were changing.

“Are you going too, Master Luke?” Hevaj asks and everyone shifts their focus to their teacher.

“We’re all going,” he says and to this, Boris is surprised.


“Field trip!” Azmo cheers and Luke gives him a stern look to which Azmo sits back down, staying quiet.

“I’ve decided that the way I’ve been running things hasn’t exactly been very effective or what’s best for all of you. I’m sorry that I have not been living up to the standards of a Master that you all deserve. So I figured it’s time for a change of scenery. I think it’s time you all saw parts of the galaxy that you’ve been studying how to save. It’s time that I trusted you to face what this title actually entails.

“But be mindful that this is only happening because I have promised to accompany my sister search for her son because I believe I was the cause of all this. I was the one who sent Rey away and I can’t tell you how much I regret it. I can’t imagine how some of you must feel about me after watching me do something like that. But I hope that we can all try to strive towards a brighter future as we take a journey together. Because frankly, I think we’ve been stashed in here too long. I think this is a good first step as any for change.”

This was hardly the response that Boris expected from the Master that seemed to hold nothing but discontent for his nephew. But then again, Luke has been so odd in the past couple of days.

Maybe things were changing, and Ben just left too soon to see it for himself. But then again, Boris wouldn’t have changed anything. As he knows Ben wouldn’t have either.

The sooner Ben left, the sooner he got to Rey.

Boris smiled, thinking how despite how they were all going after them apparently, Ben and Rey probably wouldn’t be found. They were making their own path and he wasn’t sure if any of them were even capable of following it.

“So, that was fast,” Luke says to Leia once the students had all gone to gather their things. “What did you tell them?”

Leia looked at him, dead in the eye. “I said that I had some family problems to sort through and I needed some time but I would remain in touch through holos if they needed me. And only when it didn’t affect my schedule.” She composes herself well but she caves a moment later as she snaps at him. "I left out the part about how my son was missing and that my brother was being a dumbass.”

Luke nods, knowing he deserves that.
Leia is ready to go full-on Joyce Byers and that's pretty much all I've wanted in life for the past four years (beside alive and happy Reylo *cries*)
Yeah, but then I'll go. You stay.

Are you kidding me?

He's my son, Hop. My son.

I'm going!

Sorry, I know this is really dark but I couldn't find a gif of when she says "He's my son!" so Pinterest gave me this photo booth screenshot thing but at least you get a feel for the mood.
Asobi isn't a Star Wars planet. I made it up because I'm lazy and I cater to what I want now that sometimes just looking at Wookieepedia makes me cry because I'll suddenly catch sight of canon bullshit that I can't handle. *Manic Laughter* I'm in full control of my problems.

Anyways, I took it from the band Asobi Seksu. Their song 'Thursday' is a good listen and it's on the fic playlist if anyone ever looks at that.

Thanks lovelies<3!!
“Ben,” he hears her voice in his ear. He smiles, not opening his eyes, just glad to feel her against him in the tiny cot they were sharing in the ship.

“Hmm?” he hums, hugging her closer.

“We’re nearly there. The navcomp keeps chirping. I think we have to get up.” He stirs a bit, hearing it too.

“It’s the morning?” he asks, trying to blink away the sleep still fogging his vision.

“Well, yeah. I guess it is. We don’t have any sunrise but the chrono says so well enough.”

Ben chuckles. “Good,” he says, leaning over to kiss her cheek. “By the time we get to Asobi, I’m going to head to the credit union and get some money from my account.”

She stills, looking at him curiously. “Your account?”

“Oh, yeah,” he realizes he never explained this part to Rey. “Well, ever since I was a kid, in fact, I think my parents opened it up when I was a baby, they set aside an account in my name. Kind of like a trust fund, only it already had a lot of money in it because of an inheritance from my mother’s parents. They wrote a will and for some reason, they had set aside money for any of her future children and, well, they only had me. So it’s gained interest over time and it’s got a lot of money in it. But until now, I didn’t have access to it since it was linked with my mom’s accounts. I mean, I could have still used the money with her permission but there wasn’t much I was buying at the Academy anyway.”

Rey nods. “So, what does ‘now’ have to do with it?”

Ben feels himself blush and he doesn’t know why. “Well, the account remains linked to my mom’s until I was eighteen. After that, it’s mine and she doesn’t get any alerts on how much I use or anything. So it’s safe.” He moves to get up but her arms pull him back, her hands on his waist. He falls back against the bed and she looks to him as if she was cross but he could feel her amusement through the bond.

“Was that your way of telling me today is your birthday?”

Ben breathes out a laugh, “Maybe.”
Rey leans forward, kissing the corner of his mouth before pulling back just enough to look him in the eyes. “Happy birthday, Ben Solo,” she said softly before leaning in again and kissing him on the lips, her palm on his cheek. He can’t help but smile.

Ben kisses her back, pulling her a little closer, instantly feeling how his heart started beating faster. He missed this.

He hasn’t allowed himself to really think of this too much. He knows the last time they managed any serious kind of intimacy, his uncle had barged in not too long after and sent her away.

But now they had time.

Until he hears a flush come from the fresher and he remembers they aren’t actually alone and wherever this might have been leading would have to wait.

He pulls back then, as does Rey. She chuckles softly and he knows she’s thinking the same thing.

She presses a soft kiss to his and through the bond, he hears her say, *Later.*

And that certainly didn’t help the level of focus Ben knew he needed for the rest of the day.

They were nearly to Jakku but it seemed to be taking forever.

At least, to Leia that’s how it seemed. She knows she should have tried to sleep or something that would keep her sane, but she’s too distracted.

Besides...today was Ben’s birthday.

And she’s spent the morning doing nothing but think of all of his previous birthdays. And it depresses her even more.

She thought of his last birthday when he turned seventeen but she wasn’t able to call him until the following day because she had been...too busy, she recalls and she shakes her head at herself.

She thought about his tenth birthday when Han brought him the blaster and she sent Ben to his room while they argued. She had brought him his calligraphy set later but his eyes had been red and she knew he had spent a great deal of time crying. On his birthday.

She thought about his fifth birthday when he cried because she had been late and missed dinner, as had Han. He cried and said, “I thought you were never coming back.”

Leia falls forward with her face in her hands, rethinking all of her decisions as a mother and realizing that although she thought that she was doing what was best for him, she might have done what was worst.

She knew her job was unforgiving when it came to time off or personal days but she had convinced herself early on that she was striving to make the galaxy the kind of place Ben could live in. But instead, he had escaped his uncle’s Jedi Academy only to flee to a planet that still held slavery practices to save the girl Luke had sent away.

That sounded nothing like the galaxy she had wanted for him. He was trying to fix it himself, thinking that his family didn’t care about him.

“But Princess?” C-3PO appears suddenly and Leia groans.
“How many times have I asked you not to call me that?” she asks, her hand falling from her face to look at him.

“How apologies…” he is quiet for a moment. “Did you want me to answer that?”

“No, Threepio.”

“Because I do have all the instances recorded-”

“No, I said no.”

“It’s just a hard habit to break because-”

“Nevermind, it’s fine. Just leave it,” Leia shakes her head.

The droid continues. “Anyways, I wanted to tell you that we will be arriving to Jakku very soon. I was wondering if you wanted to change into a different wardrobe as it is very warm and covered in sand. Not unlike Tatooine where Master Luke and I first-”


“You know, I actually have a theory of my own of where Ben might have gone.”

“We’re going to Jakku,” Leia reminds him. “He would have gone to get Rey first.”

“No, of course, I know. But I think if they aren’t there we should check-”

“Threepio can you just go back to the cockpit. See if Han tried to comm back.”

The droid seems exasperated but does as she’s suggested. “I see, very well.”

Leia gets up to change in her small quarters if only to find more time to herself as her mind works away.

She was furious at Luke for doing what he did, but she was also mad at herself for taking so long to come to terms with how she herself has treated Ben.

And she can only imagine what Ben must think of his father at this point. And she isn’t sure if Han even cares or if he thinks Ben was just a lost cause to them anyways. She wonders if Han even remembers it was their son's birthday.

It breaks her heart.

They land on Jakku about a half-hour later. Han had sent them coordinates of a little outpost called Niima where supposedly the girl had spent most of her life and the man who owned her had dragged her back to.

Leia steps down the ramp. They had landed beside the Falcon. Luke was coming in a larger shuttle with the rest of the students and R2 but Leia left before them, eager to see what she could do.

There are many people, scavengers (or maybe even slaves), working around, tinkering on the ships nearby. They looked like they were trying to repair them and many of them were working together to carry over spare parts from a larger structure.

Like ants carrying food back to the anthill.
In the distance, Leia sees Chewie standing beside one of the larger tents. He sees her and roars out, waving his arms in greeting. She can’t help but smile a little to see him. It had been a while and Chewie always had preferable manners over her husband. Something she didn’t fully understand until after she married him.

The wookiee embraces her in a big fuzzy hug. “I’ve missed you, Princess,” he tells her. For some reason, the name doesn’t bother her when CHEiwe says it. Hand and 3P0 on the other hand…

“I missed you too, CHEiwe,” she tells him, her face in his fur, hiding how teary her eyes felt.

He looks down at her then, his hands on her shoulders. “I know you must be worried.”

“Of course I am!”

He moans a little, startled by her reaction but then purrs softly, patting her head. “You have nothing to worry about though. Not if he’s with her.”

“What are you-”

“Those two know how to take care of themselves. And they’ll keep an eye on each other.”

She looks to him with wide eyes. Suddenly she remembers that Chewie was the one that chaperoned Ben and Rey to Illum to make her lightsaber. Leia could have shaken him if she could.

“Dammit, CHEiwe, spill it!”

The wookiee chuffs in laughter but she’s not in the mood to laugh.

“I promised them I wouldn’t tell, but it seems like everyone found out anyway. But I know for myself that they love each other very much. I had a whole discussion with him about it when Rey was looking for her crystal.”

Leia suddenly feels envious of Chewie, knowing that her son was more open with him that herself but she still listens intently, wanting to know everything she can.

“The only thing I can’t figure is how Rey ended up back here. Han was quiet on the way over and I could only get so much out of him.”

Leia sighs. “She was taken back. That Plutt man found her and dragged her back because of an incident that happened when she first escaped.”

“He found her at the Academy?” he moans.

Leia nods.

CHEiwe looks confused for a moment and then it must hit him. “And Luke let her go?”

Leia nods again, feeling anger resurge as she thinks of her brother’s actions. But then she hears Chewie give a low growl and she looks back up to his face to see he was trying to hold back his teeth.

He looked furious. “How could he do that to her?”

She shakes her head like she’s been doing all morning. “He tried to explain it to me, and although he’s come to his senses...he really fucking up.” She never got to swear around the other senators. She supposes if there’s a good thing about all of Luke’s mess is that Leia doesn’t have to bite her
tongue. “I guess Rey’s first force awakening occurred when she had killed a man as she was leaving. And then he had discovered what was going on between Ben and Rey and...” Leia rolls her eyes, thinking Luke had been so dramatic at the thought of two teenagers caught in the same hut. “...well, she was taken back and Ben, well, Ben’s been miserable, trying to figure out how to get out of there.”

Chewie moans and remains quiet for a moment. “I wish he told me. Ben. I would have helped them with this.”

Leia is grateful to hear it, knowing that he meant that. Although it was too late for that reality, it brings her comfort to know that Cheiwe supported her son in a way she wished her brother and her husband would.

She realizes then that she doesn’t see her husband anywhere.

“Where’s Han?”

“He’s inside, talking to the man, Plutt. He was just sitting around when we got here.” He nods to the inside of the fragile structure. “Why don’t you go help him out?”

She walks in to see a bulbous Crolute man sitting on a stool with a blank expression on his face. And then she spots her husband’s aging face too and he gives her a nod.

“Hey, sweetheart,” he gives her a flat smile, filled with nothing but exhaustion.

“What have you found out?”

He sighs and she wonders if it’s because of the nature of his discussion with the man or if it was because she didn’t actually greet him. “Ben was here. Plutt gave him directions to a crashed ship before he left where he thinks Rey must have been. Chewie went over on the Falcon to check it out but no one was there. We’re pretty sure they’ve left but there’s no indication of where. Best guess is we try to figure how much fuel they have and how far they logistically could have gotten.”

She expected that, but to know she missed them feels disappointing.

But there were still things to address. “And what’s with him?” she asks, looking at his face. He looked dazed. Han hadn’t even tied his hands or anything, he was just sitting there as if he didn’t even know she and Han were standing in front of him.

Han leans forward, whispering. “I think Ben did something to him. One of those mind things. The guy isn’t all home, you see what I mean?”

She nods, “But he’s answering your questions?”

“Yeah, you ask him a question and he just rolls. No threats or anything.”

Leia steps closer to the man. “You’re Unkar Plutt, yes?”

He grunts, “Yup,” he answers, but his eyes are a little out of focus.

“And you...purchased Rey when she was a child?”

He grunts again, making the same noise in affirmation. “Her folks wasn’t the cuddly type. They needed money and I gave them an offer. I needed more scavengers and a girl her size could always get in places the grown people couldn’t. Figure it’d be an investment.”
Leia’s stomach turns a little bit. To know that Rey’s parents had sold her made her want to cry.

But she needs to focus.

“These charges you held against Rey, what was that all about? You claimed she killed a man. That was why you tracked her down to Oquinn and brought her back.”

“Yup, she killed him...busted my back and leg when she threw us. But I guess I was the lucky one, compared to the other fella.”

“But why did she do it? What made her react that way?” Leia thinks Luke mentioned something about her stealing food or something.

Plutt shrugs, his eyes still dazed. She wonders what Ben did to cause this but won’t complain, knowing that they wouldn’t be getting this information this easily otherwise.

“Ugh,” he groans, giving a sigh, still staring ahead. “Well, things were pretty slow at the outpost and I was in need of more credits. A man came through for a few days. He was looking for company but the girl that used to occupy the pleasure tent had passed away not too long before that. I suggested that maybe another outpost might have what he needs but then Rey came in with her haul and he caught sight of her. He said that he wanted her. I told him she was no pleasure slave. Just a scavenger. But he still stuck around.”

“What?” Leia snapped, horrified at what she was hearing.

Plutt doesn’t flinch when she exclaims but just keeps talking. “Anyways, after a few days, he was still offering me good credits and I just figured that I would take them. So when the girl came in that evening, I told her her scrap was no good and that if she wanted to eat she would need to play along and do whatever the guy wanted.”

Leia feels Han’s hand on her shoulder then. She looks up at him and sees the horror on his face too as they realize what this poor girl has been through.

“And when she didn’t cooperate, she pushed you both back,” Leia finishes for him. “She was just defending herself from what you were forcing you into!”

“Uh-yup,” he says, zero emotion or comprehension in his tone.

Leia could feel herself shaking. “And then you brought her back here! Did you force her to do that again? Did you send her to anyone else?” She doubts Luke was aware of any of this. As mad as he was he never would have subjected her to this.

“Nah. She was just a scavenger. She always had good hauls. She could fit in the places the others usually couldn’t. But she was also repaying her debt, so she wasn’t getting as many portions in return, and I kept that collar on her to keep her from acting out again.”

Things get quiet after that as Han and Leia absorb the information. Leia had no idea this was what had led to Rey’s force awakening. And although she had been concerned about her son’s safety, she finds that she’s even more amazed at him for being so determined for finding his way here. He didn’t want Rey to be subjected to this any longer and it seemed he had succeeded.

She was so proud of him.

“How did you find her?” Han finally speaks up. She looks up at him but he’s focused on Plutt.
“Huh?” he grunts, looking ahead still.

“How did you find Rey at the Academy? How did you know she was there?” Han clarifies.

Plutt nods over to a pile of junk. “I got a message on the holopad there. All anonymous like, telling me they knew where she was and it was in everyone’s best interest if she was taken back where she could answer for her crimes. I had posted a wanted ad on the net in case anyone would see her. I didn’t expect a response. No one usually gives any bothers about murders or crimes that happen on Jakku.”

“An anonymous message?” Leia repeats, confused. “Who would tell him where Rey was?”

Han shrugs, picking up the holopad on the pile and trying to power it on. “Maybe we can decode it and find out who did this.”

“Yeah, maybe Threepio or Artoo can-”

She’s interrupted by the sound of descending engines as Luke’s shuttle arrives with the rest of the students.

“That’ll be Luke,” Leia tells Han. See if you can get Chewie in here. We can put him in custody and I’ll notify Chandrila. They can send some people to take him away. He’ll go to trial before he gets locked up, even though I’d like to end him myself,” she grumbles to Han.

“As far as I’m concerned, the Republic isn’t around… and I’ve got my blaster. Would you prefer-”

“No!” she rolls her eyes but realizes she instigated the behavior and tries to calm down. “I mean, we can’t. These students, we have to be a good example for them. They have to see how these things are handled and I’m not making any mistakes like Luke. I’ll call back to the New Republic and ask for them to pick him up. Then we can keep looking for them.”

Han’s response is more cooperative than his face was being. “Alright, sweetheart. Sounds good. Chewie! Get in here and help us with this bastard!”

Leia walks out, taking the holopad form Han and making her way towards the craft that had just landed. The students are looking all around, observing the behavior on the strange new planet. Most of them have been on Oquinn since they left their homes. To be anywhere new, even Jakku, it must have been fascinating.

She sees Luke descending the ramp with R2 beside him.

She wants to scream at him. She wants to smack him again for not asking the right questions when he should have. To understand what Rey had been through her whole life, and the true emergence of her powers, it all seemed like too much for anyone to handle. Let alone a seventeen-year-old girl.

She starts to think of what she'll say to Luke when Chewie appears once again and marches up to him first. She can only hear faint roars but she knows he's furious, trying to defend Rey and Ben. Luke backs up a little but the man doesn't seem to have any fight left in him. He looks defeated and suddenly she realizes he looks at least ten years older.

And then she remembers they were twins and if he was looking that old, then she probably was too.

“Fuck,” she breathes to herself, closing her eyes and hoping that wherever he was, Ben was having
a nice birthday for once.

Asobi is beautiful. It’s drizzling but Rey always loved the rain. And she can see by the look on E’di’s face that she is ecstatic to see it for herself for the first time in so many years.

They had landed the ship in a docking bay. Ben had told her that he had gathered all the credits he kept stashed at the bottom of his trunk in his hut before he left. Ben had a handful of credits to pay for the spot but she knew from then on, he was thinking about how he needed to get to the credit union to get more of his money.

Still, he insisted that they all eat first so they ended up at a diner after walking through the rain for a little while. A waiter droid led them to a booth next to a window. Rey slid in first, Ben scooting beside her and E’di sat across from them, amazed at the menu in front of her.

They order breakfast and the droid takes their menus, rolling away on wheels at high speed.

“So…” E’di speaks up and Ben and Rey focus on her. She’s got her hands on the table, fiddling with the utensils, not looking at them. “I’ve been thinking, and, I’ve decided that I’m going to go back to my home planet. I’d like to see if my mother is still alive and perhaps reach out to her.”

Rey leans forward, realizing what this meant. “That sounds nice. Where were you from?”

E’di smiles. “It was a gorgeous planet called, Merlia. Polar opposite from Jakku, you know? Lots of freshwater and green. I always loved the scenery there. I’d love to see it again.”

“Well, maybe after we leave here, we can head over-” Ben starts but E’di holds up her hands.

“No, I…I mean that’s very kind of you but…I feel like this is something I must do myself. I’m used to making my own way by now and I think I would only slow you kids down. Besides, by the looks of it, you have a lot of livin’ to do and you don’t want to drag some old lady with you everywhere, paying for everything. I want to make my own way.”

“But, E’di-”

“No, I know. But believe me, I want this. I’m excited. I was hoping, however…” she trails off, looking to Ben. “That maybe you could give me a deal on that ship we came in. I know you mentioned you wanted to get a new one on account of you’ve got people looking around for you. I can’t give you anything for it now but I figure that once I get a job I can transfer you the money or something.”

Rey looks to Ben but he’s smiling, already shaking his head. “E’di, it’s yours. Don’t even think about giving me money for it.”

“But-”

Ben leans closer. “Technically, the ship isn’t even mine, but it won’t come up as stolen and I’ve disengaged all the tracking instruments so it’s safe. I just figured we would get something else anyway,” Ben looks to Rey with a smile. “Just because, well we plan on moving around for a while and I wanted us to be a little more comfortable.”

*If that sounds good to you?* She hears his voice ask and she nods a little.

*Sounds amazing.*
Ben turns back to E’di, “So really, the ship is yours. Take it.”

E’di looks unsure of his proposition but doesn’t shoot it down this time, Rey reaches for her hands, still playing with the silverware. “E’di, you really are welcome to stay with us though. You don’t have to feel like you need to leave if that’s what you’re worried about.”

She smiles. “I’m not, truly. This may sound a little odd coming from a woman my age, but just being on that ship, taking a shower, seeing this place, sitting in this diner, I mean, I really forgot how big this galaxy is and I want to know what it can offer me. And I’d like to start where I left off and see my mother if she’s still around. I’ve missed her so much.”

“Well, once Ben and I get a ship we can send you our contact codes so if you ever need anything or...I don’t know, even if you just want to talk or something.”

E’di gives them a shaky smile, squeezing Rey’s hand and looking between them with gratitude. “You kids are too good to me.”

They chuckle at her, so focused on the conversation that they don’t even see the droid come in with their food.

After they ate, Ben was insistent to get to the credit union. He was relieved when the bill from the diner was small enough that his remaining credits would cover it.

They told E’di to hold out on leaving just yet, despite respecting her reasons for wanting to go her own way. Ben can understand it and sincerely hopes that her mother was still alive and well when she got to Merlia.

And as much as he knew she would likely refuse it, he wanted to give her something before she leaves.

They made their way to the credit union next. They passed by lots of different shops that Ben would have liked to take Rey to but he knew it would have to wait until after he had access to his money.

For some reason, even though she was right beside him and had her arm hooked onto his, he felt the need to keep checking on her. She was fine, He knew she was fine. But he gets a chill up his spine every time he thinks of her in his arms, dead.

Ben, he hears her say, her tone somewhat stern but also sympathetic. He must have been thinking too loud.

I’m sorry.

You healed me. Everything’s fine now.

I know, I know. It’s just that the attack and the infection took a tremendous toll on your body...and on your life! I just want to make sure you’re completely fine. I want to make sure it’s all gone.

And it is. I wouldn’t be here otherwise.

Can we just make sure? I want to double-check and then I won’t bring it up anymore.

This would really make you feel better?

Yes, Rey, please.
She nods. *Alright. Later though. We can spend the afternoon with E’di before she leaves and then we can find a good med droid or something.*

He sighs in relief, “Thank you,” he tells her and E’di turns to them.

“What’s that?”

Ben realizes he said that last part out loud but he just points to the street name and points. “Oh nothing, just relieved we’re going the right way.”

He squeezes Rey’s hand, slightly amused as they find the building they were looking for.

Ben enters the union, Rey walking in beside him. E’di opted to stay outside and watch the rain. She got some strange looks, mainly because of how she was dressed but the older woman paid it no mind.

Inside, Ben and Rey take a look around and Ben tries to act like he knows what he’s doing, not wanting to look too rushed or too eager. So, he paced himself, keeping his hand entwined with Rey’s.

The union was predominantly droids although there were some beings sitting behind desks and typing away on keypads.

Ben steps up to one of them. “Hi, I-”

“Place your hand on the ID pad,” the woman said, not looking away from her own screen.

Ben blinks but Rey nudges him, pointing to the illuminated screen that had appeared since they walked up.

*I think she means that.*

Ben agrees, placing his palm against it and it jingles a positive tone as it turns green and suddenly a new window appears. Ben is glad to see it all working but then he feels his cheeks burn as he sees that the ID photo of himself was from when he was about thirteen years old. The last time he had come to one of these places was before he left for Luke’s.

*Aww, look at you,* Rey coos into his mind. *Your hair was so much shorter.*

*It was back before I realized that if I grew my hair out, it could cover my ears.*

Rey chuckles a little and the woman finally looks up, acknowledging them. “Alright, Benjamin Solo. Looks like you have a longstanding account with us. What have you come for today? Deposit, withdraw, or other?” she asks as if she was reading off a script.

“Uh, I was hoping to start a new credit chip if that’s possible.”

The woman sighs as if Ben had ruined her whole day by not giving her just one direct answer.

She types away for a moment before looking at them again. “Here’s a pass to meet with the next advisor who will help you with the credit chip. Take the hallway to the right,” she hands over the pass on the counter before turning back to her screen. “Have a nice day,” she tells them with zero enthusiasm.

“Thanks, you too,” Rey says in her usually sunny voice and Ben refrains from laughing when he hears her question come through the bond. *If that’s who they put at the front desk to greet people,*
who do you think comes next?

**Probably a rancor,** he tells her.

Luckily, it isn’t. It was a droid who was at least engaged enough in his job to pay attention. Ben handed over the pass and they were led into a turbolift. They eventually ended up in a small office where a door at the back of the room slides open. A Rodian man walks in with a smile, wearing a crisp white suit and walks over to them.

“Ah, good morning. Welcome to Asobi’s Credit Union of the New Republic. My name is Torv and I will be assisting you today,” he looks down to a holopad in his arms for a moment. “And I understand you’re here to start a new credit chip, Mr. Solo.”

Ben steps forward, nodding in a friendly greeting. “Yes, I am. Thank you.” Ben could see how Torv catches sight of Rey behind him and he moves beside her once more to introduce her. “And this is Rey, my-” he realizes just then that he doesn’t really know how to describe who Rey was to him, especially to strangers. All the other titles seemed too mediocre to encase what she meant to him. But he settles with one, knowing now was not the time to have a crisis over it.

“My girlfriend.”

Instantly, he can feel amusement from Rey’s side of the bond and she spares no time in making fun of him.

**Eww, you have a girlfriend?**

*Oh, shut up. Go easy on me,* he replies, although he has a hard time trying not to laugh. Torv doesn’t seem to notice though. He’s too busy looking at their clothes, no doubt seeing how dirty they were.

“I see...well, let’s take a look and we can go from there,” he says with a trying smile but Ben can tell that Torv was a little uneased by their appearance, especially because he was dressed in all white. “Please, let’s sit.”

Rey abandons the snacks to sit beside him on the sofa that sat across from Torv and his screens.

“Okay, I see that you’ve had an account with us for quite a long time...opened by your mother when you were very young,” Torv studies the screens. “And I also see that as of today you’re officially entitled to it, why, congratulations, Mr. Solo. You must no doubt be celebrating,” he looks back over to them for a moment.

Rey squeezes his hand a little and he squeezes back. “Yeah, we’re traveling around. We just finished some pod racing in the desert but we both got a bit tired of the sand in our eyes.”

**Nice one,** Rey says.

Suddenly Torv seems extremely relieved at the excuse, assuming it to be an explanation for their appearance. “Oh, I see. Well, you both sound very daring then. I’m sure you’ll be off finding something else exciting in no time. I agree with you about the sand though. I prefer a place like Asobi myself. Nice weather and not nearly as much dirt,” he laughs to himself.

“Yes, I think we’ve had our fill with deserts for a while. But Asobi is nice. We both love the rain,” Ben says looking to Rey and this time she doesn’t say anything, just leaning closer against his arm, their hands entwined and settled on her thigh.
“We have plenty of that,” Torv says with a chuckle, clicking away until he seems to find the right place to look. “Alright here we go, and it looks like…” Torv trails off, his jaw-dropping slightly and his eyes going a little wide. “Wow, Mr. Solo. You certainly have accumulated quite a lot of interest over the years. Do you-” he clears his throat, clearly caught off guard. “Do you know how much you actually have-”

“Four million eight hundred and thirty-three thousand seven hundred and twenty credits. Last I checked I had been somewhere around there.”

He knew it was exactly that. He checked dozens of times before he left Oquinn.

He feels Rey's eyes on him.

*How the fuck...* she starts, sounding flabbergasted at the ridiculous number.

*I told you, most of it was an inheritance. You know, like, the four million part.*

*Well, I certainly wasn't expecting that.*

“Right. Yes, exactly, sir. H-How exciting,” he sits up straighter at his desk and then looks back to them. “I’m so sorry, I-I never even asked if you two wanted anything to drink or if you-” Torv had assumed they didn't have much given how they were dressed. But upon learning of Ben's wealth, the man looked a little shaken up and was trying to be extra accommodating.

“That's okay. We’re fine.”

“Right, of course, my apologies. I just want to help make you as comfortable as I can so let me know if there’s anything I can do.”

Ben gives him a smile, “We just want to get the credit chip and some cash so that we can be on our way.”

“Excellent,” Torv nods. “Now, I can go prepare the chip for you. Should be just a moment.” Torv gets up to leave the same door he came in when Ben thinks of something else.

“Hey, do you have any of those credit transfer disks?”

“Of course, sir.”

“I’ll take some of those too.”

“Yes, I’ll have them made out immediately. I’ll be back in just a moment.”

The door closes and Rey looks to him again, she looks amused but also a little caught off guard. Not nearly as much as Torv though.

“I know,” Ben says. He didn’t need the bond to guess what her eyes were saying which he could loosely translate to, “That’s a lot of fucking money!”

But she doesn’t say that. She just smiles and instead asks, “What are credit transfer disks?”

“They can be used if you want to give someone a large sum of money. They can take it to the bank and receive whatever amount was written for them.”

Rey’s brow furrows a bit. “So what do you need them for?”
“I wanted to give E’di some credits since she seems set on going her own way.”

Any teasing look on her face dissipates just then and she’s looking up at him with wide eyes. She almost looks teary, but he can sense she isn’t upset.

“You are the kindest person this galaxy has,” she tells him and he shrugs, blushing a little.

“Well, it’s not like we could spend this money all by ourselves. We would turn into assholes,” he jokes.

Rey laughs, her head falling against his shoulder, as Torv walks back in with his hands carrying a sleek tray with the items Ben requested on it.

“Excellent,” Torv says as he sets it down and Ben wonders if that’s just something he says when he gets nervous. “All I need from you is a signature and I have been told that we need an updated image of you for your account. After that, you’ll be good to go.”

Ben hates taking pictures but figures he has to. Torv tells him to stand against the white backdrop and Rey follows just to comb his hair a little and wipe away some of the dirt on his cheek. The movements are so simple but it makes Ben feel very loved anyways.

You look very cute, she tells him, holding his cheek for just a moment which makes him blush a little. She steps back behind Torv so the small floating droid can take the picture. He stands there, waiting for the droid to get it over with and just keeping his features neutral.

But then he caves when Rey’s voice comes through again.

Smile.

He chuckles, revealing his teeth and finally hearing the droid finish his job and float away.

“We will update that immediately so no matter which establishment you enter, that will be the image you see when you sign in at the front desk.”

Torv continues on, speaking about different benefits and life on Asobi while Ben finishes the signatures. He makes a point to tell them places to get new clothes as well as where to stay. “And if you and your girlfriend are planning to stay in the city, Hotel Vangelis is a very highly regarded establishment. Not a bad view from any floor.”

Ben actually considers that suggestion and as he stands up straight, he gives the man a nod. “Thank you.”

They leave, keeping everything in his backpack, a little more swing in their step as they make for the doors to meet back with E’di who was still mesmerized by the rain.

They make their way back to the docking bay after. But they stop at a few vendors on the way. Ben and Rey were insisting they get E’di some new clean things to wear and some things to eat in case it was a long trip to Merlia.

E’di has a hard time accepting most of it, but Rey’s insistence makes her cave and Ben admires the sway Rey has over the woman.

She clearly cares a lot for Rey.

They arrive back to the ship and Ben pays the droid to fill up the tanks before they head inside,
sitting around a small table while snacking on some things they had just bought.

“Where do you think you’d like to see after you go to Merlia?” Rey asks her.

E’di shrugs. “I don’t know. It’s such a big galaxy, I’d hardly know where to start. As long as I steer clear of desert planets I’d be up for anything. Maybe get a job somewhere where I can be useful.”

Rey spins to her then. “You know, when I first left Jakku, I went to a planet called Takodana. I met this kind woman named Maz and she helped me get cleaned up and have a place to sleep. She was the one who helped me get to the Academy where I met Ben.”

Ben smiles, thinking back to the night where Maz had called about a possible new student. He had been so annoyed then. If only he knew who was coming and everything she would come to mean to him.

“She lives in an amazing old castle at the edge of a forest,” Rey tells her. “I think you would love it. If you were to go to Maz in hopes of a job, she would definitely have something for you or at least point you in the right direction.”

“Especially if you mention Rey’s name,” Ben adds.

Rey laughs but Ben was serious. Maz had offered Rey a place after she realized what she had been through. Maz would have nothing but appreciation for E’di since she had also tried to help Rey as much as she could when she was back on Jakku.

“Do you have my sketchbook?” Rey asks him suddenly.

He nods. “It’s in the cockpit.”

She smiles, getting up to find it. “I’ll be back in a moment.”

And suddenly, Ben and E’di are alone so he takes the opportunity to speak with her, knowing very soon, she would be leaving.

“E’di?” He starts and she looks to him, eyebrows raised.

“Yeah?” the woman looks to him, her eyes always a little squinted, perhaps a habit from being in the sun.

“I can’t tell you how grateful I am to you. You were there for Rey when I couldn’t be,” his throat seizes in him and suddenly he feels as if he could cry. “I was so terrified when she was back on Jakku and I just, I couldn’t even breathe most of the time. And to know you helped her in any way you could means so much to me. She’s...She’s everything to me.”

“I can tell,” she smiles. He knows he’s never been good at concealing his emotions, but in this case he doesn’t mind. Especially now that he doesn’t have to hide it.

“Listen, I want to give you some credits,” he tells her.

E’di shakes her head. “Oh, no, Ben. Don’t-”

“Please. I come from a very wealthy family and I have more than I know what to do with.”

“You’ve already gotten me-“ she starts to argue, gesturing to the backpack of items they had just picked up for her. But Ben ignores it.
“More than I’ll ever need, I think. Besides, I know Rey won’t let me buy her too much anyways so please just let me give this to you. Even if you don’t want to use it, keep it for emergencies. Please,” he practically begs, holding out the credit transfer disk.

E’di finally accepts it, taking it from him and looking at it curiously. “I don’t even know what to say. Thank you, Ben.”

Rey runs back in then with a piece of paper she ripped out of her sketchbook and folding it in half before passing it to E’di.

“Here. I wrote down the coordinates and just a small letter you can show her if you ever end up going. She was…” Ben watches her eyes go down. “She was one of the first people to show me true kindness and I’ll always treasure that.”

E’di looks to the letter Rey passed her as well as all the things Ben had just bought her.

She decides most definitely that if these two could make it this far in the galaxy despite the curves they’ve been thrown, there would always be hope. And she knows she loves them for that. She has felt a new wind of life strike her in the past few days and these two taught her to look for it.

“I love you, kids. I think I’d adopt you if you didn’t already seem to have adopted me and given me everything I need.”

They both chuckle. “We love you too, E’di,” Rey says launching forward in a big hug. E’di closes her eyes, holding her tight and was surprised when Ben wrapped his arms around them too.

“As soon as we get the new ship we’ll let you know our contact numbers so we can stay in touch,” he says.

E’di was joking about adopting them. They were full-grown anyway. But E’di always thought about that baby she never had and who it might have become. She likes to think they might have been someone like the two people holding her now. Two very young and passionate people that she knew where off to do amazing things.

And she couldn’t wait to hear what it would be.

“Thank you. Thank you both so much for everything,” she cries.

They pull away and when they do, Rey has tears in her eyes. “It’s not goodbye, I’m sure we’ll see each other again soon.”

“I’m sure.”

And E’di can believe in that and know it was true. Something she hadn’t allowed herself to do in a very long time.

Ben and Rey stand side by side as they wave E’di off and watch her fly away.

“What do we do now?” She laughs as a joke, but it’s also a valid question. Never have they had the time before to really decide what they get to do. Not with this kind of freedom.

But now they did.

So he pulls her closer, whispering against her hair. “Whatever we want.”
I know there's probably a lot of dumb things about this right now but I just want them to be happy and I'm trying to work with what I can to get them there. I think I've got the next few planned out pretty well and I really hope you like them.

Thank you all so much for reading and for being so interactive! I love all the feedback.

P.S. I'm still crying about TROS and I'm starting to think that this is just going to be the mood for the next 30 years...so, at least good ass fanfiction isn't going anywhere. But still, my poor mother who isn't even that into Star Wars has had to sit through so many of my rants but she never complains. What a champ.

For yer health<3

End Notes

I made a playlist for this story! It's got a collection of things on there. I tried to keep it more cohesive this time although I will probably be adding more as time goes on. Anyway, listen [here](#) if you feel like it. I really just made it for myself but I thought I'd at least make it available if anyone was curious.

Thank you so much for reading!

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!