A Light in the Dark

by reystanwalker

Summary

Kylo’s fingers slowly begin to curl, gently grasping her hand. An icy cold shiver shot through her body as his thumb brushed over her skin. Her heart felt like it was going to explode out her chest, and a storm of butterflies raged in her stomach.

Rey looked into his eyes. He was watching her intently. Was he feeling the same way she was right now?

Rey’s squeezed her eyes shut and held her breath. She could hear Luke’s words echo in her mind. “You went straight for the Dark,” he had said “You didn't even try to resist it”.

Rey’s breath caught in her throat. She looked back at Kylo.

Emotions chased themselves across his face, a reminder that their connection was all too real.

“Join me,” he said. “Please.”

This time, her reply was not in anger, only sad honesty.
“Never.”

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Seven months since the battle of Crait, the Resistance is only starting to recover their strength. Rey feels lost, struggling between her loyalty to the Resistance and curiosity for the Dark side which draws her back to Kylo Ren.
Rey stared up at the ceiling of the Falcon guest quarters. It was the perfect backdrop for letting her thoughts wander.

Amongst the hustle and bustle of the Resistance base’s large hangar, she was hidden in plain sight, and as long as no one had seen her sneak up the boarding ramp, she was guaranteed at least a few hours of privacy. She often came here to catch a moment to herself when she felt overwhelmed and unable to clear her head.

Despite having settled into base life, and surrounded by friends she now called her family, the Falcon was still the closest place that felt like home since leaving Jakku almost a year ago. The familiarity of it was comforting – memories of Han lingered everywhere.

Rey breathed in the scent of the ship and traced her fingers over the bed rails. Get up, she thought. The frustrations of her morning itched at her mind – she couldn't let herself get stuck like this. Get going.

Rey sat up and swung her legs off the edge of the bed, grabbed her staff, and punched the button with her thumb to unlock the door. Pacing through the corridors, she reached the cockpit and slumped into the pilot’s chair. She had a clear view of the inside of the hangar from here – a new fleet of T-85 X-wing starfighters had been transported to the Resistance base overnight, under the cover of darkness. Both mechanics and pilots were buzzing over the new ships, ensuring the appropriate security and safety checks were carried out. With everyone pre-occupied with their duties, no one would notice Rey looking out from the cockpit of the Falcon. She swivelled in the pilot’s chair absentmindedly, gazing up at the ceiling of buttons and controls.

She wished life was simpler – no war, no fight. She could find work as a pilot and see all corners of the Galaxy. She could learn the ways of the Force without the weight of responsibility that now hung over her. But instead, she was here. It was a cause worth fighting for, but it didn't come without its burdens.

She was a Resistance hero. The last Jedi. After a lonely and independent life on Jakku, her life suddenly had so much purpose and responsibility that it was sometimes difficult to comprehend.

Sometimes it was suffocating.

Rey had handed over the Falcon’s full care to Chewie – it was his and Han’s ship after all. However, since arriving on Saphin, it been officially grounded from space travel – it was far too recognisable, and now an icon of the Resistance. Rey pictured one of Han’s gruff expressions – he would have been sad to see it retired this way.

Rey’s brow creased as she thought of Han. She had barely known him, but within a very short period, he had gone from fairy-tale Resistance legend to almost a father figure to her. He had shown her a new life. He had offered her a job. He had believed in her, when she hadn't believed in herself. She would have gladly piloted the Falcon with him, fighting alongside the Resistance, until….

Rey still ached from the memory.

*Kylo.*

He was impossible to forget. The man who killed his own father. The man she had somehow thought she could redeem.
Ever since Crait, he had consumed her daily thoughts. Rey sat up in her chair again, tracing her fingers over the controls and wondering if Kylo had ever piloted the Falcon as a young boy with his father. She shook her head to break her daydream. No. She shouldn't think of him like that – as Ben Solo. That man was dead. He and Kylo Ren were not the same person. To forget that would mean justifying and forgiving all the cruel things he had allowed to happen. She couldn't do that. The new Supreme Leader of the First Order was a different creature from the young boy who once was.

Seven long months had passed since Crait … seven months since she had severed their connection – cut herself off from him. And rightly so. She had lost all compassion for him, watching him wipe out what remained of the Resistance on Crait after the Supremacy had already decimated their numbers. What a fool she had been to think she could have redeemed him.

She couldn't let herself be weak like that again.

She couldn't trust him.

After all, Snoke had been the one to forge their connection – it had nothing to do with Kylo. Everything she thought she knew about him was thrown into question. Was everything she felt about Kylo a lie? Had Snoke simply painted that image of Kylo, just so she would surrender herself to the First Order? Kylo, after all, had proved to have no interest in joining her.

What was real? Rey felt embarrassed for having let herself believe in him so easily. She had been weak.

Luke had seen it, and she'd ignored his warning.

*You opened yourself to the Dark Side for a pair of pretty eyes!*

What a fool she had been.

Yet still, there was one part to the mystery that she couldn't explain: their bond had persisted, even after Snoke’s death.

No matter how much she actively blocked him out, Rey knew in her heart that their connection wasn’t lost forever. The Force must still be connecting them a reason… But even if it was, was there any point in reaching out to him again, after he had made his determination to follow the Dark path so clear to her?

Was there any hope at all that he could return to the Light?

If she were to reach out to him again, she feared he would be the same relentless Kylo Ren she had met after he had killed Snoke, urging her to join him – not the Ben Solo she thought he might have been. And after all, what would she say to him? His words had really hurt her – *you’re nothing*.

Yet somehow she missed their unusual bond and chance encounters. Back on Ahch-Toh, she had confided in him. He was the only who could possibly understand what she was going through – her place with the Force, and what it all meant. And her strange pull to the Dark she’d felt when she entered the cave.

*Her place in all of this.*

As far she knew, Kylo was now the last Force-user in the Galaxy beside herself. The intrigue of his knowledge was a temptation she knew she couldn't give in to.

Back on Crait, she’d promised herself that she would wait – wait for him to change his mind, or see
the Light. But nothing had changed. Seven months, and reports of First Order activity were no different to how they had been before. The same war raged on.

If there was any small chance he could be redeemed…. if anyone could turn him, she knew it had to be her. As his equal in the Force, she alone had the power to challenge him. Surely she had to keep trying. For the sake of the Galaxy, she had to try and stop him.

It was the decision that had been plaguing her constantly. Did she dare try?

Would it really hurt to reopen the connection?

Curiously got the better of her.

Rey shut her eyes and breathed deep, allowing herself to fall into a state of meditation, and make herself vulnerable to the Force. She waited – waited for that familiar sensation of all the sound being sucked from her ears, and her surroundings being blinded from her central field of vision. She waited to see him.

She waited. She squinted with concentration.

But he didn't appear.

Rey tried not to let the fear of failure interrupt her concentration, instead forcing her spirit reach further. *Ben, where are you?* She yelled the question in her mind.

Rey saw nothing but darkness and heard nothing but silence. The more she reached out, the more a feeling of unease began to wash over her.

Something was changing. It was like the time she had first learned to about the Force with Luke, when she had felt the Darkness calling to her. But it was stronger now. She fought to stay away, but it pulled her in, like a strong field of gravity.

Without warning, a heavy feeling of loneliness washed over her. She had never felt so alone in her life – surrounded by all the support she could ever need, yet no one to confide in. Her spirit felt shattered. And then…. *anger*. Rage swirled within her. Rage spurred on by hurt, spurred on by abandonment.

It was so real, yet…..these feelings weren’t her own.

These dark emotions weren’t hers.

*Kylo?*

Without warning, she felt something new. Perception. Realisation. He had felt her presence. And before she could tap into it further, the connection was ripped from her control, and she was alone again in the cockpit of the Falcon.

Rey opened her eyes. What *was* that? She had *felt* him. Somehow – somehow, she had tapped into his energy and sensed him. Her stomach dropped, recalling the feeling of loneliness and anger that had consumed her. *His* loneliness and anger.

Rey wondered, had he felt her too?
Surrounded but Alone

**Bang bang bang bang.**

Rey’s reverie was broken with a jolt. The sound of banging footsteps echoed through the empty ship, as someone jogged through the corridors of the Falcon towards the cockpit. She scrunched her eyes as she recovered her bearings and sense of time and place. She noticed her clothes felt damp with sweat. She shivered. How long had she been out of it, in her meditative state? A cold sweat covered her body and her muscles felt noticeably fatigued, like they had been tensed for a long period.

The sound of footsteps grew louder.

“Rey?” It was Finn calling out.

Rey swivelled the cockpit chair around slowly to greet her friend.

The sudden movement must have startled a nest of Porgs because two flew down suddenly, and into the face of Finn.

“What the----” Finn stumbled backwards as he swatted at the Porgs.

Rey had grown accustomed to the Porgs from her frequent visits to the Falcon. Finn, on the other hand, found them rather a nuisance and never quite knew how to interact with them. Growing up a Stormtrooper in a strictly clinical environment, he had little experience with animals.

Brushing down his jacket, he turned to Rey. “Rey! What are you doing up here?”

“Finn.” Rey said plainly. She knew his innocent question was disguised concern. He knew why she was up here – he knew she came here hide.

Finn looked her up and down and his expression changed to one of concern. “Are you okay? You look exhausted. And really ….pale?”

“Ah---” Rey wasn’t quite sure how to answer.

Suitably on cue, a lone Porg waddled towards Finn, screeching loudly and flapping its wings, as if in protest at his arrival. Finn looked down at the Porg and backed up again the wall, before sidestepping his way along the outside wall of the cockpit to collapse into the co-pilot chair next to Rey. He hastily drew his legs in underneath, away from Porg lurking below.

“What a creeper,” he muttered under his breath as he turned to Rey again.

Rey smiled. “Oh Finn, they’re not going to hurt you.”

Finn considered her comment, but wasn’t convinced.

Suddenly, BB-8 whirled in from around the corner.

“Don’t worry, I found her buddy.” Finn reassured the astromech.

Rey sighed and rested her chin in her hand. She had given up trying to convince her friends to stop worrying over her. Finn was particularly attentive. Their strong friendship was unbreakable, and with that strong friendship came a keen sense of knowing when she wasn’t quite feeling herself.
Finn was thriving working the Resistance. Since his captive life as a Stormtrooper, he finally had purpose and meaning to his life. Since the battle of Crait, he donned his new title of “Resistance hero” with some pride. Although he never openly showed it, Rey knew that it gave him meaning and purpose which he had never experienced before.

Rose had also been a hugely positive influence on Finn, although he still didn't know how to handle having such a doting woman take pride in him. They were never public about their romance, but Rey knew they adored each behind closed doors. She was glad Finn had someone to look after him, especially when she herself had not been a very attentive friend.

BB-8 rolled up to Rey and started chirping. His head spun around as his photoreceptor looked her up and down and side to side.

“Are you…are you checking my vitals?” Rey asked the astromech.

BB-8 chirped happily.

“Ugh, really?” Rey turned to Finn.

“What did he say?” Despite Rey trying to teach him, Finn had never quite got the hang of understanding droidspake.

Rey groaned. “Apparently Poe is under orders to have his droid keep an eye on me. Leia…”

“You’re our greatest asset Rey, of course Leia would want to keep tabs on you. Especially with you being so …..well, melancholic, shall we say?”

Rey was glad Finn never pried too much. He was always just happy to be an emotional crutch should she ever need one. Rey never wanted to burden him though. Not with everything she was going through.

Rey had never told anyone about her Force bond with Kylo, or what had gone down in Snoke’s throne room. In fact, the only one who knew about her trip to the Supremacy was Chewie, who was sworn to secrecy. Rey wasn’t even ready to confide in Leia, although she sensed that the Resistance General may already have guessed. She was more in touch with the Force than she let on, and Rey knew her levels of intuition were unrivalled.

Finn watched Rey as she gazed out the cockpit window. “A credit for your thoughts?

“I hate being tied down here,” Rey said softly.

“I know,” Finn sighed. “But at least we’re safe here. Until our numbers and our defences are strong enough yet, we don't have a choice about staying. There’s still so much we can do from the ground though.”

Finn was right. The Resistance’s intelligence spies were still widespread across the Galaxy and sending through information daily. Further still, new recruits were arriving every few days, ready to serve. The news of Luke Skywalker facing the First Order alone and stories of his heroic self-sacrifice had spread far, stirring hope amongst the few remaining Resistance-sympathisers. After the decimation of the New Republic, the Resistance was the only safe place left for those people. Slowly but surely, the Resistance was slowly gathering numbers and power, and returning to its former strength, all with a renewed spirit and fire.

*The fire to burn the First Order down.*
“Come on, Rey. You can’t be by yourself all the time. You’ve gotta be around people.”

BB-8 hummed in agreement with Finn.

Reluctantly, Rey nodded, grabbed her staff and stood up. Finn threw his arm around her and gave her shoulders a squeeze. Together, they walked out of the cockpit and down the boarding ramp into the Resistance base hangar.

A gentle orange-pink light glittered over the shiny metals of the various freighters and fighters parked in the hangar. The evening sun was just beginning to set. Rey and Finn crossed the far balcony, silent but content in each other’s company and enjoying the magnificent views.

The Resistance had set up their base in an old but re-purposed facility built into the side of an incredible vertical cliff, overlooking an endless landscape dominated by grassland and rocky cliffs and plateaus. The hangar acted as the base’s largest entry and exit point, close to the top of the cliffside – the spectacular drop from the balcony ledge at the mouth of the hangar was simultaneously exhilarating and spectacular. While others normally clutched the railing out of fear, Rey relished in the outside wind gently caressing her limbs and whispering to her heart, calling her for action beyond the confines of the base. Rey wished she could stay there, watching the sun set and letting her mind wander, but on Finn’s request, she would do her best to socialise herself.

“Gods, this view never gets old.” said Finn as they crossed the balcony walkway. “It’s so peaceful and untouched, you’d never think there was anything happening below.”

And Finn was right – there was certainly a lot happening below. To any median-grade lifeform scanner, the barren surface of the planet was deceptively uninhabited. Beneath the surface, large networks of underground towns and facilities were teeming with war-neutrals, mostly pirates, smugglers and other oddly folk looking to make a few credits in the drought of war. Lacking any stable governing body, or the need for interplanetary trade due to the passing of wealth through contract work and shady business, Saphin had flown under the radar the First Order. And with the New Republic gone, Saphin had become a well-hidden, almost secret safe haven for supporters of the New Republic and Resistance.

Leia’s contacts had led them to the planet shortly after Crait, and they had set up camp in a large abandoned facility. The dense rock of the cliffside that housed the facility helped to conceal it from air and ground sensors, meaning that they were almost invisible to outside explorers. Underground passages connected them to neighbouring towns, which provided aid and food supplies as required. It was no place of luxury, but it provided space for the growing fleet, with all the conveniences required for a small army base – a larger hangar, dormitories, a mess hall, training facilities, a command centre for communications, and recreation spaces.

Even better, the place was perfect for morale – it was buzzing with energy, like a small compact city. After living in solitude for almost two decades on Jakku, Rey sometimes found the bustling activity overwhelming and inescapable. The Falcon was her secret escape from people, only second to venturing outdoors. The barren landscape didn't offer much exploration-wise, but did provide much needed solitude in peace and warmth.

“Hey!” The voice of Rose called out from somewhere in the hangar.

Finn turned around and was embraced by Rose, who had run up to the unsuspecting pair from behind. She was wearing her mechanics coveralls and had a spanner in hand. Grease was smeared on her hands and clothes, and there was an oil streak across her face.

“How’re the X-wings looking?” Finn looked adoringly down at Rose, as he squeezed her shoulders
to his chest.

Rose beamed. “ Barely need any work – it’s so magnificent to work on such new models. I still can’t believe how lucky we were to get them!”

Finn chuckled but shrugged. “Leia’s skills of diplomacy haven’t failed us yet.” He scanned the hangar, looking for Poe. “Where’s my man? He must be drooling over them.”

“He can’t keep his hands off them. I can tell he’s itching to take one for a test flight.”

Finn laughed. “Yeah, I bet. Poor man must be slowly dying inside being grounded for so long.”

“He’s running through some flight drills in his cockpit. I don’t think we’ll see him for a while.” Rose giggled. “Let me get tidied up, and we can head for dinner. Rey, I’m glad he found you. The Falcon, hey?”

Rey shrugged. “It feels like home, what can I say. And it’s…quiet”

Rey liked Rose. Her energy was infectious, and she was the most positive person here. And like Finn, she didn’t pry.

“C’mon girl, let me show you what I’ve been working on. I wanted to ask your advice on something anyway.” Rose hooked her arm around Rey’s and stole her away from Finn. She looked back over her shoulder at her man and winked. “See you in the mess hall. I gotta share this gold with a mechanic.” She waved her spanner with excitement.

Rey perched herself on a chair at Rose’s work bay. She indulged in Rose’s chatter, as a distraction from her wandering thoughts. She listened as Rose packed up her things and ran her through the new features of the brand new starfighters. The two women had become close friends ever since setting up base on Saphin, bonding over flight mechanics and their mutual friendship with Finn.

Rose wiped the grease from her hands and face with a rag, and slipped out of her coveralls, into her off-duty clothes. Then, continuing their discussion about the finer details of how the starfighters were powered, and Rose’s musings on their potential speed, they walked to the mess hall to join Finn and the other crew at their usual table. Finn had already grabbed a pot of tonight’s meal for the group, and was eating hungrily by the time they arrived.

Finn, Rose and Rey had become a close-knit group of five, together with Poe and Kaydel Ko Connix.

Kaydel, as she was called by her close friends, had surprised Rey. She was extremely ambitious and passionate about the inner-workings of the Resistance, yet was just as easily fun-loving and care free when off-duty. Unlike Rey, she was easily able to separate work from leisure. Her formal roles involved recruiting new Resistance crew and overseeing intelligence operations. In the last year she had been promoted from operations controller to lieutenant, after her involvement in the victory at Starkiller Base. Now she was working hard under the watchful eye of Leia, in the hopes of climbing to the ranks of Captain.

It was just the four of them tonight, as Poe continued to work through dinner. Kaydel greeted them happily as she sat down to join them. “Ahhh it’s been a long day, pass me a bowl will you, Finn?”

The conversation was easy and lively, and they caught each other up on their day’s work. Yet somehow Rey felt uneasy. Did no one else feel this way? She was surrounded by friends, but there still something missing. It was like an itch she couldn't reach, or word on the tip of her tongue. Somebody else should be here, with her.
Kylo. She couldn't shake him from her mind. The moment back on the Falcon, before she was interrupted by Finn, she thought she had felt his presence. And in that one tiny moment, she had felt…..connected again. That moment of connection had brought a feeling of familiarity, like seeing an old friend.

Except he wasn't her friend. He was her enemy.

Rey toyed at her food with her fork.

“Not hungry?” Rose ducked her head down to catch Rey’s staring gaze. It was posed as an innocent question, but Rey knew that her friend was worried about her.

“Yeah, I’m….no, I’m not hungry.” Rey stuttered. Her mind was clouded more than usual and she couldn't form the right words to convince her friend that she was alright. She wasn’t alright.

“I think I’ll retire early tonight.”

Rey saw Rose frown as she took her tray back to the kitchen then exit the room without another word.

*Kylo, get out of my head,* she thought.
Broken

Snoke’s throne room was bathed in red. Kylo Ren sat on the throne in the centre of the room, his head held in his hands and black hair tousled between his fingers. The gentle hum of the starship filled the vast room.

The Force was howling inside of him. He was angry – very angry.

_The girl_, he thought. _The girl is coming_. He could feel her Force signature pulsing in the air around him.

He didn't have to wait long. Kylo lifted his head at the sound of the elevator doors opening at the far end of the room. Rey walked in, hands cuffed in front of her and flanked by two Stormtroopers. They crossed the bridge linking the elevator to the throne room and made their way toward the Supreme Leader.

Her eyes… they were dark and brooding, and pierced right through his soul. She was angry too. He could see it – he could _feel_ it. He never took his eyes off her, staring her down.

Without a blink, he waved his right hand lazily to dismiss the guards. They dropped Rey to her knees roughly and returned to the elevator. As the doors shut, he cocked his head to the side, studying her face with curiosity.

“ _You will_ submit to me.” He spoke plainly.

“ _Never_.” The girl growled through clenched teeth.

“ _That wasn’t a request_.” He stood suddenly and detached the lightsaber from his belt.

He walked up to Rey until he stood just a few feet away from her, towering above her. “ _You will_ submit, and _join me_.

“ _No_.

The girl was proud. Too proud.

Kylo ignited his lightsaber, and swung it sideways, directly at Rey, stopping it just inches away from her neck. It crackled loudly and burned brightly, casting a red glow over her face. Still, she held her ground, not even flinching at the sudden blade at her neck.

“ _You’re a fool to contest me_.” Kylo kept his voice low and dark, but bitterness was starting to creep into his tone, causing his jaw to clench and his lips to purse.

Rey continued to glower at him, but said nothing.

Kylo deactivated his lightsaber and tried a different approach. He held his hand out towards her, feeling for her mind. “ _Submit_.

He could feel her struggle against him. She had put up a barricade in her mind, keeping him out, but it was only a matter of time before it crumbled. He twisted his hand as he reached deeper and pushed stronger. Rey’s face began to scrunch up with pain and she let out gasps of agony.

“ _You won’t_—” Rey stuttered out. “ _You won't get inside my head again_.

"You won’t—" Rey stuttered out. "You won't get inside my head again."
That was enough. Kylo swiped his hand sideways, Force-pushing Rey to the ground. Then without any warning, he let the lightning escape his fingertips. He let the electricity pulse through his body and into Rey’s, and watched as she screamed out in pain. He knew what that pain felt like – Snoke had done the same thing to him countless times. He relished in the punishment he was delivering. He could feel the pain she was experiencing – the Force bond between them made sure of that – yet he was left unharmed.

Kylo released the first wave of electricity and took another step towards her. Rey rolled over onto her back, panting. Her eyes were squeezed shut from the pain.

“This isn't who you are,” Rey yelled out. “Don't do this!”

Kylo was manic. “I will not have you tell me who I am!”

With that, he struck her again. Electricity surged through her body, twisting her bodily awkwardly as her muscles contracted.

Rey screams echoed through the throne room.

"Ben, NO!”

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At the sound of his old name, Kylo’s whole body jolted, forcing him out of sleep. His eyes darted around the room as became aware of his surroundings. The dream still felt so real.

Kylo sat up, letting the black silk sheets fall down his chest. His body was drenched in sweat. He waited for his breathing to slow until he could no longer hear his pulse pounding in his ears.

How many times must he have these dreams? These nightmares?

They traumatised him every night, ever since the Battle of Crait. He hadn't had a decent night’s sleep in seven months, and it was starting to take its toll. He was more irritable and hot-tempered than ever. He couldn't focus. He couldn’t breathe.

In the dream he had relished in the pain he inflicted on the girl. He stroked his hair back with one hand, deep in thought. Is that really what he would do if she was here? He was angry with her, yes, but enough to punish her like that? She had left him – multiple times. First on Starkiller Base, where she had almost taken his life, and again on the Supremacy, leaving him for dead after their battle had knocked him unconscious. He had tried to reason with her each time, but she always struck him down – and she always struck first.

He slid out of bed and made his way to the refresher adjoining his bedroom. His private domain at the heart of the ship was decadent and had all the commodities the Supreme Leader could ever need. It was a comfortable life, even if it was lonely.

Kylo shed the loose black silk pants he wore to sleep, and stepped into the refresher. Hot water pelted down onto his face. Steam clouded the room around him as he let the water run down his body, attempting to wash away the stinging realism of the nightmare. Why could he not stop thinking about her? She was plaguing his mind – torturing him. She wouldn't let him be.

Kylo clenched his fists at his side. He fought to clear the nightmare from his mind, but it was still so fresh.

Returning to his bedroom, he dressed in his normal black attire and robe. There was no point
returning to sleep now – he couldn’t have gone back to sleep even if he tried. He walked over to the window, which overlooked the starboard wing of the Legacy. The monstrous starship spread out before him.

It was an incredible ship – like the Supremacy, it was a Mega-Class Star Dreadnought, acting as the mobile capital of the First Order. With full industrial capabilities, the ship was could operate independently for years without the need for planetfall, and it had the full destructive capabilities of an entire fleet.

It had only been seven months since the Supremacy and two thirds of its fleet had been decimated by the Resistance Star Cruiser’s jump to light speed. It was an embarrassing loss to be sure, but their speed of recovery was a testament to the strength of the First Order. And this time, it was his own accomplishment. It was his flagship. After Snoke’s death, he was finally a free man, and free to steer the First Order in his own direction. But he had to do it slowly. Loyalty was everything, and even with the Force, he was still one man against a million.

General Hux would have been better suited to lead – Kylo wasn’t wasn’t oblivious to that fact. He was, after all, the architect of the technological revolution of the First Order, as well as the builder of its armies. Kylo was less familiar with the nuances of directing an army and running an Empire. Admittedly, he felt a little lost without Snoke’s guidance. He could hear the bitterness in Hux’s voice every time Hux addressed him as “Supreme Leader”. But Hux knew better than to retaliate against him. Kylo was much too powerful.

Kylo sat down at his desk and reached out for his helmet, tracing the edges of the ornate chrome markings absently with his thumb. Fulfilling the Skywalker legacy was all he had now – living up to his Grandfather’s legacy. It was his mission alone. And he was alone. No father. No mother. No Master, Sith or Jedi. And no Rey.

Kylo looked out longingly at the starfield before him. Rey. Where was she?

He closed his eyes as he recalled the events of their last encounter, when he had offered her the chance to join him in ruling the Galaxy. She should have been humbled by his offer. He truly saw her as his equal. He had been impressed by her natural power and sensitivity to the force – he wasn’t afraid to admit that.

But oh, what a fool he’d been. After taking down Snoke’s guards as a team, he had foolishly chosen the wrong words to make her understand what he was offering. In an attempt to convince her to join him, he had painted down her status and taunted her about her insignificant past. You're nothing, he had said. And then on Crait, in his rage, he had lost the chance to rebuild himself in her eyes. If anything, he had only made things worst. She had slammed the door in his face, and had severed their connection ever since.

As the months past, he wondered if he would ever see her again – if their connection would return. But before, the bridge had appeared at random moments without their control, but now… it never came.

He felt guilty for admitting that he wished it wasn’t. He had believed in her…. Their fingers had touched. He had trusted her. He had opened up to her. That fleeting moment of physical contact had brought an overwhelming feeling of connection and belonging. Hadn't she felt it too? It was as if they were always meant to be together.

So when she had rejected him, it tore yet another hole in his heart. He felt a pang of loneliness. She had been the only one to understand him. To see him as a human. Was he doomed to lead the First Order alone? Perhaps it was a necessary sacrifice for claiming leadership. He knew he never could
have left with her.

*It was all her fault.* She abandoned him, just like his parents had. Just like Master Skywalker. Everybody left him. Kylo clenched his jaw. Rage swirled inside him. Let it come, he thought. At least the anger was able to drown out the inescapable loneliness and darkness in his heart.

Suddenly----

“*Kylo?*”

The familiar voice resonated through the room.

Kylo stood up with lightning speed, sending his chair flying backwards and crashing on the floor.

“*Rey?*” he called out.

He spun around, searching for the girl. His eyes darted to each corner of the room. *Where was she?*

“*Rey?*” he called out again, praying for a response.

Kylo stood silently, his ears searching desperately for any sound in the room that could be her. But he heard only silence.

He had sensed her. She *was* here. He knew it. But he couldn't feel the connection anymore. He didn't know whether he felt disappointment or anger. Had his mind being playing tricks on him? He’d spent so long tirelessly fretting over her that perhaps it had all finally got to him. Was he starting to imagine things?

She had been just within his grasp. The sound of her voice still echoed in his ear. *Kylo.* She was taunting him.

He had waited so long to see her again, and now she was just toying with him.

The sound of her voice – it awoke something in him. A sense of unease clawed at his stomach. He had to hear her voice again. *He needed to find her.*

The First Order had been attempting to locate the Resistance for the past six months with no luck. To begin with, they had focussed on rebuilding the First Order’s capital and relaxed their efforts to locate the surviving members of the Resistance, but Hux had recently resumed the hunt. In particular, he was desperate to capture Rey and have her executed for high treason for murdering Snoke. Rey’s supposed murder of Snoke was a lie which Kylo was happy to perpetuate in order to save face. He was also more than happy to authorise the continued hunt for the Resistance, but he questioned his own motives. Did he really want to wipe out the small population of Rebels or was he really just after Rey?

Kylo clenched his fists with frustration. Rey. Rey. How was he going to find her?

Feeling perpetually frustrated, he tried to calm himself. He checked the time – the morning shift on the bridge would have begun, which meant he could meet with Hux.

Throwing his robe over his shoulders, he reached out for his helmet and pulled it down over his head. Since Crait, he had reverted back to disguising his appearance with a helmet, made in the likeness of his old one. It de-humanised him, making it easier to ..... *kill.* The masking of his face was still primarily inspired by the legacy of his Grandfather, who knew that the mystique of a faceless identity helped maintain an aura of authority and power. Only in private meetings, with Hux
and his closest officials, did he remove his helmet.

Kylo stormed out of his private quarters and headed to the bridge.

“General.” Kylo greeted Hux with a small nod of his head. His voice was dark, and distorted by his helmet’s vocal modulator. “Any updates since yesterday?”

“Nothing of notable significance. Although… we’ve just had reports that a small band of civilians has attacked one of our squadrons on Pandrix. I will be deploying some more of our Stormtroopers there tomorrow to contain the situation.”

“Very well, General.”

“Just another reason we should be focussing more of our efforts on snuffing out the remaining Resistance. Skywalker’s charming self-sacrifice on Crait has only inspired confidence in the Resistance. It may be slow, but it’s a sure uprising.”

Kylo could feel the spitefulness in Hux’s voice. He knew Hux was thinking about their unfortunate defeat on Crait, when Kylo’s rash actions had led to the escape of the Resistance. Hux had little respect for Kylo as a leader, and resented being his second – Kylo could feel it.

“Actually, this is why I came to speak to you, General.”

“My Lord?”

“I think you might like what I have to suggest. I’m assuming we still have no leads on the whereabouts of the new Resistance base?”

“That is, unfortunately, correct.”

“In that case – your request to hunt down the girl … we need to triple the bounty on her.”

“Excellent, as you wish.” The corners of Hux’s mouth curled up into a sinister smile.

Bounty hunters … Kylo had learned about them from his mother and father. It was rather an old-fashioned method, but effective nonetheless. They ensured discretion – it could only bode well for the rebellion uprising if it was publicly known that a Jedi was the one to kill the Supreme Leader. Her capture needed to be a sleek and expertly-executed mission that avoided alerting anyone to the reason behind her arrest.

Kylo’s spirits rose as he visualised the success of such a mission. Rey at his mercy again. He would turn her to the Dark side for sure this time. He’d put a price so large on her head that every bounty hunter would be looking to capture her. The lure of such a large sum of money would be enough to turn even a Resistance-sympathiser. It would definitely speed up the process of capturing her. And Hux couldn’t disagree. Ever since Snoke’s death, he had been keen to have her punished for her crime against the First Order.

Hux lent his thoughts. “It is integral that the girl be destroyed. She is far too powerful.”

*Powerful yes. But not to be destroyed,* Kylo thought. He had a different plan for her.

“I will be recalling some of my Knights. I will have them join us within the week so they may assist in her capture. As you well know, she is very strong with the Force. I will be redirecting their assignments as such.”
Kylo saw Hux’s eyes narrow, but the General nodded obediently. Hux did not appreciate the Knights. In fact, Hux hated any Force-user – his beliefs centred around power through technical prowess, and thought the Force was an ancient art of the past.

“Very well, Supreme Leader,” he muttered.

“As always, keep me posted of any updates.”

Kylo turned to leave.

*I will have her*, he thought to himself, *she can’t hide from me.*
A Beacon of Hope

Rey stopped by her private room to collect her things on the way to the training room that evening. She threw all her gear into her worn-out satchel and changed it to a simple sleeveless top with loose-fitting pants that allowed her to move freely.

Her eyes cast over to the pile of books in the bottom of her closet where she kept her few belongings. The Jedi texts had so far proved useless in her attempts to expand her understanding and mastery of the Force.

As much as she was ashamed of it, there was no point denying that she couldn't read. She was blessed with multilingualism, from her interactions of Jakku, but scripture was her weakness. After all, enslaved to Unkar Plutt at a young age, she never had the chance of a formal education. Over the past few months, Leia had lent her the old droid C-3PO, the protocol droid who was fluent in over seven millions forms of communication. As it happened, a few of the texts were so ancient they were written in a language even Threepio couldn't understand. He had been able to translate several passages on a text relating to the Jedi Code. Nothing, however, on mastery of the Force. Or anything about Force connections. Rey suspected most of this must have been passed down verbally between masters and padawans.

Rey angrily kicked her closet door shut in frustration. How was she supposed to fulfil her role as the last remaining Jedi? Luke had left her with no instructions and the resources she thought would guide her were proving fruitless. But – there was one who had claimed he could teach her. Kylo Ren... it was too late for that though. She had missed that chance when she rejected his offer to stand by him and rule the Galaxy as his partner.

With these thoughts storming through her head, Rey collected her staff from her room, donned her robe for the cold walk, and headed to the training room.

Without the lightsaber, which still lay in two pieces in the bottom of her bag, Rey had returned to her usual quarterstaff as her weapon of choice. She had never quite got the hang of blasters, and the Falcon’s exterior canons were the limit of her experience with firing a weapon. She knew the staff was useless against the weapons of stormtroopers, but she was at least confident in hand combat.

And with the Force on her side, she was slowly becoming the Resistance’s greatest weapon. Lifting rocks, she had once mused, turned out to be a pretty useful skill. Though she lacked formal training, Rey could feel her command of the Force was growing exponentially.

Luke had failed to give Rey any formal training, so instinct and initiative had become her new teacher. Slowly, Rey was forming her own understanding of the Force, albeit unconventional and totally improvised. In particular, she had learned to draw on the Force to power her own strength and sensual acuity. By feeling the elements around her, she was able to bend them at her will. It was just like lifting rocks….except her power extended far beyond that now. The earth was an infinite depth and source of the Force, and she used it to flow through her and lift objects of incredible weight, or send out pulses of energy that could knock back a solid wall.

She felt powerful.

Rey pushed open the doors to the training room, dropped her bag in the corner of the room, and slipped off her boots and robe. It was a remarkable space to train in – high ceilings and enough space to fit two large Starfighters. One side of the room was bare black rock, a nod to the entire facility being dug out from the side of a cliff face. It was always less crowded at this time of night, with
normally only a few male crew training together, so she had plenty of space to work with. Tonight, Rey recognised a few of the pilots from Poe’s crew, practising some sparring on one side of the room.

Rey began with some easy stretches to mobilise her body, followed by a meditation. Her understanding of the Force was still very crude, but from her limited time with Luke, she knew that meditation was an important skill to connect with the Force. She sat down on the floor and shut her eyes. After steadying her breathing, she reached out, as Luke had once taught her, and felt at one with the Force flowing steadily around her.

She could feel the energy of the pilots training nearby. She felt the buzzing energy of the Resistance base around her. She reached out further and felt the weight and strength of the cliff their base was built into. She could feel the coarseness of the grain and density of the rock. And beyond that, she could feel the coolness of the night outside and the gentle brush of the breeze. Warmth, cold. Happiness, anxiety. Hard, soft. She felt all this energy flow through her.

And something else. The Darkness….. She felt it within herself.

No. Rey’s eyes flung open. Don’t go there. Fight it away.

Rey panted from the rush of energy now pulsing through her. Her body was buzzing, ready to go. She stood up and jumped back and forth on the spot, before beginning a rapid series of body weight exercises.

If there was one thing Rey had been grateful for on Jakku, it would be the physical fitness she had developed from her independence. With only herself to rely on, she had to learn to defend herself, and had to develop the physical strength and endurance of a scavenger. It took a lot for her to break a sweat, and she knew she should could easily beat most crew in a battle of physical strength. Her body was muscular and lean, and while she was never concerned with her actual appearance, her physical strength gave her a lot of pride and satisfaction.

Rey took her hand wraps from her bag and wove them around her wrists and palms. Then, grabbing her staff again, she began working through different series of movements. She felt the swing of the staff as it hit invisible targets at different angles, still drawing on the energy of her surroundings to add to her strength. She practiced new combinations and extended her sets each time. As the time ticked by, half an hour…an hour…her clothes were sodden with sweat and her chest rose and fell heavily with each breath.

It felt so good to be this focused. She could leave all her troubles behind – there was no room to worry about her duties to the Resistance, the ever-impending threat of the First Order, or … him. She didn’t have to think about him. Ever since the Battle of Crait, she had felt numb inside, but at least now, with the pain setting into her muscles and fatigue begging her to stop, she could feel something. The pain and exhaustion felt….good.

Rey felt the Force pulse through her. Light ….and Dark.

The pain of exertion drove her to keep going…it fuelled her…..

Rey forced herself through another set. As she wheeled around and swung the staff over her head, it was suddenly stopped by ----

“Poe!”

She had been so focused on her training that she hadn’t even realised Poe was standing behind her,
and as she had swung around, he had caught the end of the staff in his hand overhead. She made a mental note to herself – *stay aware of your surroundings.* How could she miss something so easily?

“What’s going on, Rey? These guys –” he nodded back at his crew on the other side of the room, “– say you’ve been at it for over an hour.”

He dropped her staff, and threw his hands in his pockets.

Rey panted and looked over his shoulder. There were fewer of them now, and the remaining men had long finished their training, sitting together in the corner having a chat over a game of cards.

“Oh…”

Poe laughed. It was deep and hearty, so she knew he was just messing with her. “You’re a beast, Rey. Really, you never fail to impress me.”

“Yeah, well….I do my best.” Rey blushed. “What are you doing here anyway?” she asked.

“Coming to see you, of course.” He smiled. “I know you like coming here in the evenings.”

Rey planted her staff in front of her and leaned on it with both hands. Poe’s interruption of her training probably came at a good time. Now that she had stopped, the physical exhaustion was finally starting to hit her. She wiped the sweat from her brow with the back of her hand.

“Also, I finished preparing some flight drills for the new squadron early, so thought I would swing by before turning in for the evening.”

“Early? Poe, you worked all through dinner! You really do go above and beyond.”

“Yeah, well….I do my best.” Poe mimicked her words from earlier. Rey laughed.

She welcomed Poe’s company. The pair had had an instant connection, right from when they had first met on the Falcon. Poe had approached her and introduced himself…

*Hi, I’m Poe.*

*Rey.*

*I know.*

Within the span of a few hours, she had gone from being told she was nothing by Kylo, to having someone know and appreciate who she was.

Since settling at the new base on Saphin, they had had limited interaction, as Poe had accompanied Leia on several political endeavours, including talks with Saphin authorities and abroad, in order to recruit new Resistance members. Many thought Leia was grooming Poe to be her successor, though he had not yet surpassed his rank as Wing Commander.

Whenever Poe had been home, he had always been so kind and generous with his time. Rey and Poe’s shared interest in piloting had forged a bond between them. Poe had been particularly excited to have Rey show him around the Falcon – the ship of the adventure stories he had heard as a kid, and the ship Han had always spoken so lovingly about.

Poe smiled at Rey. “Anyway, why are you working yourself so hard this time of night?”

“The Galaxy isn't going to save itself.” Rey threw down her staff and sat down cross-legged on the
Poe lowered himself to the floor to join her. “No one expects you to do this alone, Starwalker.”

Starwalker – it was her new nickname, forged by her reputation as Luke’s heir as the last Jedi and her role in the destruction of Starkiller base.

The weight of responsibility that came the title of the last Jedi was crushing at times. Rey had wondered if this in part had been why Luke disappeared – he must have felt tremendous pressure to restore the entire Jedi religion and culture. Now that responsibility had been thrown on her, almost by accident. As a child on Jakku, she was prepared to spend her life has a scavenger. She was not mentally prepared to be a Resistance hero…let alone a Jedi.

In her own mind, she was no Jedi, no matter how much she tried or how much everyone else wanted her to be one. She was a failure.

She felt like a fraud.

Rey looked at Poe and sighed.

“I don’t know. I feel like everyone expects me to be some kind of hero and save the Galaxy single-handedly.”

“Stop doubting yourself, Rey. You’re already a hero after everything you’ve done. And you don’t have to do this by yourself. We’re all working on this together.”

Poe, sensing her disquiet, deliberately tried to change the energy of the conversation. “How’s it all going – all the Jedi training?” He wiggled his fingers out in front of him, depicting some sort of mimed levitation powers.

Rey sighed again, but couldn’t help smiling at his goofy impression.

“Oi! It’s not all just lifting rocks you know.” She gestured back with the same wiggly-fingered faux Jedi powers.

She paused. “It’s hard working out everything on my own. I have so little to go off. The Jedi texts have given me barely anything. Luke gave me nothing. I’m basing my understanding of the Force on so little.”

“Didn’t you once tell me the Force is just a part of you, and everything around you? In that way, you don’t really need to be taught do you? You can just….let it in?” Poe rested his chin in his hand, clearly trying to wrap his head around everything Rey had taught him about the Force.

Ever since their first meeting when he had seen Rey lifting rocks on Crait to help the remaining Resistance fleet escape, he had been in awe of her powers. He was curious to learn more about the mysterious abilities of Force-sensitives that he had only heard about in stories. Though he had been eager to understand, Rey admitted to herself he was not quite grasping the whole concept.

“I guess you’re right, Poe. But --- it’s powerful. Learning to wield it and control it is taking some practice.”

“From what I’ve seen, I think you’ve got the hang of it. And look, if you ever need anyone to practise on, I’m here for you.” He tapped his chest proudly.

Rey laughed. “Thanks Poe.” She couldn't imagine how he could help, but she acknowledged his
kind gesture nonetheless.

Suddenly, she remembered the events of earlier that day. “What’s this about the General having your droid follow me around and checking my vitals?”

Poe let out a hearty laugh. “Well, I’m not gonna lie, it wasn’t just the General’s plan. BB-8 likes you …a lot.” He winked.

Rey couldn’t help but wonder if he was speaking for himself, not the droid.

“I hardly think it’s necessary.”

“Everyone’s noticed that you’ve been …..quiet. And you don’t tend to tell us when something’s wrong. This is just the General’s way of making sure you’re okay.”

“Poe, I promise I’ve been fine—”

“Rey, you’re not fine. You keep hiding away and isolating yourself. And you always look exhausted. I understand you have a lot of pressure on you – but you have to learn to lean on us a bit. If you hold it in, you’ll just implode”

Rey huffed in frustration. First Finn, now Poe. But she knew they were right.

Poe continued. “And what’s this about your cortisol levels being raised earlier this evening? BB-8 told me he found you in a cold sweat and looking paler than a Stormtrooper’s armour.” Poe’s voice suddenly became more serious. “Are you okay? If you're sick, you know shouldn’t be training this hard.”

“I’m fine, Poe. Really.” Red added, as she watched Poe raise his eyebrows in disbelief.

“What really happened today, Rey?”

“Nothing happened.”

“Don't lie to me, Rey. I’m only asking because I care.”

She knew he was right. Lying was no use – Poe was too good at reading her. He crossed his arms over his chest and waited for her to spit out the truth.

“I was…..meditating earlier and…..”

Her voice trailed off. She knew she had to keep up her guard to some degree. She couldn't reveal her Force bond with Kylo to anyone. If they knew she had access to a spy hole in the heart of enemy territory….

“I don't really want to talk about it.” Rey hugged her knees to her chest defensively.

“Rey, what happened? Did you see something?”

“No…I just…..” Rey hesitated. She wasn’t used to having someone take such an interest in her well-being. Unlike Rose and Finn, who were happy to just be there for her, Poe had gone the extra mile to try and whole-heartedly understand her.

“Rey, please. Tell me. You can’t just bottle things up. I promise, it’s just between you and me, if that’s what you want.”
Rey let out a breath. She trusted him. “I’m scared. Scared of what will happen if I reach out too far – if I open myself up to the Force completely.”

She paused to wait for Poe’s reaction, but he nodded silently, letting her continue without interruption.

“I’ve sensed the Dark side of the Force. I know it’s calling to me. I can feel it. It wants me. I’m worried that …...that without the proper training, it might …..turn me.”

Letting out the truth like this made her heart swell with emotion. She was suddenly having to express everything she had bottled up for the past six months. She felt her throat stiffen as she held back tears. Rey dropped her gaze and looked at her hands in her lap. She bit her cheek to stifle the tears – she didn’t want to cry in front of Poe.

“Rey.” His voice was gentle and loving. Just the warmth of his voice was enough to calm her. He grabbed her shoulders and squeezed. “Rey, look at me.”

Rey looked up into his dark brown eyes. His brow was knitted, with a look of concern.

“That’s not gonna happen, Rey.” Poe spoke firmly, looking directly at her. “You are strong. And so resilient. Look at everything you’ve been through. I think if you were going to – turn – you would have done it by now. You and I both know I’m clueless about the Force, but I do know that the Light in you burns brighter than anyone. You’re safe. Nothing bad is going to happen to you. I promise.”

Poe’s words warmed her heart. No one had ever spoken so earnestly to her.

“That’s…… thank you, Poe.” She smiled at him.

It was times like this when Rey realised how badly she was cracking under the pressure. She really wasn’t handling it at all.

“You’re right, Poe. I shouldn’t isolate myself.”

“I’m here for you.” Poe squeezed her shoulders affectionately, but kept his posture leaning towards her.

Rey continued. “I’m not coping. It’s so much……pressure. I’ve spent my whole life relying on only myself. Suddenly there are so many people relying on me.”

Poe nodded sympathetically. “Without a doubt, Rey. But don’t shy away from being a beacon of hope. You can do it.”

Rey nodded quietly.

“And I’ll be here for you, whenever you need me.”
Enemies Reunited

Kylo Ren sat in his private chambers on board the *Legacy*.

Several days has passed since he felt the connection with Rey again, and he was more driven than ever to find her. The increased bounty was now in motion and he felt a wash of excitement knowing that they might find her soon. Still, the odds were small. It had already been seven months, and no sign of the Resistance, much to his and Hux’s disappointment. He frowned, thinking of his mother, who was the mastermind behind the Resistance’s uncanny ability to evade the First Order.

And Rey, who had had outwitted and made a fool of them twice…

Why couldn't he shake her from his mind? That fleeting moment a few days ago when he had felt her – he couldn't tell if it was excitement or bitterness for her re-opening a wound. He hated himself for this weakness, this *power* she had over him.

Kylo flicked through a datapad at his desk, reviewing the outcome statuses on each search for the Resistance.

*Failed.*

*No information.*

*No further leads discovered.*

*Mission failed.*

Kylo let out a huff of frustration. *Where was she?*

What would it take to forge their connection again? If only he could reach out to her and see her again, he might be able to work out her location. Surely this would be faster than any bounty hunter. He would have to be careful. But then, he would have to bridge the connection first.

Kylo rested the datapad back down on his desk and leaned back in his chair. He had to do something. He had to *try.*

He was no longer willing to wait for a chance encounter.

Pursing his lips and looking around him ensure he was absolutely alone, Kylo carefully drew his legs up beneath him into a cross-legged position and drew in a deep breath. Meditation – it had been a long time since he had practiced this Jedi art, but he knew if anything could get his mind focussed enough to bridge their connection, it would be this. He couldn't wait for their Force bond to connect them spontaneously anymore. He had to make it work.

Kylo breathed out, long and steady, and shut his eyes. He thought about Rey. Nothing specific, just the memory of what she looked like, what her spirit had felt like – her budding confidence, burning fighting attitude, and yet her vulnerability and delicacy. He remembered the feeling of when they had touched hands, with that moment of instant connection and mutual understanding. Oh how he still wondered at that feeling…

He kept his eyes firmly shut and focussed on his breath. *In. Out. In. Out.* The sound in his ears was muffled. He forced himself to open up, leaving himself vulnerable to the will of the Force.
Where are you?

Kylo tried to relax as his frustrations fought to get the better of him.


How had Snoke bridged them? He was powerful yes, but power always has an upper limit. No one has limitless power. In theory, if Snoke could do it, so could he. Hadn't he bested him in the end, after all? And if the bond between him and Rey was truly that strong, and he focussed his mind enough, he should be able to bridge their distance again.

He only needed to try…

Kylo pictured a long golden thread drawing her to him. A thread made of the very essence of her.


Just let her in.

“Kylo?”

Kylo’s heart skipped a beat and his eyes flung open.

Her voice came from behind him, since he was still facing the wall. His body was frozen and his heart was racing.

No, what if this just a trick, he thought. Don't turn around yet. Wait.

“Kylo?”

Her voice chimed like a bell, and resonated through his whole body. The sound stirred something inside him.

He couldn't wait. He had to see her. But at the same time, he was scared to turn around. Now that he had come this far, what was he going to say. He hadn't thought that far ahead. What if she wasn’t really there?

Slowly, Kylo turned his head. On the edge of his line of vision, there she was.

Say something, he thought.

Finally, he turned his whole body around to face her. His fists were clenched. She was right there. So close, yet still out of his reach.

He looked her up and down. She looked different to what remembered. He hair was tied up in its usual three buns, but her clothes were different – she had on a loose pair of lightweight pants and a tight top which cut off at her shoulders and sat high on her neck. It showed off her muscular but lean arms and her strong shoulders. She was barefoot and her ankles and wrists were strapped as if she were about to train.

She seemed as shocked as he was. He could sense her shallow nervous breathing.

Carefully, Kylo untucked his legs from his cross-legged meditating stance, and lowered them to the floor. He stood up, but kept a hand gripping the top of his chair.

Say something, he thought.
His mind was stalling. He didn't know what to think. He was torn between how angry he was at her for everything she had done to him, but at the same time contemplating how…..how good it felt to be with her again.

*Stop it,* he thought. He couldn’t think like that.

The pair stood like statues, watching each other. He knew it was his turn to speak, but there was only one question on his mind. He couldn't stop himself.

“Where are you?”

“What?” Rey looked shocked. “You’d think I’d be fool enough to you that?”

Kriff, he did it again. Jumping straight to the blunt point. So stupid!

“What I mean is…..are you alone?”

Rey looked to the side and back again, giving him a suspicious look.

“Yes…” she said slowly.

He nodded silently. Oh kriff, now what.

Rey raised her hand and circled her finger around the area where he was. “How is this happening? Did…..did you do this? It looked like you were meditating.”

Kylo gulped. “You could say that.”

“How very …*Jedi* of you.” The corner of her mouth creeped up into a smile.

“Meditation is not exclusive to the Jedi,” he retorted.

“But you reached out nonetheless.”

Kylo frowned. Why was she making this so difficult?

“No. *You* reached out first. Three days ago. I felt you. I *heard* you.”

Rey looked back at him but said nothing. She fiddled with the hem of her wrist straps.

He couldn't read the expression on her face. Was it embarrassment? Was it denial?

Kylo began to grow agitated. “Why? After seven months of nothing. And then suddenly you reappear. Were you going to reconsider my offer?”

Rey’s eyes gave away her disgust. “Of course not! I will never join you in the Dark!”

*Lies.*

“It’s calling to you Rey. You know it.”

Rey looked petrified and he knew his assumption must be correct. Of course the Dark side of the Force was calling her. He knew how powerful she was.

“Why did you leave?” he said. “I offered you everything. A chance to start anew. A chance at power.”
Rey looked sickened. “Power? Is that all you care about?”

It irritated him that she only saw in absolutes – Light or Dark, good or evil.

“The power to make change, Rey!”

“I don't buy it – you only want control.”

Kylo remembered the burned and mutilated mask of his grandfather. I will finish what you started. It’s what he lived by every day.

“You have no idea what I’m trying to achieve. The weight on my shoulders—”

“And what is it exactly that you're trying to achieve?” Rey demanded.

"The only things that matters. Balance. Order.” It was nothing Rey could possibly understand, gallivanting off with rebels.

“We must have very different definitions of balance, then.”

“And what exactly do you know of the Force? I’ve spent two decades of my life training, and learning about the Jedi and the Force —”

“You mean the Dark side of the Force!” Rey interrupted.

“Which made a nice complement to the very one-sided education from Skywalker!” Kylo spat bitterly. “And you have only, what, not even a year's experience. Don't talk to me about balance when you barely understand the nature of the Force yourself.”

Rey glared back at him. She looked….hurt.

“I imagine Skywalker had little knowledge to impart on you – his cowardly hermitage reeks of his feeble commitment to the Jedi art. I bet he spared you nothing.”

From the way Rey bit her lip, he could see that he had hit a sensitive area.

“Master Skywalker ….. he was a good man. He did was he thought was right.”

“So it was right to kill a boy in his sleep?”

"That's not what I meant, Kylo! He saw the Dark inside you, but never would have killed you. If only you could forgive him, you might start to see the error in his ways.”

“He abandoned his own pupil. He’s the reasonI finally turned to the Dark side.”

Rey stepped forward towards him. “It doesn't have to be this way. I know there’s a struggle inside you. I know there’s Light in you somewhere.”

“What do you care for my struggles?”

"I do care.”

“No you don’t. I trusted you. I killed for you, Rey. But you turned your back on me – I thought you and I were going to work together. And you left me for dead on the floor of Snoke’s throne room as the Supremacy slowly disintegrated. You can't claim to care about me.”
“I left Kylo Ren. I thought… I thought I was working with Ben Solo. We took down the Praetorian guards together. I thought you had finally seen the Light again.” Rey’s anger was obviously rising, but her voice trembled, as if fighting back tears.

“Don’t talk to me about Ben Solo.” The sound of his former name made his stomach churn violently. “Ben Solo is dead. And so is your allegiance Rey. You’re dead to me.” He felt his knuckles bursting as his fists quivered at his sides.

Tears glistened at the corners of Rey’s eyes. “And yet you still sought me out! Why?” she yelled.

Kylo said nothing. His jaw clenched with anger.

Rey shook her head, breathing heavily with rage. “Go away Kylo,” she said icily.

It was like a knife to his heart.

“Leave me alone.” She wiped away the tears of anger from her eyes and turned away from him.

Kylo froze. No. This wasn’t how it was supposed to be. He stepped forward, reaching out towards her. What had he done?

But it was too late. The connection was gone, and so was she. His outstretched hand quivered, reaching for the space where she had been.

Kylo yelled out in anger. He grabbed the chair at his desk and threw it viciously to the ground. Lifting his head, he turned to the mirror next to the cupboard by his bed. His reflection looked back at him. The face of … Ben Solo. He was weak. Weak for letting her get to him this way. Anger twisted inside him.

The mirror smashed into a pieces as he threw his fist into its centre. Pain seared through his knuckles and blood trickled down his hand.

The pain felt good. It was distracting.

Kylo panted with rage. He held his hand up in front of him, watching the blood stain his skin and drip to the floor. He turned and looked back at the smashed and cracked mirror. Good, he thought. I won’t let you down grandfather.

***

Kylo wrapped his hand with a bandage as he contemplated his plans for the day. Mostly meetings with General Hux and other First Order officials. One of his Knights was also due to arrive today – he should be landing shortly, if he wasn’t here already.

Kylo brought up the military report for the meeting today on his datapad. He needed to iron out the logistics of an upcoming attack on Jadan V with Hux later today. It was all part of a delicate plan to expand their area of control and secure a more disposable army.

Hux had been the one to suggest using a droid army.

“We need to bypass the lengthy process of training and programming in the Stormtrooper program. It takes far too long. We need to secure the Pandrix system.”

Kylo knew the Pandrix system well. It was stronghold in the Mid Rim, but had finally fallen under the reign of the First Order four months ago. They were in the final stages of securing full control of
the planet’s military capabilities. The core planet of Pandrix was renowned for its droid-building capabilities, which was something that had greatly interested Hux.

Kylo had supported Hux’s idea. “Pandrix would do well to join our forces. After the fall of the New Republic, their economy has plummeted. It would be folly to not sell out.”

But why had Hux been so interested in a droid army in the first place?

“What of your current army, General? I thought you took great pride in them?”

“I do, Supreme Leader. But droids would be in the long-run less expensive and more… dispensable.” His lips twisted. “After all, a droid army helped the Empire to rise. It would seem fitting, don't you think, Supreme Leader, for us to follow suit?”

Hux knew how to work Kylo.

And so now in its last stages, the plan to secure the Pandrix system had only one remaining obstacle. A planet fiercely loyal to the New Republic, and one of the major suppliers of Pandrix, had not assured their support for the transfer of power. In short, Jadan V must be made to submit.

However, without the Starkiller super weapon to simply eliminate them, they had to do this the old-fashioned way.

Kylo poured over the military report for the meeting today. Jadan V was strongly protected, so the operation had to be handled smoothly and precisely if it was to go down a success. And it needed to be a success. Once Jadan V was taken care of, they could finally seize full military control of the Praxia system, and with it, its high-class droid-building capabilities.

An army utterly his own. His grandfather would be proud.
Rey had been in the privacy of her own room when Kylo appeared to her.

“Don’t talk to me about Ben Solo. Ben Solo is dead.” His dark voice pulled her in. “And so is your allegiance Rey. You’re dead to me.”

Rey fought back the tears with increasing difficulty.

“And yet you still sought me out! Why?”

Why bother contacting her? She thought that there was a chance they could resolve their differences, but she was wrong. He only wanted to belittle her more, the way he had done on the Supremacy when he told her she was nothing.

Rey waited for his response, but Kylo refused to give her an answer. He was right – the man standing in front of her was not Ben. This was Kylo Ren in all his rage.

Rey was angry too. Why couldn't she get him to understand?

She breathed heavily, holding back her temper. “Go away Kylo,” she managed to force out.

A part of her didn't really mean it. A part of her wanted to stay and shake him and make him understand. But he was pushing her away.

*If that’s the way he wants it, she thought, that’s what I’ll give him.*

“Leave me alone,” she reiterated. Rey wiped away the tears of anger from her eyes with the back of her hand. She turned her back on him and walked away, praying the connection would break then and there to end their misery.

Reality returned and the silence around her came from her own room, not from ….well, wherever he had been.

Rey held up her hands in front of her. She was shaking.

It had been seven months since she last saw him – he looked different. More tired, more troubled. He had dark circles beneath his eyes, like he hadn't slept in days, and his skin was pale and gaunt. He was obviously in pain.

This was not how she had envisioned their reunion. She had wanted to talk to Ben Solo. But instead she had found Kylo Ren.

Rey growled with anger. She hated him for making her feel that way. For suddenly bursting in on her and then making her feel worthless. *You barely understand the nature of the Force.* Her stomach sunk as she knew that he was right. And what he said about the Dark side of the Force - *It’s calling to you Rey. You know it.* Was he just confirming her worst fears?

She had hoped he could help her understand the Force and her place in it. She had put hope in him. But she was wrong.

*You're dead to me.*

Grabbing her staff, she threw open her door and slammed it violently behind her with the Force.
Heading to the training room, she stormed around the corner and ----

“Whoah, Rey!”

Finn rubbed his shoulder as Rey bounced back off him.

Rey felt her temper snap. “Watch where you're going!”

“Uh…?”

“I mean,” Rey rubbed her forehead and lowered her voice, “where are you going? ….Sorry.”

“I was just visiting Rose.” He looked at Rey suspiciously. “What's got you all fired up?”

“Nothing,” Rey said quickly. “Just ….pent-up energy. I was on my way to the training room.” She let out an angry breath and admitted the truth. “I need to hit something.”

“Okay….cool,” Finn nodded, trying to stay casual.

An awkward silence fell between them.

“Want me to join?” Finn asked.

Rey shrugged. “Sure. I could probably do with the sparring practice.”

“No problem, I’ll just go throw something else on. See you in there.”

Rey didn't care whether he genuinely did want to practise sparring or if it was just his sneaky way of keeping an eye on her. She really did need to hit something – hard.

Rey paced through the complex and entered the training room, feet stamping loudly on the ground. She slung her staff off her back and swung it into action.

She heard a hearty laugh behind her. It was Poe.

He was on the multi-directional treadmill. Running was Poe’s thing. He wasn’t a wrestler or trained in hand-to-hand combat. When he wasn’t in a cockpit or firing a blaster, his forte was endurance. And blaster accuracy.

Poe nodded to Rey, but kept jogging at his normal pace. Something fluttered in Rey’s stomach. The sweat over his body had dampened the dirty shirt he was training in, clinging to his muscular physique...

*Stop it,* she thought.

She brought her mind back to the matter at hand – letting off steam. Her mind continued to race, remembering her encounter with Kylo just minutes before. She walked up to a punching back and gave it a strong kick, imagining it was him. Then grabbing her staff again, she gave the bag a good beating. It felt good.

After a minute of savage attacks on the punching bag, with probably very primitive and poor technique, Rey felt Poe’s presence behind her.

“Why are you so angry?”

Rey panted. “Not angry, just training.”
“C’mon Rey, don’t lie to me.” Of course, he always saw right through her.

Rey whirled around. Poe’s eyes locked with hers. He had a towel draped around his neck and he clung to each end with his fists. His sweaty hair stuck to his brow and his chest heaved up and down from his run.

“You alright? Remember I said you could lean on me if anything was bothering you?”

She looked away sheepishly, and pouted. The bare truth couldn’t hurt, she supposed.

“Kylo Ren,” she muttered.

“Ah.” Poe nodded understandingly. “Gotcha.”

Rey was thankful she didn't need to expand, although it was more complex than Poe knew.

With her small confession, Rey felt some of the tension leaving her body already. That was the thing about Poe – he had a calming effect on her. And he was right – leaning on someone and sharing her feelings really did help to relieve her stress.

“Can I give you some advice?”

Rey nodded.

“From my years of flying, one thing I’ve learned is to never pilot with emotions. It just clouds your vision. I’ve had to learn the hard way sometimes.”

Poe’s eyes gazed into the distance, remembering his past missions.

“I’ve hated the First Order so much that it’s lured me into making rash decisions…. sometimes at the cost of many lives – the lives of my friends.” He looked back at Rey. “In the end, anger doesn't give us strength. It only fuels reckless abandon. It makes us weak.”

Poe was right. Having finally calmed down a little, Rey realised….she really had let anger get the better of her. She shivered, thinking of how easy it was to fall out of control. She knew enough about the Force to know that hate and fear was a path to the Dark side.

“Thanks Poe.”

He winked at her. The butterflies in her stomach came alive again. Damn, that charming man.

Rey tried to throw the moment off course. “You really are a wise old man,” she said teasingly.

“Hey!” Poe laughed and nudged her shoulder.

They laughed together for a moment. “I’m glad to see you feeling a little less cross. I was a bit scared to come say hello before.”

“Want to spar with Finn and I?”

“Not my domain at all. I think I’ll stick with cockpits and blasters. But I’m all done – I’ll stay and watch Finn get his butt kicked. I do enjoy that.” He laughed again.

“Sure thing, Commander.”

Poe grinned at Rey. He took his towel and wiped the sweat from his brow and headed to the side of
the training room. He stretched out his legs as Rey returned to the punching bag. She watched it sway back and forth until it hung motionless once again.

Rey closed her eyes and took a deep breath. Poe was right – she had been letting her hate and anger control her. She needed to calm her mind again.

Finally in the right head space, Rey remembered some more of Kylo’s words from earlier.

_I killed for you._

_For you._

She hadn't given it much thought at the time, but now she realised…. maybe he hadn't killed Snoke for purely selfish reasons, as she had first thought. Had he really done it first and foremost to protect her?

“Let’s get started, girl!” Finn strode in and called out across the room.

He pulled out two training swords from his bag. Really they were just blunt wooden poles, but they were heavy and struck hard if you weren’t careful. He threw one over to Rey and dropped the rest of his gear on the floor.

“Don't think I’ll be going easy on you, Finn.”

“Yeah I know” he said, wearily. Rey always won their sparring matches, even without making use of the Force. She was too fast and nimble for him.

Poe finished his stretching and sat against the wall to watch.

Finn and Rey often trained together. It was mutually beneficial, as they shared tips and tricks with each other. Finn had such a regimented upbringing and was competent in combat training. He constantly surprised Rey with the skills and knowledge the First Order had imparted on him. Rey had only learned from experience on Jakku, and without her staff, she felt a little out of her depth. She was thankful to have the Force on her side, although he couldn't use it against Finn in a sparring match.

The pair circled each other. Finn was feeding off Rey’s earlier manic energy and had psyched himself up for a good session. He swished his weapon invitingly, a twisted smile giving away his eagerness to engage.

Rey jumped in with the first blow. Finn was strong, but slow, and Rey’s nimbleness kept him on his toes. She almost danced around him, evading his strikes. She threw up her weapon, blocking a blow from above. The sound of the weapons clashing together echoed through the room. With a vocal grunt, Rey, threw Finn off her and jumped to the floor, swinging her leg out and cutting him off at the ankles. Finn tripped but steadied his balance.

This time he tried a new approach, on the defensive. Rey let her blows flow steady, forcing him to step further and further back, towards where Poe sat.

Suddenly, Rey’s mind shot back to the battle in Snoke’s throne room. She felt the same vigour she had experienced back in that room, fighting alongside Kylo. In that moment, he had been her ally. She imagined she was fighting alongside him again, taking down their mutual enemies.

_Ben!_ She had called out his true name, and he had responded, as they took down the final guard. They had worked like one, effortlessly and with ease. Communicating as if they shared a single
Rey struck forward but Finn successfully parried, sending her weapon upwards. He grabbed her wrist and twisted, causing her to fall sideways. Rey yanked her wrist from his grip and circled around, defending as he lay another blow towards her.

*I killed for you.*

Rey stalled. Finn, who had been hammering his weapon down on Rey’s, finally managed to knock hers out of hands, sending it flying behind her.

She tripped backwards.

Finn whooped loudly. “He scores!”

“Alright, alright,” Rey said. She secretly kicked herself for letting herself get distracted like that.

She called her weapon over to her with the Force, and twirled it in her hand, ready again.

“You don’t have to go easy on me, you know.” Finn swung his weapon in circles in front of him.

“Hey, I have not!”

“I want to get better! How else am I gonna be able to take Kylo Ren’s head clean off his neck when I see him next?” Finn swatted at the air, feigning an attack. “He got me last time, but next time, I’m not gonna let him anywhere near you.”

“Whoah, calm down buddy.” Poe teased from the sidelines.

"What do you say, Rey? Lay it on me!”

But Rey wasn’t listening anymore. She had stopped as soon as Finn had mentioned hurting Kylo. *Killing* Kylo.

He couldn’t. She wouldn’t let him.

But how could she think like that? Of course it was natural for Finn to feel that way – for *anyone* in the Resistance to feel that way. And that’s how it was going to end. Kylo Ren was the First Order, and in order to defeat them, the Resistance had to take down the enemy leader.

Rey frowned. Unless there was another way... Unless he came back to the Light.

“Re-eyyy,” Finn called, egging her on.

“Oh, sorry.” Rey shook her head quickly. She must have been staring vacantly into the distance.

“Come get me.” Finn said invitingly. He wielded his weapon in front of him, ready for the next onslaught of her attacks. He laughed. “Pretend I’m Kylo Ren!”

*Kylo Ren?* she thought to herself.

She threw down her weapon. “We...we can't kill him.”

Finn was taken aback. “Him --- you mean *Kylo Ren? Are you crazy?”

“I can’t.”
Finn’s mouth dropped open. He turned to his friend on the sidelines. “Poe are you hearing this?”

Rey didn't need Poe getting involved as well. “Finn, no! He’s……”

“Well if you won't do it, I will. Rey, we’ve all seen what he’s done – what he did to you. What he did to Poe. I’ve seen him in action, first hand – I know exactly what he’s capable of.”

”There’s still a chance for him to come back to the Light.” Rey said quietly. How could she possibly get them to understand? She still kept the secret of her trip to see him on the Supremacy. They didn't know she had already tried and failed once…

“I think he lost that chance when he massacred the entire New Republic. And when he killed his own father.”

Rey bit her lip. “I know…”

Poe jumped up from where he was sitting and sided with Finn. “Rey, this is a war. This isn't the time for wishful thinking, or being nice to your boss’s son. He’s gone. There’s no bringing him back. This is the only way.”

Rey looked between them. She knew these two men would go to any length to protect her. But it terrified her that, more than anything, she wanted to throw herself into the hands of the enemy to try and bring Kylo back. How could she do that to them?

“I don't know, Poe.” Her voice trailed off.

Finn grabbed Rey’s shoulders. “Don't worry, Rey. When the time comes, you’ll know the right thing to do.” He drew his finger across his throat.

Rey nodded.

She did know the right thing to do.

Somehow, when the time was right, she would go to him again. Try again. And keep trying until he came to the Light.

Because somewhere under all that darkness, underneath the monster, there was still a human.

Ben Solo.
“Supreme Leader Ren.”

Kylo looked down at the communications officer from where he stood on the bridge of the Legacy.

“We just received communications from Master Botek. The tractor beam is guiding his yacht in presently. He should be docked within the next few minutes.”

“Which hangar?”

“Hangar four, my Lord.”

“Thank you, officer.”

Kylo turned and left the bridge, straight for hangar four. He had been anticipating this visit from his most loyal and closest Knight. He trusted the man with his life.

The Knights of Ren, as so titled under Snoke’s rule, were not part of the formal hierarchy of the First Order, and were therefore able to operate freely, outside military command. The army of the First Order was forged and largely controlled by Hux, although now under Kylo’s authority, but the Knights of Ren were Kylo’s alone to command and were loyal to him only. Now that Snoke was dead, they answered only to him. And after Snoke was gone, he had recalled them all, to stand by his side in ruling the First Order.

The mission tasked to them by their leader was simple – the Jedi religion must be wiped out. They had to start anew. They had all once been Jedi Knights, but now they were a new brand of Force-users – the Knights of Ren. Kylo’s Knights. No one else sensitive to the Force could be allowed to revive the ancient Jedi religion.

And that included Rey. She could not be allowed to flourish as a Jedi. As something else? Maybe….

Perhaps she could join their Dark circle one day. She was a natural with the Force, after all. Unnaturally natural…

The Knights of Ren had once been like her – young, impressionable, and hungry for knowledge. They had believed in him – they had pledged themselves to him. Why couldn’t she?

Kylo’s mind wandered back in time as he pushed on towards hangar four.

***

It was night. The only light came from the burning ruins of the Jedi temple, the red flames smudging the horizon with a deep red glow.

“Good,” whispered the deep voice in Ben’s head.

Ben looked around where he stood with a strange calm. The Jedi temple lay in ashes. Fire crackled under the sprinkling rain and smoke billowed up from the ruins. On his hands was the blood of his fellow students. Their dead bodies lay just meters away from him.

“Ben!” Aleina ran towards him, her face covered in ashes.

Quickly, he raised his lightsabre, casting a blue light over the terrified girl’s face. “Don’t make me kill
“No, Ben. Please!” she begged. Aleina fell to her knees in the soft mud. “I only want to follow you. I’ve seen you. You are so strong with the Force. Please, I would lay down my life for you.”

Ben resheathed his lightsabre.

“Get up,” he said darkly.

Five more remained. Would they follow him too?

Ben looked back over the hut where he had been sleeping. Now in ruins, he presumed his former Master to be dead. No one could have survived that.

There was no turning back now. He had killed his master. He had killed his fellow students. The path to truth lay ahead of him, away from this place. Only one could teach him... the voice inside his head… he promised to teach Ben, he promised him…

Over the hill, Ben saw the glow of green and blue approaching. His friends, his team … They would follow him, or die. The Jedi had to be wiped out.

The group of students came down the hill towards Ben. Botek was the first to resheath his lightsabre.

Slowly, he walked up to Ben, unafraid. He cast down his lightsabre, letting it splash into the mud – a gesture of surrender. His dark brown hair, saturated from the rain, clung to his face. He looked eye-to-eye with Ben. The others stood behind him, cloaked, with their hoods drawn over their faces, waiting for the two men to meet an agreement. Their weapons were drawn, but they made no attack.

“Is this really the path you choose?” Botek’s thick eyebrows furrowed together. His eyes squinted under the pouring rain.

“There is no other path.”

Ben knew they would follow him. They were his closest friends at the Jedi temple. Many late night conversations had taken them to dark places.

“If this is the path laid down by your bloodline, then I will follow you.”

The time had come. The time was right. And everything had gone according to plan. It had only taken Luke’s mistake to set it all in motion. Nothing could stop him now.

“Gather your things. We leave immediately.”

Botek turned and led the others past the burning ruins and into the dark night. Aleina gave Ben one last stare before running after the others.

And then again, Ben stood alone in the rain.

*You have done well .... Kylo Ren.*

The name resonated through Ben’s whole body. His new name.

“Who are you?” he called out into the darkness.

Silence.
“You promised to show me the ways of the Force. I have done your bidding. The last Jedi Temple is no more. Now teach me. I’ve given everything to you. Every part of me.”

Ben turned on the spot, looking around him for any sign that this voice had a physical form. He waited with baited breath, clinging in blind faith to the mysterious power that had caressed the outer edges of his mind too long. *Show me, show me I am worthy*, he thought. *Who are you?*

The deep voice resonated through him again.*You have done well, Master of the Knights of Ren.*

The voice filled him. He felt strong.

***

A tall hooded and masked figure strode purposefully down the boarding ramp of a sleek silver yacht. Kylo waited patiently at the outskirts of the ship.

“My lord.” The masked figure lowered himself to one knee before Kylo.

“At ease, Botek,” Kylo said.

The masked figure rose to his feet. The pair walked through the hangar, Stormtroopers and officials at attention as they walked past, their robes billowing out behind them.

Botek’s masked appearance was menacing and enough to strike fear amongst even the bravest of soldiers. Like Kylo, he was tall, and clad all in black. He had a belt of weapons, including a blaster and crude lightsabre, and he carried a tall quarterstaff, strapped to his back, which was laced with sharp metal. His helmet, like Kylo’s, had a vocal modifier installed, which distorted his voice to a dark scratching sound.

Back in Kylo’s personal quarters, they were able to talk normally with each other. Kylo pulled his helmet off left it by the door.

Kylo led Botek into his office and invited him to sit down with him in a pair of chairs surrounding a low table. Botek removed his helmet and dropped it next to his chair. He ran his hand through his short brown hair, straightening it, and stroked a hand over his beard.

“Space travel,” he muttered, “I never liked it.”

“Drink?” suggested Kylo.

Botek made a grunt of approval. He shifted side to side in his chair, getting comfortable, and threw his boot-clad feet up onto the low glass table. Kylo gave him a disapproving look, but let it pass.

Kylo removed his gloves to pour out two glasses of port.

Botek nodded towards Kylo’s bandaged hand. “Troubles with the ginger tyrant?”

He chuckled. He knew how much Hux and Kylo secretly despised each other.

Kylo didn’t care to answer.

“How was your journey?”

“No troubles. Not nearly as comfortable as here though. These are quite the royal chambers.” Botek glanced around and traced the ornate edges of his chair with his fingers.
Kylo’s mouth twitched. “Hmm.”

He was not one to relish in the grandeur of the Legacy. Grand displays of riches and technological prowess were Hux’s preference. For Kylo, it just came with the job.

“What news from Palen?”

Botek sighed. “The system is wrought with political chaos. It really ought to be next on your list after the Pandrix system.”

“And your mission?”

“I’m afraid I haven’t had any luck. Even after accessing their archives, nothing. But I would hesitate to leave it un-manned. I sense something in the Force there. Not an awakening. But the potential for one.”

“We can’t allow for any new Force-sensitives to go rogue. There can be no uprising. After we are done with the re-assignments, I will have you return to Palen. Do not leave a stone unturned.”

“As you wish, my Lord.”

Kylo crossed his legs and leaned back in his chair. “Have you word from the others?”

“Meena and I are still in regular contact. Soan and Dagran, as usual I’m sure, have been a little more destructive than necessary.”

“I may need to separate them on the next re-assignment.”

“But they are like brothers…”

Kylo stared into the glass perched between his fingers. “I won’t let them bring foul the name of Ren.”

“I’m sure it is never their intention to dishonour your bloodline, Kylo. You know how fiercely loyal they are.”

Kylo huffed. “Fiercely loyal, or loyally fierce?”

“Both?” Botek shrugged and put down his glass. “I wonder if they've had any more luck than I at tracking down any Force sensitives.”

“No news is good news.”

“And what of the girl?”

At the mention of Rey, Kylo’s attention snapped back into focus. “She is not your concern,” he said quickly and darkly.

Botek sat silently and looked at Kylo long and hard, prompting more information from his leader.

Kylo twitched uncomfortably. “She will be within my grasp soon.”

“I sense a lot of anger in you, Kylo. Let it fuel you, but don't let it cloud your judgement.” Botek picked up his glass and took a sip.

“What are you implying?”
“You seem pretty intent on getting this girl. Why so desperate to get your hands on her?” Botek peered over the top of his glass at Kylo. “If I didn't know better, I'd say you were in love with her.”

“Shut up.” Kylo spat. As he glanced away, he noticed the side of Botek’s mouth turn up in a defiant smile.

Kylo took a long sip on his port and then slammed the empty glass back down on the table heatedly. “You know full well how powerful she is. If we can't wipe her out, she needs to join our side. She must be turned.”

*Turned to the Dark side of the Force.*

Kylo had let the words roll out of his mouth, but his heart felt something different. He wanted her, yes, but was her fall to the Dark side really a fate he wished upon her?

“I'll deal with her myself. She is not your concern,” he muttered.

“Still recovering from your rejection then?”

“*Enough, Botek!*”

Botek smiled smugly. “As you wish.”

Why must Botek always test him? Kylo felt the stare of Botek drilling into him. Even without the skills of mind reading and perception that Kylo possessed above all his Knights, Kylo knew Botek had a strong sense of intuition. After all, Botek was closest to Kylo and knew him better than anyone.

While the other Knights were younger than Kylo, Botek was one year Kylo’s senior. They had been best friends when they were training as padawans. Unlike the other Knights, Botek was not afraid to stand up to Kylo and challenge him.

“I heard the bounty on her has increased. I suspect Hux still doesn't know the truth about Snoke’s demise then?”

“Fortunately, yes, he is still unaware, and I would prefer to keep it that way.”

Kylo refilled his glass.

The hour was getting late and Kylo’s head spun with exhaustion. He rubbed his brow.

“Since freed from Snoke, I thought you might have gained some inner peace. But you seem more exhausted than ever. Have you been sleeping?”

Kylo circled his thumb around the rim of his glass. “No.”

Botek put down his glass and leaned towards his leader. “I'm not going to ask. But you have my full confidence if you ever want to talk.”

“That won't be necessary.”

Botek leaned back in his chair, unsatisfied. He nodded. “My lord.”
The Bounty

“Chewie, pass me the Harris wrench.” Rey poked her head out from the grating in the floor of the Falcon.

The Wookie passed her the tool before returning to his own work. The pair had devoted themselves to repairing and upgrading falcon, which had become a daily afternoon ritual. Rey enjoyed the work – it felt good to keep busy. Even if the Falcon wasn’t allowed to fly anymore, or at least anytime soon, they could at least put their skills to work and honour its late captain.

“The hyperdrive on this thing is incredible!” Poe called out from the cockpit. He was spending his lunch break today helping the pair run tests on the Falcon to assist in the repairs. It made for faster work with someone in the cockpit. While Rey busied herself with the mechanics, he had been familiarising himself with the controls.

“I know – it's a class point five hyperdrive! For such an old freighter, it’s incredibly high tech.”

“Twelve parsecs indeed!” Poe laughed back.

Rey finished matching some wires below deck. She threw her wrench up to the deck and jumped up out her work space, heading to the the cockpit. Poe was still studying the controls. Absolutely nothing was intuitive in this ship – after years in the hands of Hans and Chewie, everything had been customised and adjusted to suit their own personal specifications.

“Switch on the deflector shield generator will you?” Rey asked. “Let’s see if there’s any improvement.”

Poe flicked a switch above his head. Rey poked her head around the corner to listen back down the corridor where she had been working. No crackling or smoke – must be fine.

Poe studied the panels. “Looks all good at this end too. Nice work, Rey.”

“Excellent!”

Chewie crooned in agreement from around the corner.

Poe turned around in his chair to see Rey smiling. “You really love this ship, don't you?”

Rey nodded. “Actually, I wanted your advice on some of the external damage too.”

Poe stood up and placed a hand behind Rey’s shoulder, gesturing for her to take the lead and lead him out of the cockpit. The pair walked down the boarding ramp and Rey pointed to just some of the copious damage the Falcon had sustained during the last few battles, particularly from flying through the mines on Crait.

“I’m so used to pulling things apart – I can’t say I have any experience mending the outside of ships. I think you might have a better understanding of aerodynamics than me.”

The pair stood together looking up the Falcon.

“Well, I’ve learned a thing or two. It's just a matter of getting the right materials, probably recycling some old ones. Shouldn’t be too hard in a place like this. I’m sure there must collection of old ships here on Saphin. I might have a poke around, see what I can hunt down – we’re doing another supply
Rey turned around, and found Poe standing very close behind her. She stumbled back with surprise.

“Whoah, steady there girl!” Poe grabbed her shoulder to stabilise her.

Rey felt her cheeks become warm. With him so close, she could see every detail of his smiling face. His grip on her shoulder was firm but gentle, and even though she was now balanced, she felt weak on her feet. He was glancing down at her softly.

“Rey!”

The moment between Poe and Rey was suddenly broken with the entrance of Kaydel, who approached at a brisk speed.

With Rey now safely balanced, Poe let go of her shoulder. Rey secretly thanked Kaydel for the interruption – she wasn’t sure what might have unfolded.

“Lieutenant,” Poe gave her a friendly nod.

Rey always addressed her friend by her first name. “Hey Kaydel. What can I do for you?”

“Genera Organa wants to speak with you.” There was a seriousness in the tone her voice that worried Rey.

Rey looked over at Poe, who raised an eyebrow. Feeling apprehensive, she kept her response polite. “Of course, I’ll come over now.”

“I’ll walk with you, I’m on my way back.”

The two young women walked off together. Rey saw Kaydel glance over shoulder at Poe, who had turned to walk back up the boarding ramp into the Falcon.

Kaydel and Rey walked to the Resistance base’s command centre. Leia was sitting at the control centre with Admiral D’Acy. They had been in deep conversation over a data screen, speaking in hushed tones. They felt silent and turned to Kaydel and Rey as they approached. Leia had a gentle smile on her face when she saw Rey, but D’Acy looked concerned.

Larma D’Acy had been one of the few surviving Resistance members following the Battle of Crait. Formerly a Commander, D’Acy had received a promotion to Admiral and had been working closely with Leia ever since.

D’Acy was known for her ability to maintain a cool head even under great stress, so her temperament made her a suitable second-in-command to Leia, whose age was beginning to show. Leia’s incident outside of airlock had left her physically weakened, though still as mentally resilient as ever.

“Thank you Lieutenant, we’ll take it from here.”

Kaydel snapped her arms to her sides and gave the old General a quick bow of her head before heading back to her station in the command centre.

Leia gestured for Rey to take a seat beside herself and D’Acy.

Over the past seven months, Rey and Leia’s relationship had flourished, almost like one of a mother and daughter, but in the command centre, it was always business. Rey sat with a straight back in her
chair, at attention.

“We’ve received reports overnight from our spies based in First Order territory that there is a rather large bounty on your head.”

“Bounty?”

“Apparently – according to these reports – you are being hunted down by the First Order….for high treason.”

Rey heart started to pound in her chest.

Rey immediately though of Snoke’s death. Of course Kylo would blame her for that. It was to save his own skin – it made sense. And now he was ordering a Galaxy-wide hunt for her.

*Is this the game he’s playing now?* she thought.

D’Acy leaned forward to clarify Leia’s words. “We have no more information than that, but I think we can be certain why they are hunting you so intently.”

_No, they can’t know!_ Rey thought. Rey’s visit to the _Supremacy_ was still a closely-guarded secret. Not even Leia knew. Was lying to them all this time about to blow up in her face? What would they think of her presenting herself to the enemy willingly, when the Resistance was in their time of greatest need?

Rey shifted nervously in her seat but remained silent.

Leia eyed Rey suspiciously. “People talk, even our own. I don’t think it was ever going to be secret that you’re strong with the Force. People know about your besting of Kylo Ren on Starkiller Base, and that you trained with Luke. And ever since Luke’s self-sacrifice on Crait … well, it’s become somewhat of a legend. Naturally it follows that people see you as Luke’s successor – as the *last Jedi*. You’re a symbol of hope. Of course the First Order wants you destroyed.”

This was not what Rey expected, but she sighed with relief that it made sense.

Still, one point remained. “What are you saying? That the First Order is hunting me because I’m … a Jedi?”

Leia nodded.

“But I’m not a Jedi. *You* know that!”

D’Acy pointed her finger into the table, emphasising her words. “It doesn’t matter what *you* think you are, Rey. It only matters what *others* see you as. And a chance at winning this war is what they see in you.”

Rey ground her teeth and rubbed her forehead with her fingers. “This is ridiculous. I can’t be what everyone needs me to be!”

Leia reached forward and took one of Rey’s hands. “I know Rey. This burden was thrown onto you. But you can’t deny it – the Force is strong with you. You shouldn’t doubt your ability. You may not think you’re a Jedi, but,” Leia smiled knowingly, “I knew a Jedi once. You have the same strength and love in your heart as Luke did when he was your age.”

Rey frowned. As if the weight of the role wasn’t already crushing her, but now to be compared to
the legendary Jedi Master…

Leia squeezed Rey’s hand sympathetically.

“I know this is a lot of pressure, but in many ways, you’re our best hope at winning this war. You inspire hope in people – and that’s all it takes to build a rebellion.”

Rey sighed.

“Which is why,” Leia continued, “we need to make a few changes surrounding your safety.”

“My safety?” Rey stammered.

Rey thought of all her friends – her family – only just rebuilding their strength on Saphin. All in one place. If the First Order was hunting her, they would be led right to the Resistance base, leaving them open to attack.

“My safety? Leia, I can't be here.” Rey shook her head, suddenly aware of the danger she was bringing on everyone. “I can't risk everyone else’s safety by being here.”

“No,” Leia said firmly, and looking Rey square in the eyes. “I thought you might say that. But Rey, please listen. We need you here.”

“Here? Leia, what for? What good am I doing here, sitting here doing nothing? I should be out there, taking action.”

“You’re just like Poe.” Leia shook her head and laughed. “He hates being grounded. Anyway, until we have rebuilt our strength, I will not risk your – or anyone’s – safety. Biding our time and rebuilding our strength is not doing nothing. We just don’t have the strength to mount an attack just yet.”

It was true. The Resistance was in no place to mount any attacks.

D’Acy, seeing Rey’s mind ticking over, sighed in sympathy. “I know it’s very frustrating for everyone being grounded so long.”

Leia nodded. “We have already taken measures to ensure our base stays unknown to our enemies, but I think it also best that we introduce a curfew. Particularly for you. I’m sorry, but we just can't risk you being seen – we have to curtail your outside privileges. Not even any supply runs on Saphin.”

“Leia…” Rey thought of the wind and the warmth of the sun. But she couldn’t contest Leia’s logic. Rey was strong with the Force, but not strong enough to fight an entire army or become invisible to the prying eyes of bounty hunters.

D’Acy leaned forward towards Rey, sensing her disappointment.

“We will be confirming confidentiality from everyone here to ensure that our location remains secret. But that doesn’t mean outside efforts to find our base have not been doubled.”

Rey gulped. They all knew they couldn't stay hidden forever.

“Can you do this for us?” Leia asked.

Rey looked between the two older women.
“We need to trust you, Rey,” said D’Acy. “No matter your feelings. This rebellion is built on trust. Do we have your word that you will stay here, grounded and out of sight, for now?”

Rey sighed in defeat. “You have my word.”

Leia nodded. “Thank you, Rey.”

***

Rey was relieved that she could keep her secret about going to Kylo all those months ago. What would they think of her, knowing that she had gone willingly into the hands of the enemy? Would they have seen it as a betrayal?

Maintaining secrecy helped to soften the blow of stricter curfews on the entire base, and her curtailed outside privileges. She missed the outdoors.

News about the bounty on Rey spread quickly through the base.

“Of course that damned Kylo Ren has you on his hit list.”

Finn slammed his fist down on the table, clattering his cutlery on his plate.

“Especially after what you did to him on Starkiller Base. He must have been humiliated.”

“Hear hear!” Poe whooped with approval, and the two men high-fived over the table. Both had their own vendettas against Kylo, and they thought it was tremendous that Rey managed to best him.

But somehow Rey didn't share the same sentiment. It wasn’t like she had beat him fair and square either – he was already handicapped with a horrific injury from Chewie’s bowcaster at the time, and if it wasn’t for the crumbling planet, she might not have made it.

Finn added, “You certainly would be his prized conquest. He’s nicknamed the Jedi Killer you know.”

“Jedi Killer?” Rose asked.

Poe gritted his teeth. “He earned the name when he burned down the Jedi temple where Luke was teaching the next generation of Jedi. He killed them all … all of Luke’s students.”

The three friends looked over at Rey, expecting her to say something. She had not been particularly forthcoming about the details of her time with Luke. She’d rather let him live on as a hero in the others’ eyes, than tell them about his self-imposed exile and resolve to let the Jedi die out. He wanted his mission to be a secret and die with him, so she honoured him that.

Poe continued hesitantly, knowing that ‘Jedi killer’ encompassed Rey by default. “That’s famously his mission – wiping out the Jedi religion.”

Rey shivered as Kylo’s words echoed in her mind. Let the past die. Kill it if you have to.

“That’s horrible! Can you imagine killing your own friends in cold blood like that?” cried Rose.

Rey tried to fight the ignorance of her friends.

“It wasn’t him. It was Snoke.”

“Rey. Again with this defending of the enemy!” Finn grabbed his dinner knife and waved it
mockingly at Rey. “Snoke’s dead now – there’s nobody controlling him now. He’s acting of his own will.”

“Do we even know Snoke is actually dead?” Rose said. “Sure, we have reports that Kylo Ren is the new Supreme Leader, but who said Snoke’s actually out of the picture?”

Ren twiddled her fork and hoped no one noticed her shifting nervously in her seat. In truth, only her and Kylo were the only two that really knew what happened to Snoke.

Finn shrugged. “Doesn’t matter. We’re still fighting the same enemy.”

“Are you scared, Rey?” Rose asked. “You know…. with this bounty?”

Rey considered Rose’s question.

“No.”

Rose looked frightened for Rey.

“Not scared for myself anyway. I’m more worried that it means putting everyone else here in danger. Besides… Kylo doesn't want me dead.”

Finn raised an eyebrow, so Rey elaborated for him. “He wants me on the Dark side.”

Finn leaned back in his chair and picked at his teeth. “Of coursehe does. That totally makes sense…”

His voice drifted off.

Poe gave Rey an understanding look. He already knew her fears about falling to the Dark side. He leaned in and placed his hand close to Rey’s on the table. “Don't worry, that’s not going to happen to you,” he said quietly, so only she could hear.

Rey turned back to Finn, who was now chatting animatedly to Rose about something else. He planted an adorable kiss on her nose, and she giggled. Rey smiled. She loved these people. No matter what Leia had instructed, she knew would eventually have to leave. The longer she was here, the longer she put her family in danger. And she wasn’t willing to risk their lives and everything they had worked for.

But where would she go?

The answer was strangely simple. There was only one place she could go to keep her friends safe.

Into the hands of the enemy.
It was dark out, and the wind whispered silently through the streets of Mos Eisley. Tatooine was the birthplace of his Grandfather, so it was only natural that he made a journey out here. Kylo wrapped his black cloak closely around him and kept a quick pace. It was unlikely anyone would recognise him here in the Outer Rim, so he had chosen to leave his helmet on board. But still, he wasn’t willing to take any chances – he pulled his hood low, casting his eyes into shadow. This wasn’t First Order territory and he didn't need to cause a scene.

The markets were still alive at this time of night, and traders were calling out as he walked briskly towards his destination. The crisp night air felt cool on his skin, and the smells of the night markets made his stomach ache with hunger.

Kylo rounded a corner, and headed into a busier part of town, filled with junk traders. As he approached one of the stalls, he noticed a mother haggling with one of the dealers. Her young child clung to her hand and swung from side to side impatiently as he waited for his mother. The woman’s face was out of view, but judging by the aggressive posture of the shady-looking dealer, the haggling was not going to plan. Kylo paused to watch the scene.

The child was young, his height only just passing his mother’s knee. He was cloaked with the hood drawn back, capturing his long black curls that fell to his shoulders. In one hand, he held his mother’s hand. In his other, a silver-handled device.

Kylo narrowed his eyes through the darkness. It was … *a lightsaber*.

Why would such a small child be in possession of a Jedi weapon?

The child turned around and saw Kylo. Suddenly, he stopped fidgeting impatiently, and Kylo couldn’t bring himself to look away. It felt as if the child’s deep brown eyes looked right into his soul. Why, of all the people in the busy street, had the boy suddenly become so fixated on him?

Kylo felt uneasy studying the child’s face. Pale skin, deep brown eyes, and his hair … black locks falling to the boy’s shoulders…

The child tugged on his mother’s hand, calling for her attention with a frightened voice. “Mumma!”

The woman turned to her child. “Ren, what is it?”

*Ren?*

The name caught Kylo by surprise, but it was the woman’s voice that made his heart stop. She turned around and followed her child’s line of sight.

Their eyes met.

*Rey.*

Time seemed to stop. She was cloaked, just like her child. Her hair was out, and longer than how Kylo had remembered it. She didn’t look tired like the other people here – in fact, her skin was smooth and clean, and shone under the moonlight. She looked radiant.

He expression was still angry, as she had been with the trader, but after recognising his face, her expression turned to fear.
In a split second, she pulled the child into her arms and ran. As if her life depended on it, she ran as fast as she could, away from Kylo. The lightsaber the boy had been holding fell to the ground in the chaos of the moment.

“Rey!” he called out after her, more in surprise than anger, but she didn’t stop.

Quickly, he picked up the child’s dropped weapon, ready to run after Rey. His stomach hit the floor as he recognised the lightsabre. He knew the previous owner all too well.

But there was no time to think. The sound of yelling behind him grew louder and louder. The sounds of lightsabres igniting filled his ears. Kylo whipped around and saw three dark figures run toward him, and then past him, chasing after Rey and the child.

His Knights were hunting her. He needed to protect her.

Kylo yelled as he jolted out of sleep. Sweat dripping down his chest, he threw himself out of bed and across the other side of his room in frustration.

This dream was new. It was different. And it made him extremely uncomfortable.

Why a child? Why was there now a *child* in his dreams?

He slammed his fist against the wall and let out a growl. He was beyond done with these dreams. He couldn't make sense of them. They were starting to consume him. He couldn't sleep. He couldn't concentrate.

He didn't feel *human* anymore.

Kylo huffed at that thought. Not that he was even human to begin with. He was a monster. She had said it herself.

Kylo walked over to his wardrobe, and opened the door. At the bottom, hidden behind a wall of black robes, was a heavy, metal safe. With his mind rapidly turning over, he unlocked the combination of the safe and pulled out the weapon he had seen in his dream.

Crouched on the floor, Kylo felt along the hilt of the weapon with his thumbs. Cold and silver. Not like the hilt of his normal lightsaber – black, and warm from the unstable kyber crystal within.

This weapon represented his beginnings as Kylo Ren. It had slaughtered the lives of dozens of Jedi in training. It had fulfilled the will of his Grandfather – the legacy of Darth Vader.

It was his own lightsabre. The lightsaber in his dream.

Kylo stood up. He pressed the ignition button with his thumb and a fierce blue blade shot out, sending an icy blue light through his dark room.

The light in the dark.

Kylo looked up and down the blade, memories flooding back to him. The faces of fearful students, moments before he took their lives without a second thought. The whisper of Snoke’s voice in his mind, guiding him along his new path. And the thought of his Grandfather.

Kylo was well aware of the Skywalker legacy and the prophecy of the chosen one. His Grandfather, born of the Force, was prophesised to bring balance to the Force, but the Empire had failed to restore
balance and Darth Vader’s legacy was left incomplete. After that, the Skywalker legacy was passed onto Luke, but he also failed. He’d had it wrong, Kylo deliberated – restoring the Jedi Order was never the path to balance, and when he had failed, he only ran and hid.

Now Kylo was the only remaining in that bloodline, and it was up to him alone to bring balance to the Force. To bring peace to the Galaxy. And the only way to ensure that it happened was to rule over the Galaxy. He, and his bloodline, was responsible for all that was unbalanced in the Galaxy. That is why he must stay with the First Order. That is why he must succeed.

He would take what the Empire had started, and build on it, completing his bloodline’s sole purpose.

Elimination of the Jedi had been his primary goal all along. Snoke had used him to wipe out the Jedi students. Then he had used Kylo to track down Luke Skywalker. And to an extent he had succeeded. But one still remained. One with the power to renew it all…

As long as Rey remained, his mission was incomplete. He could not allow her to flourish as a Jedi. But every time he thought of this, he was so conflicted and confused – how to stop her?

Kylo returned to his bed and threw his face into his hands. He already knew he couldn't kill her. Making her a powerful ally seemed like the only alternative. But could he take her all the way into the Dark? Was that a fate he wished upon her?

*You need a teacher!*

He thought of the forest on Starkiller Base, where she had first realised her strength. He had sensed it then. Her natural untamed ability.

He could show her the ways of the Force. He could teach her to control it, and wield it. She was already remarkably powerful. After all, she had been able to reach all the way across the Galaxy to find him, without Snoke’s help to bridge the connection. What else was she capable of doing? Her power could only be growing.

Untamed power.

She was a threat. She had to be contained.

Kylo threw on his robe and meditated. He let himself seek her out again.


The connection as almost immediate. And what he saw, astounded him.
The Crystal Cave

Chapter Notes

A little bit of fun. A little bit of flirting. Rey learns to yield the Force in a new way. And then a chance encounter that places her in a difficult position.

“C’mon!” Rose splashed some water towards Rey playfully. “Let’s jump in!”

Now that the Galaxy was hunting for Rey, and curfews tightened on the rest of the crew, exploring the outdoors had been ruled off the list of possible recreation outside of duties. That was why they had come here today. Finn had heard from some of the underground Saphin traders that there was a cave pool nearby their base that could be accessed via a network of tunnels. And he was keen to check it out. He had banded together a number of younger crew members and turned it into a swimming expedition.

Rey looked out over the water. The enormous high ceiling of the underground cave was lit up by a large beacon of light streaming down from an opening in the ground above. This cave had once been a mining site for black crystals – remnants of the tiny crystals shimmered along the walls and ceiling, creating a glittering illusion of the night sky.

In stark contrast, the cave pool water was dark and inky black, and to Rey, frankly uninviting. She shivered as she realised this place reminded her of the cave on Ahch-To – that place of Darkness. She had opened herself up to him that day….

“You coming in?” Finn interrupted her mid-thought.

Large bodies of water were still a foreign and mysterious concept to Rey. She blushed with embarrassment, afraid to confess her inability to swim.

“I….I don’t think so. I don't swim.”

“Don't swim, or won't swim?”

She pursed her lips. “Can’t swim.”

“Ha! Rey Starwalker, the all-powerful Jedi, can't swim?”

“Hey! It’s not like I’ve ever had the chance to learn Finn.” Rey pouted. “I grew up in a desert!”

“I’m joking, Rey! C’mon, take your boots off, at least get your feet wet.” He dove into the water and swam out deep.

“Alright, alright.” Rey threw her staff down with the rest of everyone’s things, and bent down to remove her boots.

The group had divided themselves in two: the boisterous boys, and the girls, Rey, Rose and Kaydel. The boys, of course, had taken no time at all to get in the water. With no shame at all, they had dropped their pants, and thrown off their shirts, leaving only their under-shorts. Rey noticed Kaydel give a little chuckle before averting her eyes and sitting down on a rocky ledge. Like Rey, she was
keen to stay out of the water, and was just there for the company and free time.

Rose, on the other hand, was more than happy to join the boys. She had come prepared with a simple one-piece bathing suit – it was modest, but still showed off her slim figure that had been hiding too long under her bulky work clothes.

“It’s so warm!” she called back to the other girls on shore. “We used to go swimming back home on Hays Minor, but it was much icier there!”

Finn gave a loud wolf-whistle from across the cave as Rose slid into the water with a satisfied “Ahhhhh!”, causing her to blush. “Oi, Mister!” she yelled back playfully.

Rey watched from the shore as everyone made their way in.

“You sure you won’t come in?” Poe approached her from behind. He was still clothed, except for his pants, which he was folding slowly in his hands. Rey didn’t dare look down.

“I might just stick to the shallows.” She was too embarrassed to tell Poe she wasn’t a strong swimmer. She hoped she was convincing enough, but she knew Poe had a way of seeing right through her fear.

“It’s perfectly safe out there, Rey.”

He dropped his folded pants on the ground beside him and started to unbutton his shirt. As he delicately undid each button, Rey fought to control her gaze. No no no… she thought. Poe’s chiselled figure slowly came into full view, right in front of her. She was suddenly very conscious of her posture. Her face became warm and she felt like her heart kept skipping a beat.

She was mildly ashamed to feel so suddenly flustered. She always knew Poe was a handsome man, but she had never really thought about him physically in that way.

“Rey? You sure?”

“You boys have fun.” Her voice drifted off as she focused all her efforts on maintaining eye contact and not looking down. She gulped.

Poe patted her shoulder playfully. “Suit yourself!” He threw down his shirt and made for the water.

She watched Poe wade out into cave pool, pushing against the water until it reached his hips. She hadn’t given it much thought before, but she realised now what an incredible physique he had. Beautifully sculpted shoulders and back, and warm tanned skin...

Rey picked up his shirt where Poe had thrown it on the ground. She folded it, then lay it back down with his pants.

Hesitantly, Rey rolled up the hem of her pants to her knees and stood at the edge of the water, her toes just inches from the gently lapping waves. The shallows stretched out for yards. A few of the boys had already swum far out enough to reach the deeper water where they could tread water. Rose spotted Rey and started to swim back to shore.

Just breathe, Rey thought. It’s not the same cave.

“C’mon Rey.” Rose waded up to Rey. She cheerfully grabbed her hands and walked backwards, guiding Rey into the water.
Rey stepped forward, submerging her feet. The water wasn’t ice cold like the water she’d been thrown into on Ahch-To. It was surprisingly warm. She hadn't expected that. Rose tugged her forward some more, edging her in slowly. The water crept up to her ankles. Each step brought the water further and further up her legs.

“Rey, relax!” Rose shook Rey’s arms gently, making Rey realise how stiff she had become.

“Finn told me that you can't swim. Want me to teach you?”

Rey blushed with embarrassment. “I think… I think I’ll stay in the shallows for now.” She smiled at Rose. “Go enjoy yourself!”

Rose smiled understandingly.

Rey couldn’t tell her, but it wasn’t the fear of swimming that was plaguing her mind. It was Kylo. No matter how much she tried to deny it, this place reminded her of him somehow. She kept thinking back to the cave on Ahch-To and the intimate conversation she had shared with him afterwards.

I've never felt so alone

You're not alone.

Neither are you.

She had been so vulnerable in that moment. They both had. It was that shared moment that she had felt… close to him. He had reached for her outstretched hand – he had come into the Light, she knew it in her heart.

Could she ever open herself up to him like that again?

Rey joined Kaydel on the rocks, and watched as the others played in the water – splashing, chasing, diving. It was beautiful watching them finally have some fun. The water was washing away all their worries of the raging war outside.

Rose finished her swim and came to join Kaydel and Rey. It was nice to have time alone with the girls – they were easy to talk to, and the conversation drifted to faraway places, allowing Rey to forget about the darkness of the cave and the nagging thoughts of Kylo. Finally, she was starting to relax. She found herself laughing with her friends. It felt good.

“Ladies!” Poe called out. He was wading up to the bank. Rey blushed again at the sight of his unclothed torso. “Come join us!”

Rose and Kaydel giggled.

Kaydel brushed down her jacket. “I think we’re happy here, thanks.”

“You boys have fun,” said Rose.

“Rey? Ready to jump in yet?” Poe opened his arms out in front of him, inviting her to join.

Rey smiled but shook her head kindly. “Poe, I already told you I’m not coming in.”

“Oh really?” Poe said cheekily. He took a step towards her and grabbed her hand.

“No really, I don't swim!” Rey couldn't wipe the smile off her face as Poe playfully pulled her to her feet and tugged her towards the water. When their feet met the shallows, Poe swung her toward him.
She shrieked as he grabbed her around her middle and threw her over his shoulders.

“Poe!” She hammered on his back, half giggling and half trying to escape his strong grasp.

Poe laughed heartily as he ran her through the shallows, out towards the deeper water. With one abrupt movement, he swung her around into his arms, cradling her tightly, so she couldn't escape. Then he began to rock her side to side, preparing to cast her into the water. “Time for a swim!” he called out playfully.

“Arghhhh!” Rey shrieked again. She was surprised at what a girly sound came out of her.

She threw her arms around Poe’s neck to hold on. She could feel Poe’s warm breath at her ear. For a few seconds, their eyes met. Even though she was about to be cast into the water, she felt safe looking into his eyes.

He had that effect on her.

Softly, Poe dropped her at his side. The water barely reached her knees.

“Don't worry, Rey, I wouldn't do that to you,” he winked, and his eyes twinkled. Despite his years of warfare, there was a youthfulness in his eyes.

Rey realised she still was still holding onto his arm. Gods, he was muscular. She quickly withdrew her hand, hoping it hadn't lingered too long. Poe was still watching her, beaming.

Suddenly, a huge splash of water came their way, drenching them both from head to toe. Finn cackled and made a run for it, legs leaping ungracefully over the water, back into the deeper water.

“Oi!” Poe ran after Finn, and tackled him into the water, sending another large, though unintentional, wave towards Rey. Now sodden from head to toe, she looked back at the girls and shrugged. Rose was slapping her leg with laughter.

Rey waded back to shore and sat back down again with the girls. Her wet blouse clung to chest and arms. She did her best to wring out what water she could, and attempted to air it out to maintain some modesty. She wriggled out her pants and squeezed them dry, before laying them out on a nearby rock in the sunshine. Normally, she would feel self-conscious exposing her body like that, but with Rose in her swimming clothes right next to her, she felt a little less embarrassed.

“Poe, you know,” started Rose. “He’s still got that effortless charm.”

“He used to be quite the ladies’ man you know,” said Kaydel.

Rose interjected. “You know he used to be after my sister, Paige. She turned him down though. Too much of a charmer,” Rose giggled.

Kaydel continued. “Of course, he’s still as charming as anything,” her eyes glazed over momentarily, “but I haven't seen that cocky side to him since Crait. Whoever he has his eye on must be someone really special.”

Kaydel and Rose looked at each other knowingly. Rey raised an eyebrow.

Rose elbowed Rey softly. “Don’t play dumb, Rey. We’re obviously talking about you!”

Rey suddenly snapped to attention. “What?”

“He keeps looking over here, you know,” said Rose.
Rey looked over at the boys. Sure enough, there he was. Poe quickly glanced away, and promptly wrestled a fellow pilot into the water.

“No! What do you mean? Poe?” Rey stammered, as she fought off the teasing looks from the girls.

“C’mon Rey, he’s totally into you. I can tell by the way he looks at you.” Rose leaned back. “Boys! They’re so easy to read.” She added matter-of-factly.

Kaydel leaned in towards Rey. “Do you like him?” she asked seriously.

“Yeah, I like Poe, I mean --”

Rose called out teasingly. “Woooo!”

“No! No -- not like that. I meant --”

The other two girls laughed as Rey struggled to find her words.

“We’re friends – colleagues!” Rey insisted.

“You were totally blushing when he took his shirt off. I saw you two. And I mean, all that time you’ve spent together on the Falcon….”

“Hey! Chewie was there for that too!”

It was useless. The two girls gave each other cheeky looks, but they let Rey off the hook.

From she had learned from the Jedi texts, she was sure it was against the Jedi code to be with another person like that anyway. Attachment was forbidden. She probably should have let the girls know that – it would have been a good defence.

Rey looked back out at Poe in the distance. The more she had come to know him, the more she was starting realise just how close they were and how important he had become to her. She cared for him in a way she hadn’t expected. Was it really wrong for a Jedi to become attached to someone? To feel compassion or affection for another person?

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As the afternoon passed into evening, the boys began to tire, and numbers slowly started to dwindle. Rey found herself wading through the shallows again, starting to enjoy the curious feeling of the water against her ankles.

The two other girls had headed back to their rooms to change before dinner, and the last of the boys were throwing their clothes back on and returning to the base.

“What’s on your mind, Starwalker?”

Poe approached her, pulling his shirt over his head. He was the last to leave, meaning that the two of them were alone together.

“The water…..it’s so different.”

“Is this a Force thing?”

“I guess so…. I’m so used to feeling the energy of the rocks and the wind, and the sun and the earth. I haven’t dealt much with water yet. I grew up on a desert planet, remember? It’s so unfamiliar to me.
It … *scares* me. Well, it *did* scare me,” she corrected herself.

Finn’s splash from earlier had washed away her fear of the water. Now, she only felt intrigue. “I’m glad we came here.”

“Yeah me too.”

“I want to try something, now that everyone’s gone. I might hang back a bit longer.”

“I’m not in any rush to get back, I can keep you company and keep an eye out for you.”

Rey couldn’t help but smile at his goodwill. “I don’t need looking after, Poe.”

“Sure you do,” he teased, shrugging his shoulders softly. “I promise I won’t intrude. I’ll just wait up here.” He jabbed his thumb over his shoulder, indicating a rocky shelf.

Rey nodded. Secretly she was glad for his company. His presence was always soothing.

She stepped into the shallows and slowly lowered herself into the water. The coolness of the water engulfed her, as she lay down. Her body was still against by the ground, but her limbs were buoyant and supported. She felt strangely light.

Rey pushed the fear out and let the intrigue flow in. The water covered her ears, blocking out the outside sound and enclosing her in a strangely peaceful world.

Slowly, Rey reached out. The gentle ebb and flow of the water against her skin pulsed energy through her. She could feel Poe, through the Force, sitting close by on the shore watching her. Without wanting to feel into his mind too much, she let herself touch just the outskirts of his thoughts. He was thinking about her. He had such a clean soul – feelings of protectiveness, love, selflessness. Rey afforded herself a little smile before getting back to the matter at hand.

She travelled the perimeter of the cave with her mind, feeling the course of the water. Further down the cave, she found small waterfalls, and incoming streams from other cave systems. The vast expanse of water and its trajectories was incredible to her. It was never ending. She let the depth and expanse of water flow through her fingers and up her arms, into her chest, where she let the power swirl around her.

Rey sat up, but kept her eyes closed, and drew her legs in underneath her. Placing her hands on her knees, she took a deep breath.

She imagined the waves she had seen earlier. She felt them slapping the walls of the cave. And slowly she felt the water rise along the walls, creeping upwards towards the ceiling of the cave.

*Push. Push. I have control.*

Her body started to tremble, but she fought to maintain control.

A familiar voice broke her concentration. “*Rey.*” Poe barely whispered her name, but she heard it – all her senses were heightened right now.

She opened her eyes.

She hadn’t noticed, but she was no longer sitting in the water. Instead it had been drawn further back into the cave and was shimmering along the walls of the cave, leaving an area of shallow water at the centre. Rey kept her focus as she gazed at the spectacle. *She did that.*
She felt Poe rise to his feet behind her, eyes cemented to the spectacle before him. 

*I am strong,* she thought. She knew her mind and her imagination were her only barriers now.

Rey stood up and raised her arms out in front of her. She felt the power of the water pulsing in her heart and out through her hands. She pushed the water further back, clearing an area of damp stony ground down the centre of the cave, where the water had previously been. The water shimmered as it clung to the walls of the cave, both falling and rising, recycling itself over and over, as it edged higher and higher up the cave walls.

Shutting her eyes, she slowly shifted her weight and circled her hands around one another, feeling the water gather in on itself, forming a large sphere of water in the centre of the cave. She felt powerful. Yet…. uncontrolled.

Rey’s arms began to tremble and ache from holding the weight of the water. It felt almost as if the power was changing sides, and the energy of the water was now controlling her. Before she lost control, Rey executed a deliberate in-circling of her arms, releasing the water and letting gravity return as its master. Waves crashed towards her, throwing her back into the water.

“Rey!” Poe ran towards her to help her up. She wiped the hair out of her face.

“Did you see that!” She laughed.

“Yes! Rey --- that was incredible---- I … I don't know what to say!” He was exuberant.

Rey looked out at the water. The waves began to settle again. “I could feel it. I was*one* with the water. That probably sounds really weird but --”

Poe grabbed her and pulled her into a tight hug. “You’re amazing.” He planted a strong kiss on her cheek as he released her.

Rey blushed at the sudden ambush of affection.

“Sorry --- ” Poe stuttered, realising the rashness of his actions. He looked sideways and rubbed the back of his neck. She could feel the embarrassment radiating from him. “I’m going to go grab our things. Let’s head back now.”

“Thanks.” Rey took the opportunity to settle herself. She looked out at the water again and breathed out, long and deep.

“You need a teacher.” A dark voice spoke coolly behind her.

Rey whirled around. Without any warning, there *he* was. Cloaked in black as usual, and looking as brooding as ever. She narrowed her eyes. She had even notice the connection open – how long had he been there?

Rey kept her voice low, so as not to let Poe hear. “I don't think I do, thank you.” And after a brief pause, she added, “How long have you been watching?”

“Long enough to see that arrogant-ass pilot Dameron put his hands all over you.”

“What--?” Rey saw Kylo eye her up and down. “Oh---” she suddenly realised she was still in her form-hugging shorts and wet blouse. Rey blushed heavily, realising that with light from the cave behind her, he could see the entire outline of her naked body. She quickly folded her arms in front of her.
“Go away, Kylo,” she said darkly, through gritted teeth.

“You’re powerful, Rey. But if you take this too far, you won’t be able to control it. You’re untrained. Unexperienced.”

Anger brewed inside her. How dare her take this away from her!

“You're wrong!” She rose her voice a little too much.

“Rey?”

The connection broke as Rey whipped her head to the side to see Poe standing a few yards from her, holding their things. Rey looked back in front of her but Kylo was gone. *Kriff, how much did Poe hear?*

The pair looked at each other, both frozen where they stood.

“*Who’s* wrong?”

“No --- not you Poe. I was-----” Rey’s voice trailed off.

“Who were you talking to?”

“No one.”

Poe blinked.

Rey quickly changed the subject. “Throw me my pants.”

Poe rummaged through the pile of clothes in his arms and passed over her still-sodden pants.

Rey stumbled and tripped as she tried to pull them up to her hips. Wet pants were difficult. “You can turn around, you know. This isn't particularly graceful.”

Poe turned sideways and averted his gaze.

“I heard you say his name, Rey.” He spoke out to the cave. “*Kylo*…. But you were talking to thin air. What’s going on?”

“Drop it.”

Rey called her staff over, and it slammed into her palm. She turned to leave but --

“Rey!” Poe jogged up to her and grabbed her shoulder. “What’s going on?”

Rey shrugged him off. “Nothing,” she said frigidly.

She was still shaking from Kylo’s words. *Untrained. Unexperienced.* She knew he was right. No matter how much she wanted to, she couldn’t escape the truth of his words.

Rey stormed back up the path to the cave tunnel exit, leaving Poe to watch with his mouth agape as she left him confused on the shoreline.
Rey did her best to avoid Poe in the next few days. It was childish, but she didn’t know how to explain to him what happened in the crystal cave. How much had he heard? Perhaps he thought she was just talking to herself? And especially after what the girls had said about him – she wasn’t sure what to do.

At meal times, she ate quickly so there was no chance of being left alone with him at the table, and she abandoned her repairs on the Falcon so he couldn't find her there either. Instead, she kept to herself busy and isolated, sifting through the Jedi texts with C-3PO or training for longer hours during the day. Her options were thin, now that her outside privileges had been cut.

Unlike the other crew, Rey didn't have a designated ranking or role within the Resistance, so her time was often her own. Leia had allowed her this freedom to train and study.

“I don't know what Luke had planned for you,” the General had said, “but I do know he would have wanted you to focus your time and energy on learning about the Force. One day you may be needed to pass your knowledge on – in the meantime, you will need to preserve the history of the Jedi. Learn all that you can from those texts. Train as much as you need.”

Rey sometimes worried that Leia thought her incapable of undertaking a leadership position, or was too unstable or inexperienced. But still, Leia had allowed her to attend all the Resistance meetings. Their latest meeting was where she inevitably came face-to-face with Poe again.

“Rey, good to see you.” Leia nodded as Rey slid into the room quietly. She was five minutes late, purely for her own convenience so she could avoid Poe on the way in.

The team at these meetings were fairly small, never more than fifteen crew. Leia headed the large round table in her private office adjoining the command centre. Poe was seated on her left, leaning back in his chair and a serious expression on his face. It was difficult not to keep looking at him when he sat right next to the General.

Rey leant back against the wall in the corner of the room with her arms crossed, and listened in on the meeting. Her concentration wavered in and out, her heart fluttering nervously and with guilt every time she glanced over at Poe.

Leia spoke with poise, as always, with her hands planted firmly on the table in front of her. “We have recently made contact with Major Hal Deen – he was serving on the Senate of the New Republic before the attack from the Starkiller weapon, thankfully away on business at the time. He's promised the support of the troops from Kadar, and is helping to recruit new allies from the Outer Rim.”

There were several nods of approval around the room. Leia was still an incredible diplomat if she was able to pull loyalty from the last remaining allies of the Resistance, given the incredible odds against them.

“What are our numbers looking like – our allies in the Outer Rim?” someone called out.

D’Acy, appropriately seated on Leia’s right, wore her usual expression of concern. “The numbers are there, but recruitment has been slow – people are still too scared to defy the First Order without a strong backing.”

“But we can't get the backing without first having proper military-level strength.”
“We know that ever since we lost the Republic’s capital, the surviving senators have been attempting to set up a new governing body and a new capital. But with so much leadership lost, it’s been a long and difficult process.”

Poe rubbed his brow in frustration. “We cannot rely on the rebuilding of the Republic. We have to act now. The First Order is practically back to full strength – soon they may be more powerful than before.”

“We don’t know that for sure. And we can’t predict their movements – their change of leadership ensures that.”

“Where’s our intel? Have we secured anyone yet on their new flagship capital, the Legacy?”

“No one on the inside yet, I’m afraid,” reported Kaydel.

“The matter remains: we still have no clue what the First Order is up to. We can’t pre-empt their activity.”

Finn piped up. “We can’t keep waiting for information, we have to take action at some point.”

“But we’re down in numbers. We need that spy on the inside so we can anticipate their movements – otherwise we’re powerless against them.”

Poe growled under his breath. They were going in circles, and Rey could see the frustration in his body language. If they didn't have the numbers, they had to play it smart, like they always had. They just needed a way in…

The conversation drifted on. “Lieutenant Connix, have you heard back yet from…”

Rey began to zone out as she let her thoughts wander with Leia’s last comment. We still have no clue what the First Order is up to.

Though they had been able to re-establish a lot of their intelligence networks in the past few months, infiltrating the Legacy would be extremely difficult, let alone dangerous and difficult. All they needed was just on person on the inside….

And then it occurred to Rey: she could be that spy. Of course! She had direct access to Kylo through the Force – why hadn't she thought of it before?

Rey’s stomach filled with butterflies. This could really work.

Kylo might not divulge any information directly, but if she could connect at the right time, she might be able to catch him unawares, or twist some information out of him. Even better, if he was mid-meeting, like she was now, she might be able to eavesdrop on important information. One small slip up could be priceless for the Resistance.

But then Rey realised something else… their Force bond was a two-way street. Kylo could do the exact same thing to her.

Just another reason why she couldn't stay.

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The meeting wrapped up shortly after an hour. Rey felt renewed with hope—she finally had purpose, a way to truly help the Resistance.
Everyone left Leia’s office through the command centre, and returned to their stations. Rey made a dash for the door – she had conveniently stationed herself close by so she could make a quick escape. But it wasn’t enough.

She heard Poe jogging up behind her. He must have seen her leave in a hurry. *Kriff.*

“Rey!” Poe pushed past the other crew squeezing through the door on their way out of the command centre.

Rey hesitated. Would it be too obvious if she pretended not to hear him and ran off? She twisted on the spot, but ended up turning again to continue leaving with the others. *Coward!*

“Hey!” Poe caught up with her and grabbed her shoulder.

Rey whirled around and tried to feign surprise. “Oh-- Poe!”

“What’s going on Rey, are you okay?”

She looked into Poe’s pleading eyes. “Yeah, I’m fine.”

“You’ve been avoiding me.” Poe walked with her out of the command centre and into the quiet privacy of a nearby corridor. “Look, about what happened in the crystal cave…. I’m sorry I pried… if I upset you?”

Rey shook her head. “No, Poe --”

“We don’t have to talk about it. I just need to know that you’re okay. You looked so upset.”

Rey nodded.

“It’s okay, Poe. I shouldn't have snapped ….. you didn't do anything wrong.”

“What’s really going on Rey?” he folded his arms. “I thought we promised to be open with each other.”

Rey bit her lip. “How much did you hear, back in the crystal cave?”

Poe looked around to make sure no one else was within ear shot, then he placed a hand on the wall and leaned in towards Rey a little closer. “Well…. I heard you tell – *Kylo* – to go away.” He looked confused and concerned. “Was it …some kind of *vision*?”

Rey scrunched up her face in thought. “In a way…. She wasn’t *really* lying. “You haven’t told anyone have you?”

Poe shook his head vigorously and spoke softly. “And lose your trust like that? No, of course not.” He sighed. “I’m just trying to understand Rey. I want to help you. I know what it’s like to have him inside my head – I hate the thought of you suffering like that too. What’s going on?”

She had forgotten Poe shared the same torment she did – Kylo had forced himself into both of their minds, although Poe had probably suffered the worst of it. He had already been brutally tortured for information before Kylo had laid his hands on him and forced his way in.

“I’m sorry that happened to you. Does -- does it still affect you?”

“Yeah sometimes.” Poe frowned, caught offguard by her question. “At night…” Poe’s voice faded out.
“At night?” Rey asked.

Poe sighed and looked down, embarrassed. “Yeah at night. Nightmares… I used to have trouble sleeping.” He rubbed his hands together nervously and looked away. “I don't know, I guess he just really got to me … into me. He got in my head, you know, and took whatever he wanted.”

“Poe, I’m so sorry.”

“It’s okay – it’s not bad anymore. I’m just sorry you had to go through the same thing. You…when he searched you for the map to Skywalker…. Did it affect you too?”

Yes – pretty sure that’s when the connection was forged, Rey thought.

She shifted nervously where she stood. “I think so. I sometimes have …. visions…memories. They happen randomly, I can't control it.”

She prayed Poe would buy the story. At the very least, it might explain what he had seen in the crystal cave.

Poe nodded sympathetically. “Hey, come here,” he said softly.

He stepped forward and pulled Rey into a warm hug. It took her by surprise. It wasn’t the abrupt in-the-moment hug like back in the crystal cave. It was slow, and warm, and honest. He held her there, resting his cheek against her head. It felt….so good. Rey tightened her grip around his back, indulging in the feeling. It wasn’t like hugging Finn or Rose or Leia. It was different.

She felt safe.

After a final squeeze, the pair broke their embrace.

“So… we’re okay now?” Poe pointed between Rey and himself.

Rey smiled back at him. “Of course.”

As the blush spread across her cheeks, BB-8 came rolling in around the corner.

“Buddy!”

Rey laughed. Poe was always so happy to see his astromech friend. She had never seen such a close bond between man and machine.

Poe kicked his feet out and tapped the sides of BB-8 playfully with his toes, like a little dance. BB-8 chirped playfully, spinning his head around.

“Haha, you two,” Rey giggled.

Poe tapped BB-8 on the head. “Okay, okay. Back to work – I’m coming.”

Poe turned back to Rey. “Gods, he’s such a work-a-holic. I’ll see you later. Don't be a stranger, alright?”

“I won't. Bye, Poe.”

Rey smiled as they departed and left her alone in the corridor. Soon, it might be goodbye for a long time.
Renouncing the Jedi

The girl was becoming more powerful than he had anticipated. He had never seen someone so naturally in tune with the Force, and wield it with such confidence and ease.

It frightened him.

Kylo could see that Rey was powerful, dangerous even. Powers left untamed like that were wrought with danger. He knew Rey had no formal training – she would benefit from his teachings. And surely he was the only one who could teach her.

But she would never have him…. She had already made that perfectly clear after watching what she did with the water. He had tried to tell her.

*If you take this too far, you won't be able to control it. You’re untrained. Unexperienced.*

Something else was bothering him, too. Dameron. He couldn't handle the idea of them being so close. Watching them embrace…

But stranger still, and more to the point, he saw the pilot. He heard him. This was new.

He had never been able to see Rey’s surroundings before. Their connection must be stronger now, somehow. Was she also able to hear and see his own interactions? What if she caught him in the middle of a meeting with Hux or Botek – valuable information could be leaked right to the Resistance.

Kylo frowned. All the more reason to ensure she was safely within his grasp – captured, and at his mercy.

Kylo looked over the Legacy’s central hangar through the window of his private office in the heart of the ship. Botek’s shiny yacht was no longer in view. He had left that morning, returning to Palen upon his request. Kylo never enjoyed seeing him leave. At least Dagran and Soan were due for arrival within the week.

In the privacy of his office, Kylo removed his helmet and gloves and pulled up the hologram system, studying the designs for their newest weapon.

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Halfway across the Galaxy, Rey sat down in the privacy of her room to meditate. Right now was just as good as any other time. *Operation First Order infiltration*, she thought to herself.

Even if she couldn't catch him unawares, they could at least still talk.

The two times they had connected had ended badly, and both times he had left her feeling worthless and almost in tears. Even after everything that had happened, she still prayed for the Light in him – she had felt it on Ahch-To. If there was any chance he could still turn, she was the only one who could help him. It was almost her duty to try – redeeming him was their best chance at winning the war.

It wasn’t all a heroic act though. Deep down, she knew Kylo was still her best chance at understanding her place with the Force, and as much as she hated to admit it, she *did* need a teacher. Perhaps it was time she admitted that to him.
Rey settled into position and steadied her breathing. It was only the second time she’d tried to reach out, but it was easier this time. Rey felt the silence cup over her ears and the ringing grow louder with each second that passed. She felt the air thick with energy and the fluctuation in the Force as she projected her consciousness across the Galaxy.

She opened her eyes.

“Have you come to tell me you’ve changed your mind?”

His voice resonated through her. Deep. Dark. It pulled her in.

Kylo was leaning back in one of the armchairs in the corner of her room. There he was, as clear as day, yet not really physically there. He couldn't harm her, not through this connection – she was safe.

Rey stood up and walked towards him, confident. He had spoken to her without hesitation, so she knew he was alone.

“Where are you?” she asked, taking the seat next to him.

Kylo maintained his relaxed posture, leaning back in his chair. His eyes never left her, watching her almost hungrily. “On board the Legacy. Welcome.”

He waved his hand, gesturing around the room. “But I’m assuming you can’t see any of this. I think that’s how our connection seems to work,” he added darkly.

“As far as I can see, you’re sitting in my room.”

“Your own room?” he said inquisitively. “Somewhere nice? Not on board a freighter, then? On land?”

“You know I won't tell you anything, so stop trying.”

Kylo leaned forward towards her. “You can't run forever. Eventually I will find you,” he hissed.

Rey didn't want to tell him that he might not have to wait too long.

“Why are you here?” Kylo asked. There was a tone of resignation about his voice.

“I wanted to talk. As long as the Force connects us like this, I think we need to try and understand each other.”

“Go ahead.”

“I want to know….. You killed Snoke. You’re free to act without his influence. So, why – why are you still on this path when you have the power to change?”

“Straight for the big questions, then.” Kylo sat forward in his chair. “I have changed. You’re just too blinded by the single-sided beliefs of your friends to see it.”

“I thought you had turned. I thought you killed Snoke to end the war.”

“No, it was much more than that.” Kylo gazed off into the distance. “Han Solo was right.”

Rey jumped hearing Kylo say his father’s name.

“He knew that Snoke was just using me, even at a time when I couldn't see it myself. I gave
everything to Snoke. But in the end he was just using my power to do his bidding.” Kylo sighed. “I was stronger than him in the end. I could see his intentions – after I brought you to him, he was going to kill me, you know.”

Rey tried to hide her expression of shock.

Kylo looked back at Rey. “Killing Snoke wasn’t about defection. It was about survival.”

He leaned forward. “Snoke wanted to turn you, Rey. You would have made a prized apprentice, more than what I ever was to him.”

He averted her watchful gaze again. He looked hurt.

Rey pressed on with her questioning. “Why didn't you kill me when Snoke gave you the chance?”

“I could ask the same of you. You left me unconscious in the throne room. You bested me…. Again. And you could have ended everything, right there.”

“Killing you wouldn't have achieved anything. A new darkness would have just risen to take your place.”

“I'm upset you think I could be replaced so easily,” he said sarcastically.

Rey frowned.

Kylo continued, his voice articulating every syllable. “Or perhaps you thought you needed me?”

“You’re right, Kylo,” Rey held her breath for a moment before letting it out. “I do need a teacher.”

Kylo’s expression changed quickly from apathy to interest. “Skywalker wasn’t able to fulfil that role? What did he teach you?”

“That the Force doesn't belong to the Jedi. They’re a romanticised culture. His beliefs were actually not too far from your own. He wanted the Jedi Order to end, too.”

Rey thought Kylo might have rejoiced at this news. But as always, he maintained his composure.

“How interesting,” he said dryly. “He was an old wise man in the end. And now you have replaced him as the last Jedi. Will you carry on his legacy?”

“I am no Jedi. And I will never be one. I guess your mission is complete then – they say you are the Jedi Killer, after all.”

Kylo sat upright. “What are you saying? That you renounce the ways of the Jedi?”

“No…” Rey paused, “and yes. To begin with, I have no formal training, I could hardly give myself that title. But also… the Jedi Code – it's outdated. The world is a different place now. I think I agree with Master Skywalker.” Rey hesitated, “And with yourself to some degree.”

“Jedi Code? Where are you learning this?”

Rey gulped. She knew she had slipped up, and there was no turning back now. “The ancient Jedi texts, from the island. I stole them from Master Skywalker”

“Those books should have been burned. Damn that Skywalker!”
“But there’s something else.” Rey paused, taking a deep breath. Should she really be telling all this? “I feel both Light and Dark inside me. It’s a balance. I think…. I think you were right, Kylo. It is time to forge a new Order.”

Kylo’s eyes lit up. “Yes.”

“I—-”

“Join me Rey, and I can show you the ways of the Force.”

Rey hissed back at him. “I’ll never join you.”

“Then will never reach your full potential. You know full well I am the only one equipped to teach you.”

Rey gulped, knowing he was right. Could she ever trust him enough to allow him to teach her?

“I know,” she whispered.

Kylo stared at her, then looked away. She sensed frustration in him. He stroked back his hair with his hand, and Rey caught sight of the crude bandages wrapped around his knuckles and fingers.

“What happened to your hand?”

“Nothing.” Kylo said, turning his hand over. It was an obvious lie. There was no denying the condition of his injury – the bandage around his hand was speckled with blood.

“Let me see.” Rey reached out and grabbed his hand.

She felt Kylo jump at the sudden physical contact. Her own heart skipped a beat, and then her heart rate suddenly increased two fold. Calm down, stay cool, she thought. She tried to brush it off, but she couldn’t help but wonder if Kylo could sense exactly how she was feeling.

The bandages were roughly tied and blood was seeping through. She snapped the ties of the bandage and unravelled the crude dressing.

It reminded her of one her chats with Rose, who had been helping Finn with a minor injury sustained while training. “Men,” Rose had said, shaking her head with laughter. “They don’t know how to look after themselves.”

Kylo’s voice broke the silence.

“Why are you smiling?” he asked.

“Just something my friend said.”

“Dameron?”

“No,” Rey said sharply. She wasn’t about to start on that topic.

Rey peeled the remainder of the bandage of his wounds and she inspected the damage. Large gashes covered the backs of his knuckles and fingers, and the side of his thumb. Some of the cuts were deep and still open.

“What did you do?”
She saw Kylo flinch, but he stayed silent, obviously unwilling to confess how he had gashed open his hand so horrifically.

“You haven't had this properly looked at, have you?”

Kylo said nothing again. Taking his lack of response as a “no”, Rey wound up the crude bandage and tossed it to the floor.

She left her seat and retrieved a first aid kit from her cabinet. Returning to Kylo’s side, she unpacked the contents on her lap. Bacta strips, clean gauze, antibacterial ointment, saline… Rey separated out what she needed.

“Give me your hand,” she said. She spoke as if to a disobedient child. But it worked – Kylo passed over his hand without a question.

Rey carefully washed out the wound with saline then applied the ointment. The gashes in his hand were still deep, but at least they were clean now. She applied the Bacta strips and covered them with clean gauze.

“Just need something to secure it with…” Rey said to herself.

“It’s fine.” Kylo drew back his hand.

“I’m not done,” Rey said fiercely. “Keep your hand there,” she ordered, pointing to the gauze balancing on his knuckles.

She stood up again and looked around her room for ideas. Bed sheet, that’ll do. She tore a long strip off the hem, then ripped it to size.

Again, she picked up his wounded hand and wrapped the strip of linen around it, with just enough pressure to keep the dressings in place. Rey tied the final knot and looked at her handiwork. “That’ll have to do.”

Still holding onto his injured hand, she paused for a moment. She had finished her work, but he hadn't withdrawn yet.

A feeling of unease rushed through her. She felt her heart pounding again.

Kylo’s fingers slowly begin to curl, gently grasping her hand. An icy cold shiver shot through her body as his thumb brushed over her skin. Her heart felt like it was going to explode out her chest, and a storm of butterflies raged in her stomach.

Rey looked into his eyes. He was watching her intently. Was he feeling the same way she was right now?

Rey’s squeezed her eyes shut and held her breath. She could hear Luke’s words echo in her mind. “You went straight for the dark” he had said “You didn't even try to resist it”.

Was this just the Dark calling to her again?

As if reading her mind, Kylo spoke. “I feel it too.”

“You don’t know what I feel.” Rey said quickly. She dropped his hand back on the table. She couldn't understand what she was feeling, but she knew she couldn’t let herself get drawn in by him. Not like that.
“You have to leave,” she said firmly. Kylo looked back at her with shock in his eyes, but made no move to leave, so Rey changed her words. “I have to go.”

She stood up, and Kylo leapt out of his chair to follow her. As she turned to leave, he reached out and grabbed her arm in his uninjured hand.

Rey’s breath caught in her throat. She looked back at him.

Emotions chased themselves across his face. It was a reminder that their connection was all too real.

“Join me,” he said. “Please.”

This time, her reply was not in anger, only sad honesty.

“Never.”

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Rey shrugged her arm out of Kylo’s grip and walked away. The connection broke.

Please.

Kylo watched the empty space where she had been just moments ago. His heart was still pounding. He was clearly mistaken about her. The Dark was calling her, but she shone brighter than any star in the Galaxy.

There’s so much Light in her, he thought. How could he ever be worthy of her? She would never join him.

Kylo glanced down at the flashing lights on the control panel of the hologram table. The lights flickered with colour.

Light like Rey.

The rage came without warning. In a sudden switch of emotion, he took his lightsabre from his belt, ignited it, and cast the fiery blade down on the glistening control panel with all his might. He slashed furiously, only stopping when his injured hand ached with pain and the unsalvageable circuits crackled with sparks and smoke, dripping molten metal to the floor.

He couldn't take it anymore. He would take her by force if he had to.
A few days passed since her encounter with Kylo, and Rey couldn’t shake the feeling unease that now clawed in her stomach. Just the touch of his hand had stirred her entire body in a way she hadn’t expected. And the way he had looked at her, constantly – it made her nervous. It scared her.

But these weren’t negative feelings. She felt scared, but in a good way. In fact, looking back on it, just sitting there having a conversation with him had been … nice. Helping him, and working together again – it felt right. Even if they had finished on a sour note, yet again.

Rey pondered all this as she sat in the common room with her friends. Finn, Rose, Poe and herself had sunk themselves into some old yet extremely squishy and comfortable couches surrounding a single low table that supported the weight of all Rey’s books. She had finally swallowed her pride and asked her friends’ help in reading the texts, in the hope they could help speed the process of discovering a way to help restore her broken lightsaber.

A heavy text rested on her knee, and the two broken halves of her lightsaber rested in her lap. Her lightsaber – although she knew, with a pang of guilt, it really belonged to Kylo. She missed the feeling of it humming in her hands. She missed the feeling of power that came with wielding it.

Fixing it was starting to feel like a lost cause, beyond her capabilities. First and foremost the kyber crystal was beyond her. How did it work? How did she harness its power? Even the mechanics of it saber itself – all her years’ experience, and she was still out of her depth. It was old technology – after all, it had belonged to Kylo grandfather, Vader. No wonder he had wanted it so badly.

Perhaps Kylo could have fixed it. He had constructed his own lightsaber after all.

Rey frowned – this was just another failure that highlighted how she paled in comparison to him. Kylo had extensive training and experience that she sorely lacked. How could she ever match his strength enough to overcome him?

Rey leaned over and tapped one half of the lightsaber against her forehead in frustration and deep in thought.

“Don’t lose hope, Rey,” Rose said sympathetically, from the other side of the table. She was curled up to Finn with one of the texts propped up on her bent knees.

Poe, who sat with Rey on the other couch, squeezed her shoulder. “We’ll figure out a way to repair it. There must be something in these books.” He put down the cup of tea he’d been sipping quietly, grabbed the book on top of the pile and started to scan the pages. Rey envied his ease with literature.

“A Jedi needs her weapon!” Finn fist bumped the air.

“Finn… I’m not a Jedi.”

“Yes you are.”

“No… I’m not.” Rey gripped her knees firmly, ready to finally confess to her closest friends.

“What are you talking about?” Poe asked curiously.

“Luke was the last real Jedi, and that’s the way it is. The Resistance can continue to label me that way for their own benefit, but--”
“Whoah, Rey, don't get fired up,” Finn sat forward in his chair. “What do you mean, you're not a Jedi?”

“Fixing this lightsabre won’t make me a Jedi. Nor does simply using the Force make you a Jedi. It's more than that…. And for that reason, I’m not prepared to take that title.”

Finn’s face contorted into an expression of scepticism.

Rey sighed loudly and shut the book on her lap. “I’m not technically a Jedi because I’m not bound by any Order or Code. I – I don't believe in it.”

Poe stopped turning the pages of his book and looked up with attention. “What Code are you talking about?” he asked.

“The Jedi Code. It was a set of rules that governed the behaviour of the Jedi Order.”

“Where are you learning about all this anyway?” Finn asked.

Rey pouted, hating to highlight again the fact she was illiterate. “I had to get C-3PO’s help to read this one. Here, have a look.” She tossed Finn one of the heavier books about the Jedi Order and the Jedi Code.

Finn flicked through the book and read in silence for a minute.

“Pretty strict code,” Finn nodded to himself, scanning the page with his finger. He then paused over one passage. “It says here attachment is forbidden. What does that mean, like, you couldn’t be in love? You couldn’t marry anyone?”

Rey shrugged. “Yes, that’s how I interpreted it. Jedi weren’t known to take partners.”

“And you couldn’t, like….you know....” Finn made an obscene gesture with his hands.

“Finn!” Rose slapped Finn on the knee.

Finn tried again. “You’d be celibate, too?”

Rey blushed. In all honesty, she was as innocent and naïve as they came when it came to intimacy between a man and woman.

“That aside….” Rey stumped, “I still think it’s important to love and be loved. Compassion is why we’re on this side of the war anyway. I think forbidding attachment is going too far, and unrealistic. Surely the purpose of a Jedi’s power would be to protect the ones they love?”

Rose nodded in agreement. “But doesn't attachment lead to jealousy and suffering? A path to the Dark side?” She pointed to the next line in the text.

Rey shook her head. “There isn't anything central to the ‘Light Side’ which prohibits love, romance or marriage. Love is fundamental to the Light side.”

“So what you're saying is that…. ” Poe joined in on the debate, “that Jedi ought to love?”

“Of course.” Rey smiled. “I mean, I love all of you. I don't think that’s turned me to the Dark side.”

Poe nodded gently. He was listening intently, but his eyes were glazing over, giving away his wandering mind.
Rey, suddenly aware that she had just poured out her deepest musings, felt a twinge of embarrassment. “I don't mean to bore you with this all.”

“No no. Not at all,” urged Poe. “You really…you really care about what you’re doing. I think that’s important. I think it’s really brave of you to forge your own path.”

Rey saw Finn and Rose nod with agreement.

*If anything, Rey though to herself, love has made me stronger.*

And Kylo…. wasn’t it her empathy and caring for him that was going to redeem him? *Hate* couldn’t possibly turn him.

While Rey dazed off in thought and wasn’t looking, Finn raised a cheeky eyebrow at Poe and winked. Poe pretended not to see.

As time passed, Finn and Rose grew tired and retired early for the evening. Poe got chatting to a group of pilots that came in to play cards. Left alone with her books, Rey decided to persist as long as her energy would permit. A second round of tea was called for, so she left her things in the common room and went to the mess hall to collect a fresh pot. When she returned, the pilots were still there, but Poe sat on a couch by himself – arms spread eagle along the back of the couch, with his head tilted back, sleeping. He was clearly exhausted from the day.

“*You know it’s really not wise for a Commander to be caught sleeping.*” Rey sat beside him with a smile and handed him a cup.

Poe woke with a small jump, and shook his head. “Oh Rey. Thanks,” he took the tea from her.

Rey drew her legs up underneath her and grabbed another book. Not one she could read, but she was desperate to find *anything* that could help her restore the lightsaber. Diagrams, pictures… anything. She wracked the furthest reaches of brain. She had to find *something*.

Perhaps this would be her fate and punishment – renounce the ways of the Jedi and be condemned with the inability to construct a lightsabre. Yet Kylo had constructed one after falling to the Dark side….and he had rejected the Jedi path too. Rey frowned yet again – he was the one person in the Galaxy who could teach her.

Poe sipped his tea silently, looking over Rey’s shoulder as she sifted through the book for information. He kept his free hand along the back of the couch, behind her. Rey sensed a change in his energy after their conversation earlier that evening. Tired, but happy … and hopeful. After a while, his head nodded backwards as he fell into slumber once again. Rey leaned back and melted into the cushions next to him, drinking in his warm energy.

She placed her hand in her pocket as her mind began to wander. They were still there – the bandages from Kylo’s hand. Somehow, they had not vanished with Kylo when their connection had broken. A piece of his world was somehow in her pocket...

The mystery of the bandage aside, Rey was still so confused about her Kylo. Why did she care so much about this man that she barely knew – this man that everyone hated? The man that had caused her so much pain?

*I wonder where he is right now...*

Rey shut her eyes. She felt along the rough edges of the bandage with her fingertips and twisted it between her fingers, hidden in her pocket.
She had taken the Skywalker heirloom lightsaber from him. Was he mad at her? She had never asked. It belonged to his idolised Grandfather, Vader – would he be devastated to learn that it had broken, or did he already know?

She could almost feel his fury in the Force around her...

The noise of the surrounding room and the sound of Poe’s gentle snores had disappeared, replaced by the muffled silence she had come to associate with her Force bond with Kylo.

And suddenly, she was there with him.

***

Kylo felt the tug of the bond. Not now, he thought.

He felt Rey behind him, but didn’t dare turn around. Instead, he rested his hands on the table in front of him and bowed his head, so that he could grit his teeth in private. This was the very worst moment for her to be tuning into.

Hux was in the middle of reporting their final their plan of attack on Jadan V to secure the Praxia system. “So by the day after tomorrow, the attack will have forced our enemies into submission and I propose that we –”

“NO!” Kylo bellowed.

Hux’s looked, up startled. “My lord, what –”

“No more …. today.” Kylo stammered. “That will be all.”

“But the attack on Jadan V is crucial to ----”

“Need I repeat myself, General?” Kylo bellowed. Using the Force, he grabbed Hux by the throat and lifted him a few inches off the floor. Hux grappled at his neck with both hands, fighting against the invisible noose tightening around his airway.

“Yes-----my—Lord---,” he stuttered, gasping for air.

Kylo dropped him ungracefully to the floor. “General, carry on without me. Send the report through to my personal chambers by this evening. Do not proceed without my final authorisation.”

And with that, he stormed out of the operation room. Hux and several of the officers watched with open agape at his departure.

Kriff, Kylo thought. Although they were used to his outbursts, unreasonable neglect of his duties as Supreme Leader and rash reactions would not bode well for his image as leader of the First Order. He was sure Hux was already waiting for any excuse, any slip up, to take him down.

Kylo reached out to touch his connection with Rey, but the it had been severed. How much had she heard? He had seen that damn pilot through their connection – who was to say that she couldn’t hear company on his end?

As he rounded the corner, he used the Force to slam open the doors to personal chambers. Kylo flung himself into a chair. How could he have let this happen? He should have een more careful – blocked her out permanently, barring her entry to his mind. He could only hope that she had been unable to interpret what she had heard….if she had heard.
He wasn’t about to take second chances…

Or should he just let it happen?

Resistance or not, they had to push forward with this mission and secure a droid army. There was no way the Resistance was strong enough yet to completely intercept the mission anyway. Furthermore, if Rey had heard everything, she would be there.

For the first time since Crait, he knew where she was going to be. He would have her within his grasp!

It was worth risking the mission just to have her.

He’d be ready for her this time. And he wasn’t going to play fair.

***

“Rey, what are you doing?”

Poe was awake again. Snapping, back to reality, Rey found herself standing up, her body frozen in position, and her breath held.

*This was it. This was her chance.*

Everything was falling into place.

“I need to see the General right away.” Before she could explain anything more, Rey had turned to leave and made for the old General’s office at a light jog. Poe, left confused as ever, made after her.

Rey burst into Leia’s office without knocking. Even nearing midnight, Leia was busy at her desk. D’Acy was by her side, going through some documents with C-3PO. All three looked up at Rey as the door violently swung open.

“The First Order. I know where they’ll be,” Rey panted.

Poe burst into the room behind her. “Rey, what’s going on?”

Leia stood up and took Rey’s arm, pulling her down into seat next to her. She clasped Rey’s hands in her own. “What do you know?”

Rey’s mind hummed with the recent exposure to Kylo’s meeting. There were three crucial parts of information – attack, Jadan V, and day-after-tomorrow.

“Jadan V is their next target. The day after tomorrow, they’re going to attack.”

“What?” Poe stood stunned in the doorway.

D’Acy sat back on Leia’s desk and folded her arms. “But how do you know this?”

“I just…” Rey hesitated, “…*know.*” She looked at Leia, hoping for some kind of support. “I can feel it. You have to believe me.”

“A vision?” asked a stunned Poe.

“Yes… I guess –”
“I believe you, Rey,” reassured Leia. “My brother had similar moments of foresight – it is a burden we Force-sensitives are sometimes cursed with.”

Leia smiled and winked softly at Rey. It was so warming to feel included by Leia. We, she had said. It was a sense of family Rey had never felt before.

Poe stepped inside the office and shut the door behind him, ensuring their privacy. “Jadan V. Which system is that?”

“The Praxia system, I do believe, Commander,” piped up C-3PO.

“That’s the one,” said Rey.

“The Praxia system….” D’Acy nodded slowly. “Famous for their droid armies. That’s –”

“That’s exactly what the First Order’s after.” Leia completed D’Acy’s thoughts. “Jadan V is their major supplier within the system.”

“Why are they after a droid army? What about the Stormtroopers?” Poe asked.

Leia shrugged. “I guess they want something faster, more controllable, more dispensable.”

“In all honesty, they probably want both.” D’Acy suggested. “It really is a sign that their territories are expanding. This isn't good.”

“We have to warn them,” Rey said.

“Even better, this our chance to finally strike back,” Poe urged.

“We would have the upper hand,” said D’Acy slowly, mulling over the conclusion they were all reaching. “They won’t be expecting us. How could they? The Praxia system is already First Order territory, but while Jadan V are against the First Order, they aren’t necessarily Resistance sympathisers either. The First Order couldn't possibly know we’re coming.”

Leia, normally tired and weary with work, was now sitting up at attention, speaking firmly with authority. “Commander, I need both our Starfighter squadrons on standby and ready for departure the morning after next. Ensure they’re all briefed early tomorrow morning after the meeting. Admiral, I want our ground crew prepped and ready to go.”

“Of course General.” Poe was suddenly buzzing with energy, ready for action.

Rey nodded, agreeing with Leia’s plan. Her body was fluttering with excitement.

Not everyone in the room, however, was ready to jump at a moment’s notice. “Wait! Are we really going to send our entire fleet on the off-chance Rey’s vision is real?” D’Acy’s voice rose. “Is this a risk we can really afford to take? We’ve only just recovered our numbers!”

Poe stood his ground against the conservative Admiral. It was a clash of philosophy if Rey ever saw one. “This is a chance we haven't had in a long time, Admiral. And by the sounds of things, this will be an important attack to intercept.”

D’Acy’s mouth opened and shut. She looked to her superior for support.

“I’m sorry Admiral,” said Leia soothingly, “but I stand with the Wing Commander on this one. And I trust Rey, as should you.”
D’Acy took her orders with grace, but continued to wear an expression of apprehension. The safety and survival of the Resistance had always been her primary concern and she never wanted to throw the Resistance into blind danger.

Leia, squeezed Rey’s hands again. “Thank you, Rey. I hope you can trust our leadership enough to leave this with us.”

“I’m just happy we finally have a heading.” Rey smiled.

A heading. And a chance to see Kylo once again, face-to-face.
Early the next morning, the plan was in place. For Jadan V to fall, the First Order would have to target their capital. But without destroying supply routes to the Praxian droid-building planets, they would need to seize the Jadan senate by forcing them into submission. Anticipating the First Order’s tactics, the rebels’ plan was to secure a ground position with a team of Resistance fighters, to provide forewarning to Jadan officials and intercept any attack. To slow enemy advancement, Poe would lead an attack from the air on the signal from the ground crew.

At the morning briefing session, Rey sighed with relief as she was assigned to the ground team.

“Rey, come with me. I need to talk to you in private.”

Leia pulled Rey aside after the morning briefing session as everyone trickled out of the command centre. It was a long day ahead, filled with preparations and planning, and Rey knew this might be her only chance to speak with Leia before they departed early the next morning.

Leia lead Rey into the privacy of her office and shut the door behind them. Leia lowered herself into a chair, supporting her weight on her cane, and gestured for Rey to join her in the adjacent chair.

“I am growing old, Rey.” Leia straightened her coat as she settled into her chair. “But my sharpness is not leaving me. I sense that you are not giving me the full story behind you so-called vision yesterday. I believe you, but I know there’s something you’re not telling me.”

Rey stared back at Leia. Gods, this woman was intuitive.

Leia tapped the side of her head. “Force sensitive.” She winked.

Rey could see that there was no fooling her. Time to confess.

“It’s about your son.” Rey waited, assessing Leia’s expression. “He’s going to be there. Tomorrow.”

Leia sighed. “You want to hand yourself over, don’t you?”

“The longer I stay here, the greater danger I put everyone in. It’s me he’s after. I don’t want to keep risking everyone else’s safety.”

“Rey, you know where I stand on this. We need you here.” Lei’s eyes narrowed, studying Rey carefully. “There’s something else though, isn’t there?”

Rey twisted her hands together nervously in her lap. “I need to go to him, Leia. Redeeming Kylo is the only way I see us winning this war. I need to do this. I need to try.”

Leia shook her head in disappointment – not at Rey, but at her predicament. The years of hoping her son would return was slowly taking its toll on her. Rey could see it in her tired eyes. Leia was growing weary from constant hope that only brought relentless disappointment. Tired of fighting against her son – the constant push-pull of destroying the First Order, but leaving her son unharmed.

Rey felt mildly guilty for proposing that there was a chance her son could still return. Leia couldn't possibly face more disappointment – her heart could only take so much, especially after the way
Han’s life was taken.

“Ben…” Leia sighed. “I thought he could be redeemed, but I lost that hope when he killed his father…. and when he lead the attack on the Raddus – he knew I was on board.” Her voice trailed off momentarily. “I think I’ve resigned myself to the fact I will never see my son again. He is lost.”

Rey’s heart sunk. She had never seen Leia so defeated.

Rey gulped. “Leia… I know it must be hard, but …there’s still hope. I’ve seen the Light in him. It’s there Leia. I was there, on the Supremacy, when it fell.” Leia's eyes widened as Rey finally confessed her secret. "I went to Kylo – I thought I could turn him. I saw him kill Snoke.”

“What?” Leia looked shocked.

“We shared a vision – I saw him turn Leia.”

“He killed Snoke?” A hint of hope flashed in Leia’s eyes. “But still…” She sighed again, the hope leaving her again. “Killing his master doesn't necessarily mean he’s turned to the Light. It is but the passing of power. The apprentice always ends up killing the master. That’s just how it is. It’s the cycle of the Dark side. I shouldn't have been so hopeful that he killed Snoke… perhaps it is a sign that he has only gone further down the Dark path.”

Rey’s heart sunk at this idea. “I know it was more than that, though. I could feel the struggle in him. It’s different this time. Without Snoke guiding him anymore, he is free to make his own choices. There’s no one to stamp out the Light in him – the conflict will turn him.”

“I wish we could be so sure. Guard yourself carefully, Rey. Be careful that he’s not just after your power, just as Snoke was after his.”

Rey frowned with frustration. Could no one else, even his own mother, see what she saw?

“Don't you believe me, Leia?”

“I believe in what you’re saying Rey, I do. But too many times I’ve faced disappointment. I’m resigned to having lost my son. Luke failed to help Kylo. His own father failed. What makes you think this time will be any different?”

“Luke was never Kylo’s impetus to turn to the Light. But I’ve seen him – I’ve seen Ben. He’s there, still, after everything.”

“Rey…” Leia shook her head.

“Please. You need to let me go to him.”

Leia frowned. “I can see there’s no stopping you, Rey.”

Rey breathed out a sigh of relief. “I don't know what I'll need to do. I don't know how long it will take. But I'm going to try. Because I know it's our only hope.”

“I appreciate the hope you have for my son. Perhaps you're right and we need this to turn the war around. Perhaps he needs you too.”

*And I need him,* Rey thought to herself privately.

Leia smiled and grasped the head of her cane. “I hope for all our sake’s that you're right.”
As dusk set, the ground crew headed to the mess hall for their final supper before departure. They would board several transports in just a few hours, heading to Jadan V early, before the attack was due the next day.

Rey took the long route to the mess hall through the hangar in the hopes of seeing Poe before she left. It was more than just a well-wish before battle. Unknown to Poe, this was goodbye, for a long time.

Poe was at his X-wing, making last minute touches to the ventral hardware. His sleeves were rolled up as he tweaked the mechanics above his head, and BB-8 chirped instructions from atop the Starfighter.

As Rey approached, Poe wiped his greasy hands on a rag and stepped away from his work. “Starwalker!”

“Everything ready?” Rey pointed up at his ship.

“Just about.” Poe nodded. Suddenly caught by a thought, he added, “Oh! Chewie and I finished off the Falcon too. I didn't have a chance to tell you earlier.” The pair looked over towards the Falcon, parked alone nearby. Poe excitedly pointed out the repairs to the surface shields and the front windscreen. Rey watched him in adoration – he was always so vibrant when he talked about his work.

“Poe, it looks great.” The craftsmanship on it was exquisite. The repaired metalwork shone out, its brand new metal standing out from the rest of the old ship. “Han would have appreciated it to.”

“Yeah. I know how much that ship means to you. And I like that I’ve put my two cents into that piece of history.”

Rey giggled. “Yep, that piece of garbage.”

Poe let out a hearty laugh.

She loved seeing him this happy. With the crushing reality of war day-to-day, any moment of laughter was truly precious these days. There was a real twinkle in his eyes now. The tiredness had left him and he had a renewed youth about him. Everyone was right – as they said, he was the most handsome pilot in the Galaxy.

“I'm dying to get out there tomorrow. It'll feel good to take some action again,” he said.

“Me too.” Rey smiled sheepishly, but her stomach twisted with guilt knowing that the kind of ‘action’ she was talking about was different to what she was letting on.

Rey rocked back on her heels. “I'm heading to the mess hall now. I'll see you at dinner, okay.”

“Wait,” Poe said. He stepped forward and grabbed her hand as she turned to leave. Rey looked back and saw that his expression had changed. The smile was gone from his face, replaced by a gentle seriousness. “I actually…. I want to tell you something.”

Rey’s heart skipped a beat. “What is it?”

Poe’s normal confidence and natural coolness had suddenly melted away. He hesitated for a moment, carefully choosing his words. “I care about you a lot, Rey.”
Rey noticed that he hadn't let go of her hand yet. She could feel it trembling. He was nervous?

“I care about you too. Don't worry, everything’s going to be fine tomorrow.”

“That's not what I meant.”

They both paused. Rey looked around – they were hidden in the shadow of Poe’s Starfighter, so were out of view of anyone else in the hangar. She suddenly felt extremely vulnerable.

Poe continued to gaze at her. His expression was soft.

“Rey…” Poe took a step closer to her and reached forward to push a strand of hair behind her ear. She felt his warm, rough hand brush against her skin. He was standing so close now, she could see every eyelash and every speckle of colour in his eyes.

Oh no. She knew what was coming next. He had that look in his eyes. His head was tilted, gazing into her eyes, then down at her lips.

“I hope you don't mind, but I'd really like to…”

And with that, Poe cupped her jaw in his hand, and leaned forward to kiss her. Rey closed her eyes. His hand was coarse, but his lips were soft. She could feel the warmth radiating from him. She felt his rough hand tremble, as he paused with his lips locked on hers.

Poe withdrew and looked into her eyes. He looked at her with anticipation, attempting to read her expression. Rey couldn't shake the stunned look off her face. She could feel herself holding her breath.

He lowered his hand to rest on her shoulder. His touch was so caressing, so gentle…

Rey blinked, still recovering from the touch of his lips on hers.

“Rey… I care about you.”

“Poe….”

“Please.” A hint of desperation entered his voice. His hand dropped from her shoulder, tracing down her arm and then clasping her hand in his. “I think you're beautiful – the moment I first saw you…. I can't fight it – all I want to do is protect you and keep you safe.”

Rey looked down, guilt rising within her. “Poe, I can’t….”

“But I thought…. With everything you said about not being a Jedi and not being bound by a code? I thought you were open to this?”

“It's not that…”

Poe looked down, in what appeared to be shame or embarrassment. “Just a plain old rejection then, huh?” He smiled and chuckled to himself, but Rey could see through his attempt to mask how much he was hurting.

Poe sighed. “It’s okay, I was almost expecting this.” He looked straight into her eyes again. “I knew with everything going on, and everything you’re going through…. It was hopeful to think you’d feel the same way. But I don't want you to worry over it. I just ….I just had to tell you how I feel.”
“Poe, I’m so sorry…”

“It’s okay.” Poe sighed. He rubbed the back of her hand with his thumb, holding onto her for as long as he could. Rey could feel the glimmer of hope in him, though it was quickly being replaced by shame and the pain of rejection.

Rey scrambled to help him understand. “I wish…..I wish I could explain why. I feel terrible. But….,” Rey hesitated. “…I’m not good for you Poe.”

She knew it was a lie. The two Resistance heroes – of course they were a good match. And he would be good for her. He already had the calming effect on her, and she cared for him too. But the way she saw it… there was too much unexplained Darkness in her, and there was too much Light in Poe.

Poe nodded silently. He was hurting, but was taking the rejection like a true champion.

“Poe. I really like you. I do. And I care about you. I would do anything for you – just, not this – not right now.”

“It’s okay,” Poe nodded again, but there was still pleading and hurt in his eyes. Poe was truly the only calm, static thing in her life right now. It killed her to see him hurt this way.

Rey shut her eyes and bowed her head. How honest was she being? Poe had been so good to her, and she could feel how much he loved her. Still holding onto his hand, she turned his hand over and entwined her fingers through his. She couldn't deny how he made her feel – she felt safe, warm … loved. No one had ever made her feel this way before. It felt so perfect, but it wasn’t….right. Why? More than anything, she was so flattered to be so important to someone like that. Why couldn't she just reciprocate the feelings? What was holding her back?

“I’m so confused.” Rey shook her head, still unable to look Poe in the eye. “Poe, I’m so sorry – I don’t know.”

“Hush, it’s okay,” Poe said, releasing her hand. He threw both his hands in his pockets and looked away, out into the silent hangar. Rey watched as he gazed away, hoping somehow, he could forgive her.

Poe drew in a deep breath and managed a smile as he looked back at her. “I’ll be waiting for you, Starwalker.”

Rey’s stomach churned with guilt. The long awkward silence that fell between them stung her ears. Her brain was screaming, trying desperately to find something to say to end this tense moment.

Poe eventually broke the silence. “I’m going to finish off this work,” he said, pointing back up to the ventral hardware on his Starfighter. “I’ll see you at dinner.”

It was her cue to leave, but Rey knew they wouldn't meet again – he was too hurt to face her in the mess hall with everyone there. So before leaving, Rey drew him into a tight hug. It was goodbye, after all, for a long time.

“If I don't see you before I leave,” she said, burying her face into his shoulder, “I love you.”

Poe, feeling the honesty in her words, drew his hands out of his pockets and returned her embrace. He pressed his face into her hair and kissed the top of her head. “I’ll see you on the other side.”
Chapter End Notes

This was one of my favourite chapters to write, so I hope you all enjoyed it! Thanks so much for the support so far :) The Reylo pain train is fast approaching - I love Poe, but we all know Reylo is endgame (and so does Rey I suspect...!)

Coming up next, the adventure finally begins!
“Incoming!”

The Resistance ground team ducked for cover as a stream of TIE fighters flew overhead, shooting everything in their path. The stoney architecture of Jadan V’s city centre was being pulverised around them as the First Order made advances on the city.

Another explosion right next to them sent debris hurtling toward the team. Rey shifted the airborne debris off course with the Force, casting it to the side and protecting the team as they pushed onwards. Smoke billowed from the surrounding building and fire raged around them.

The ground team was in a panic. They had been anticipating an attack from the First Order, but not one of this magnitude. They had been prepared for a ground-level interception, not for a heavy onslaught from the sky.

“It’s too late! We have to retreat,” called out one of the team.

“No! We might still have a chance.”

“We’ve done everything we can. Any longer here and we’re toast.”

The comlink pinned to Finn’s lapel crackled with insistent instructions from the air team. “Ground team evacuate now. First Order transporters are on their way. Abort mission!”

“There’s more coming?” Finn called out in disbelief.

Another nearby building exploded as the TIE fighters continued to swoop overhead.

“There are too many of them – they must have known somehow that we’d be here. Otherwise why bring such ridiculous numbers? They were expecting a counterstrike.”

“How could they have known we were coming?”

“It doesn’t matter, let’s just deal with the situation!”

Rey shrank into the shadows with guilt as the team panicked amongst themselves. She was definitely the reason the First Order had anticipated the Resistance’s defences on Jadan V. Kylo must have sensed her when she eavesdropped on the information. *Kriff.*

“But we’re here now. We can still take them - we just need to secure an advantageous position,” someone suggested.

Finn stood his ground and shouted above them all. “No, enough! Mission is aborted! Understand?”

The team leader’s word was final. Finn glared at them all. “Let’s go, now!”
They picked themselves up from their defensive corner between two buildings and began their retreat.

“Overhead!” one of the Resistance crew called out.

A dark shadow blocked out the morning sun momentarily. The familiar shape of Kylo Ren’s command shuttle passed over the city and flew towards a clearing several hundred meters away.

“Looks like the boss is here. We gotta get moving fast!” cried Finn.

Finn was right, Rey could feel it. There was a massive shift in the Force, and she knew that Kylo must be onboard. It was like gravity was pulling her towards it.

A resounding crash startled the team as yet another nearby building was fired on by a stream of TIE fighters.

“C’mon, let’s go!” Finn yelled, urging the team forward, back to the transport hidden in the forest outskirts of the city.

Rey watched as the others ran ahead, away from the pull of gravity that was tugging at her back towards the clearing where the command shuttle had headed. This was the time. She had to do it now.

“Rey, c’mon,” said Finn, grabbing her shoulder.

“Finn, he’s here. I have to go.”

“Yes, I know he’s here. Wait---what?”

“I’m going to him, Finn. The only way we’re winning this war is if he’s turned.”

Finn threw down his blaster and grabbed both of Rey’s shoulders. “Rey, no! Are you insane? He wants you dead.”

“Please Finn, I need you to cover me. Leia knows what I’m doing. It’s part of the plan.”

“Leia---” Finn through his hands up in disbelief. “The plan? Are you kidding me? Why am I only just hearing about this?”

“I couldn’t tell you before. I’m so sorry.”

“Rey, we need you!”

“You don’t need me. You’ve got this.” Rey could see the desperation written all over his face. A pang of guilt surged through her. Finn had always done everything in his power to protect her and ensure her safety, and now she was simply throwing herself to the enemy.

Another explosion hit the horizon and screams rang out from a nearby building. Time was running out.

“Finn, I’m sorry! But, I need you to give me the best chance I can to get to him. Please, go!”

“I’d be sending you to your death!” Finn said, exasperated.

“As long as this bounty is on my head, they will continue to hunt me. And they will find our base, and destroy everything I care about. Please. This isn’t just for me. I’m trying to protect you all.”
“Rey.” Finn growled.

“Please!” Rey begged, starting to fight against his grip. “I don’t care what anyone thinks, but there’s Light in him, and I’m going to bring him home. I’m meant to do this, Finn.”

Rey knew Finn could see the defiance in her eyes and that she would go, no matter how hard he tried to convince her otherwise. “Come here.” Her threw her into his arm and hugged her so hard she felt as if her ribs would break. He growled into her shoulder, “I hate you. But I trust you.”

“Thank you!” Rey sprung up, secured her staff and ran in the direction of the last explosion, leaving Finn to run after their team in the opposite direction. At least he would be away from the heart of danger, she thought to herself.

Rey felt the wind ripping at her lungs as she ran full speed towards the clearing where she knew Kylo Ren’s command shuttle had landed. The fight overhead in the skies was starting to escalate. Rey spotted the Resistance X-wings zooming after the TIE fighters. Please keep him safe, she prayed, thinking of Poe up in the sky. If only he knew what she was doing right now - Finn might have been convinced, but she knew Poe never would have let her go. The memory of their kiss still lingered in the forefront of her mind.

Rey slowed her pace as she approached the clearing. It was oddly quiet. All the commotion was coming from where she had been with Finn. The hair on the back of neck pricked as a gentle breeze passed her by. Carefully, she peered around the corner of a building in an attempt to gain a sense of the landscape.

The disturbance in the Force was undeniable, yet something was out of place. The boarding ramp was lowered but no one was in sight. Surely Kylo Ren’s ship would be well guarded. Where was he?

A small team of Stormtroopers marched down the boarding ramp and Rey jumped back behind the wall that sheltered her from view. She hugged the wall behind her, still panting from her earlier sprint. Pushing her Force senses outwards towards the command shuttle, she felt the Stormtroopers walk off to the side, away from where she was hidden.

Now with the coast clear, should she just walk straight on board to find him?

Rey drew in a deep breath, centring her mind and drawing on the energy of the Force around her. The hardness of the ground, the whisper of the wind, the towering heights of the trees. She drew it all in, ready to unleash an attack should she need to defend herself.

Once she felt centred, she turned back to face the clearing, ready to make a run to the command shuttle. But before she bolted, she saw someone else walking down the boarding ramp.

Kylo Ren.

He was clad in all black, with a cape billowing out behind, fastened over one shoulder with a gold clasp. He was wearing his helmet as he once had … but…his helmet….

It was …..

Rey squinted and looked closer. No. This wasn’t Kylo Ren. The helmet was different. The tall figure swept his robe to the side, revealing a belt clad with a whole number of weapons.

Who was this? She could feel the Force radiating from them. But it wasn’t Kylo’s Force signature. Why hadn't she sensed it before? She kicked herself for her limited training.
Before she had time to rethink her plan, an icy dark voice spoke behind her.

“Well, well, well.”

Rey whipped around, swinging her staff out in front of her.

A second masked man stepped out from the shadows. He was dressed similarly to the man in the clearing, but instead of a robe, he had a long black jacket, and a large rifle slung across his back. His helmet was robust and angular, and disguised his true voice with a vocal modulator. It seemed oddly reminiscent of Kylo Ren’s uniform.

From his casual stance, it was apparent he had somehow been expecting her.

And then it suddenly dawned on her. They knew who she was – it was all a set-up. Kylo wasn’t here at all.

The man spoke again as Rey stood frozen in place, his voice crackling and sending shivers down her spine. “I think this will be a lot easier than anticipated.”

Rey didn’t get a chance to question him - suddenly, her staff was ripped from her grip and hurled yards away.

Her stomach plummeted through the floor. He’s a Force sensitive.

A million different thoughts began to race through her mind. He can use the Force. Could he be…?

The tall disguised man lunged toward her, drawing a short blade from his belt, but Rey ducked to the side, evading his attack. Quickly, with the Force, she cracked off a chunk of brick wall debris laying nearby and sent it hurtling towards her attacker.

He yelled out but managed to shatter the wall with the Force before it hit him.

Even with the Force, Rey never felt safe without a weapon in hand. She made a dash for her staff, but before she reached it, she felt her body thrown off course in the opposite direction and was sent flying through the air, hitting the ground fifty feet away with a heavy thud.

Seconds after impact, she heard heavy footsteps approaching from behind her. It was the first masked man, from the clearing. He was running towards her at full speed and reached for his weapon at his belt. Rey’s stomach dropped when she heard the familiar hissing sound of a lightsaber ignition. A blade shot out, clear and bright.

It was blood red.

Gasping for breath, Rey sent a wall of powerful air towards her second attacker, knocking him off his feet and flying several feet back. She scrambled up and attempted to send another onslaught of bricks toward the first attacker, but she was too slow.

Rey reached for her throat with both her hands as she felt her airway locked shut and was lifted into the air by an invisible iron grip. She could hear both men start to laugh now, as they approached her.

Rey fought against her instinct to struggle and attempted to refocus her energy. In one last effort at defending herself, she pushed outwards with the Force and tried to knock both men off their feet.

But it was useless. She continued to gasp for air.

The pair stood side-by-side, looking up at her as she dangled several feet above the ground, hanging
helplessly like a rag doll.

“Just finish her,” one of them said to the other, almost unamused.

And with that, Rey felt herself flying through the air again, blacking out on impact.
High Treason

From the cockpit of his TIE Silencer, Kylo received word from the command-and-control station on the Legacy that the remaining Resistance fighters had scattered, but had escaped without tracing. Kylo de-activated the attack systems in his fighter and swerved around to head towards the rendezvous point, ready to jump to hyperspace.

“Silencer squadron, prepare for hyperspace jump. Return to the Legacy.” Kylo spoke plainly into his headpiece and sent word to his wingmates over the first communications channel.

They had lost a few fighters in the battle – fighters he could have easily saved if he had not been distracted by what he knew was taking place below him on the surface of Jadan V. His command of his squadron had been less than ideal on this flight. But it didn't matter now. To Kylo, the most important part of this mission had never been about wiping out their contenders and securing the capital of the Praxia system – that was for Hux’s interests only.

No… it was about the girl.

It was selfish, yes, but how could he possibly keep himself focussed on battle strategy and droid armies when the girl who had been taunting him was finally within his grasp?

He switched comm channels to the Command Shuttle, which was now safely in orbit around Jadan V.

“How is she?”

He only needed to wait a few seconds before a reply came through the other end.

“No change since you last asked, my Lord.”

Kylo grumbled to himself. Did he really just ask how she was for a second time? Stick to business, he reminded himself.

“Prepare for jump to light speed. I will see you on board.”

“Yes, my Lord.” A snap of static sounded, ending their brief communication.

Kylo pushed forward on one of the central controls and sent his ship into hyperspace, and within an instant, was hurtling towards the hangar of the Legacy. He joined the stream of other fighters and parked his TIE Silencer in a ground bay. He removed his headpiece hastily, returned his helmet over his head, and leapt out of the cockpit. On the other side of the hangar, the Command Shuttle was drifting in, like a giant bird.

He could feel her already – a distant pulsing in the Force around him. He quickened his pace. Fighter pilots and troops bowed their heads to him as he passed, but he paid no attention to them. Rey was near, and that was all that mattered right now.

He felt so impatient, twitching, ready to lay his eyes on her in the flesh, and completely at his mercy. He pulled his gloves tighter onto his hands and straightened his robe.

Hux waited for Kylo at the landing point of the Command Shuttle, ready to provide an update on the attack.
“Jadan V has been secured, my Lord.”

“Any losses?”

“Minimal.” Hux looked pleased with himself.

Kylo didn't need him getting too carried away. “I wouldn't call it an entire success, General. The Resistance made a clean escape again, did they not? They should not have been allowed to intercept us at all.”

Hux grimaced.

A jet of steam was ejected from the vents of the Command Shuttle boarding ramp as it was lowered to the hangar floor.

“I take it that your Knights captured the girl?” Hux inquired.

“Hm.” Kylo said, distracted and peering up into the ship. He watched as several officers departed down the boarding ramp, followed by one of his Knights, and then the other carrying an unconscious Rey.

Kylo’s heart started pounding against his will. There she was!

“Excellent work, Supreme Leader.” Hux nodded with congratulations to Kylo, and greeted the Knights with a victorious smile. “Gentlemen.” Neither of them acknowledged Hux, much to Hux’s apparent irritation.

“You're welcome.” Kylo muttered sarcastically. He wasn't doing this for Hux or the First Order at all. Capturing Rey was for purely for his own selfish reasons.

Soan and Dagran approached their leader with confident strides. Dagran, slightly taller than his comrade, greeted Kylo with a deep bow. “It was too easy.” Even with his face masked, Kylo knew he was smiling. Dagran took too much delight in missions like these.

Kylo turned to Soan. Rey was limp in his arms, her head hanging back uncomfortably. He could see the bruises and grazes on her face and arms, but from her beating heart and steady breathing, he knew she was mostly unharmed. There were no weapons at her belt, and his Knights had already secured her ankles and wrists with binders – she would be defenceless when she eventually woke up.

Well…almost. A Force-sensitive was never truly weaponless. He would have to secure her away well.

“My Lord.” Soan nodded his head in greeting, and readjusted Rey firmly in his arms. Soan was a stronger build than Dagran, and Rey weighed nothing more than a feather to him. Kylo found himself wondering how she would feel in his arms. He had held her once before, but he had seen her differently back then – an enemy… a threat. Oh how things had changed since that day… It was definitely more complicated now.

“You have served me well, both of you.” Kylo said, trying to suppress the hunger in his voice and guarding himself with the Force, so as not to expose he feelings to his perceptive Knights. “Take her to the holding cells.”

Soan readjusted Rey again, throwing her over his shoulder like a ragdoll. The two Knights walked off with Rey, and Kylo tried desperately not to let his gaze follow them too long before turning back
to Hux.

“Your Knights are proving very useful indeed.” Hux said. “I’m looking forward to the proceedings later today. The Galaxy will know now what happens to those who conspire against Order.”

“Are all the arrangements in place?” Kylo asked, his mind still distracted by the huge shift in the Force brought by Rey.

“Everything is running on schedule, my Lord. The….”

Kylo’s eyes glazed over as Hux began to list off the proceedings of later that day. He still felt the pull of his connection to Rey, harassing him from afar now. He longed to follow his Knights so that he could deal with her personally, but he had to be seen talking business with Hux.

Hux’s voice drifted back into focus. “Now, finally with the execution of the last Jedi, the last hope of the Resistance will be snuffed out.”

Kylo’s eye twitched “She is not to be executed,” he said firmly.

Hux looked taken aback. “My Lord? Pardon me for saying so, but why? Was that not your intention all along? This girl is the reason for the downfall of the late Supreme Leader Snoke. She is the poster girl for the Resistance!”

“I’m well aware of that matter, General,” Kylo said icily.

“Forgive me, my Lord, but I don’t think leniency is the message we ought to be projecting. I thought we had public execution in place for high treason.”

Hux was starting to become irritating. Kylo fought the urge to Force choke the man. “Stop your squabbling, General. The girl is far too valuable to kill. But don’t worry yourself. She will be dealt with appropriately. It is not within my right to let high treason go unpunished.”

The corners of Hux’s mouth curled upwards into a sinister smile. He knew exactly what step-down punishment they had in place.

“Besides, she will make excellent bait for the Resistance. I thought with a mind like yours, General, you could have foreseen using her to our advantage.” Kylo’s relished in watching Hux squirm at his taunting. “No doubt they will reveal themselves within time, in an attempt to win her back. Their pathetic mantra of hope is their greatest weakness, and will be their eventual downfall.”

“Yes, you are right, my Lord.”

“In the meantime, the girl remains in my custody and her fate will be my responsibility. My plans for her do not concern you. Rest assured, however, that she will no longer be a threat to the First Order.”

“Very well, my Lord.”

Kylo could tell very well that Hux wasn’t pleased about being excluded from deciding Rey’s fate, but as Kylo’s inferior, he didn’t have a choice. He could only hope that Hux trusted him.
When Rey woke, she was lying on the floor of a tiny cell lit with dim artificial light. She shifted uncomfortably, quickly realising both her wrists and ankles were securely positioned in binder cuffs, almost completely immobilising her.

_Breathe_, Rey thought. This wasn’t a time to panic.

She wracked her memories for clues of what had happened. The last thing she remembered was the two masked figures in black… the Force sensitives. Who were they? They had attacked her… they came from Kylo Ren’s command shuttle.

_Kylo_. Where was he?

Rey shut her eyes and steadied her breathing. Reaching out with the Force, she tried to get a sense of her surroundings, but …. This wasn’t what she was used to – she felt out of touch.

Panic started to take over. She couldn't get a grasp on _anything_. What was going on? She searched and searched for something familiar, but she couldn't feel any earth beneath her – just hard, cold metal. No wind, no warmth, no earth. Wherever she was, it certainly wasn’t on land.

Which meant that perhaps her mission hadn't failed. She must be on board a First Order ship. And so her next step was to get to Kylo.

Just at that moment, her cell door was slid open, and several guards stepped into view. “Get up,” one of them barked at her. The lock on her ankle binders was remotely de-activated, allowing her to stand, but her wrists were left tightly and uncomfortably bound.

Rey looked up at the guards. She could have easily knocked down all three with the Force right then, but she wasn’t here to cause a scene or place herself in a situation more difficult than it already was.

“I demand an audience with Kylo Ren!” Rey snapped hotly, jumping to her feet.

“It’s funny you should ask,” said one of the guards, grabbing one of her shoulders and pushing her roughly her out of the cell. “We’re just on our way to see him now.”

“Oh.”

He had a slight smile on his face that made Rey feel uneasy. Something was going on … she had the sense that it wasn’t going to be as simple as walking into Kylo’s office for a chat.

Rey was escorted to a small room, simply laid out and containing only a few chairs. On the other side of the room, a wide door opened out onto the wings of what appeared to be a large assembly hall. From the side of the stage, she had a mostly direct and clear view of the stage and audience. Her stomach twisted seeing the spectacle – there must have been hundreds of stormtroopers and other First Order personnel out there. It all seemed extremely ceremonious and official.

Rey craned her neck to get a better glimpse of who graced the stage, hoping to see Kylo, but only saw one man, centre-stage and addressing his audience with fierce rhetoric. She deduced that the red-haired man must be General Hux. She had never seen him before, but had heard stories from Finn, Rose and Poe, who all had personal vendettas against him.

_“That pasty, red-haired vermin,”_ Finn had described him.
The guard escorting Rey pushed her into one of the chairs.

“We’ll wait here few minutes,” her ordered in hushed tones, leaning in to Rey’s ear so that he didn’t disturb the proceedings on the stage. “Don’t try anything funny, or you’ll have the Supreme Leader and his Knights to answer to.” He sat down nearby to watch the presentation from side-stage, but the other guards remained by her side, blasters at the ready.

*Knights?* Rey thought.

She wriggled against the binders at her wrists. “What’s going on? I thought you said you were taking me to –”

A deep spine-chilling voice spoke interrupted her. “*Hush,* little girl!”

Rey turned her head toward the voice. In the corner of the room were the two masked men clad in black from Jadan V – the ones that had knocked her out.

“Recognise us?” one of them taunted.

Rey narrowed her eyes – of course she remembered. And she remembered just how strong they were with the Force. With their watchful eyes on her, breaking free now was near impossible.

She eyed them up and down. Their attire looked so similar to Kylo’s, only more rugged and practical, suitable for combat. Rey peered down at their belts and noticed both had lightsabers secured in place. Were these the fallen students that Luke spoke of? Were they trained Jedi, now fallen to the Dark side, like Kylo?

“Who are you?” Rey growled.

“I said *hush,*” the first man spoke again. “You’ll get your turn.” He nodded toward the door opening out onto the stage. Rey took another look. Kylo had just joined General Hux on stage.

He was standing off to Hux’s side, closer to the holding room where Rey was, masked and standing tall with his hands behind his back. Rey couldn't help but marvel in the authority of his stance. He was unwavering, and looked so commanding and menacing. Hux was doing all the talking, and Kylo was simply standing there overseeing business.

Rey attempted to reach out with the Force, ready to open up and let her presence be known to Kylo, but….

“*Tut tut,*” came the mocking voice of one of the Knights behind her. “No funniness, remember.”

Kriff. This wasn’t going to work.

Rey hissed through gritted teeth, but withdrew in defeat. Surely Kylo already knew she was there – he would have been the one to order her capture after all.

Rey would have crossed her arms in frustration if it weren’t for the binders. She did her best to hold her tongue and decided to wait patiently. Following suit with everyone else in the holding room, she started to listen to Hux. At first, she couldn't understand the military jargon he was using, but it became clear that he was discussing the recent attack on Jadan V.

Hux had a gift at entrancing his audience. He spoke with such conviction that not a sound from anyone else in the assembly hall could be heard. While the audience was captivated by his monologue, or perhaps just exceptionally obedient, Rey was horrified. He was proclaiming the First
Order’s union with the Praxia system, who had resigned their military forces and sworn their allegiance after the attack on Jadan V.

The Resistance, Rey though, had they made it out alive? Poe – Finn…. What had become of them? Had Kylo brought her here to watch this announcement, just to taunt her?

Rey’s heart started to pound as she listened to the rest of Hux’s speech with careful attention.

“This victory is not without some minor set-backs. The Resistance, who so blindly thought they could intercept our attack, managed to escape…”

Rey bit her lip, praying his words were true.

“…but not without losing their most valuable weapon.”

Hux turned to face Rey, his eyes boring into her with burning hatred. Side-of-stage, she was hidden from view from the audience, but was directly in Hux’s line of sight. Her face burned from the sudden attention.

“Their precious Jedi,” Hux continued. “For such an icon of the Resistance, her capture was no difficult task.”

Rey seethed. The mocking in Hux’s voice was direct – he clearly took pleasure in asserting his dominance, and she had the horrible feeling it wasn’t about to end there.

Hux turned back to his audience, almost spitting out his words with terrifying excitement. “The girl is our prisoner now. Her punishment will be a message to all those who choose to conspire against the First Order. This is the fate that awaits those who fall foul of our Order and choose to disobey. Bring out the girl!”

The guards next to Rey jumped to attention, and she was promptly escorted onto the stage. Cheering and jeering echoed throughout the audience. A few men in the front row spat at her feet. “Rebel scum!”

Rey was escorted to the centre of the stage, where there stood a large metal apparatus, resembling the torture rack she had been bound to as a prisoner when Kylo had first interrogated her.

Rey turned to look at Kylo, who was still standing by himself, a step back from the action on stage. With the helmet over his face, she couldn’t be sure if she’d managed to make eye contact with him, although it was unlikely he’d be willing to communicate with her in front of such a large audience.

Rey’s eyes darted around her new surroundings. Hundreds of armed stormtroopers filled the hall. With Kylo to her side, two Force sensitives in the next room, and armed soldiers all around, there was no easy escape route. Panic started to set in.

Hux indicated to Rey’s guards, who grabbed her arms, and forced her face-to-face with the metal apparatus. Refusing to let Hux have the satisfaction of seeing her retaliate, she allowed the guards to pull her arms up high and secure them above her head, her chest pressed up against the rails, and leaving her back open behind her.

Hux approached her, a chilling grin on his face.

“If it were up to me,” he whispered viciously in her ear, “it would be a public execution. But as it is, you are the keeper of some very important intel. Since your head is a little difficult to crack,” he glanced over at Kylo, “we will be using a different …tactic to withdraw information from you.”
Rey hissed. “You’re a fool to think I’d tell you anything!”

She fought to keep a brave and defiant front, and attempted to rein in the fear churning inside her.

“You’re a fool to be uncompliant!” Hux snapped back, “And only a fool would resist the First Order.”

He leaned in closer still, his lips almost brushing her temples. “Your refusal will be met with punishment. You may yet change your mind…”

Rey tugged at the restraints around her wrists above her head.

“You’re out of your mind, General!” she spat out his title. “I’d rather die than join you or release information about the Resistance.”

Hux stood back and opened himself up to the audience once again. “What a pity,” he mocked. “Captain, you may proceed.”

A stormtrooper with black insignia on his shoulders suddenly stepped forward. He wielded a large weapon Rey had never seen before, but judging by the long whip that was being unwound from the main handle, and the cracking sound radiating from it, it was not good. Rey’s stomach dropped as the impending reality of her inability to escape suddenly took hold.

Kylo had not yet uttered a single word. Rey wondered what was going through his mind. She could feel that he had completely blocked off their connection. There was no getting through to him. She looked right at him, hoping that somehow he would step in stop this from happening. “Kylo” she mouthed silently, and shook her head gently. Help me, she pleaded in her mind.

Kylo’s low voice finally spoke, crackling and mechanical. “Where is the Resistance base?”

It felt like the first day they had met, when her had restrained and questioned her. Had they really sunk back to this level? Rey glared at him but remained silent.

“I’ll ask you again … where is the Resistance base?”

Still silence. Rey was determined to hold her ground. If it meant the safety of her friends, she would take on anything they did to her.

Kylo looked over to the stormtrooper with the weapon. With barely a nod and twitch of his finger, he gave the order for the first strike to be delivered. “Deliver the blows.”

CRACK.

Rey screamed, half in surprise, half in agony. The weapon was lashed against her back, the whip searing through her flesh and injecting a strong electrical current which passed through her body and left her muscles convulsing out of her control. Too occupied by the pain in her body, she could only faintly hear the cheering from the crowd.

Gasping for breath, she returned her gaze to Kylo. He continued to speak simply. “Where is the Resistance base?”

“No,” she managed to stutter out, through the spasming of her muscles.

Kylo signalled to the stormtrooper once again. Rey braced herself this time.

Crack.
This time she held her breath, so as not to let out her scream. Her body writhed again as the electric current sped through her body again. Dissatisfied with the lack of response from his captive, Kylo indicated for the third strike to be delivered.

Crack.

Rey let out a low pant and grit her teeth together. No, I won’t let him.

Then suddenly she felt the connection between them bridge, and she heard his voice loud and clear in her mind.

“Don’t do this, Rey. Don’t defy me.”

I will protect my family. Rey thought, squinting through the pain. At whatever cost. I’m not budging.

“You will join me, Rey.”

Rey looked up at him, shocked. Is that what it’s been about the whole time, she thought.

“Swear your allegiance to me, and the Knights of Ren … join the circle of Dark. The things I can show you. The things we could accomplish together. I can help you master the Force.”

Rey panted, and gritted her teeth. “No,” she said aloud.

Kylo’s fingers twitched again.

Crack.

A curdling scream escaped Rey’s lungs. There was no point being a hero about it anymore. Every strike was agony.

After everything they’d been through, why was he doing this?

***

When she had first walked onto the platform, there had been such resolve in her eyes, like she had meant to be here, and such confidence. When they had looked at each for that brief moment, there was no hate in her eyes. Why?

It didn’t matter now though, Kylo thought. She would hate him after this.

His head was a mess. Every lashing he felt, but every strike he had to lay on her. With each crack of the whip, he could feel her internal screaming, crying out in pain and terror and shame.

Why won’t she budge? The girl was too stubborn, too proud.

It didn't have to be like this – if only she had listened to him. He had offered her his allegiance, to rule the galaxy together, to start afresh together – if she had just trusted him, the Galaxy would be a different place now. Instead, the First Order remained as it was. She had sealed her fate the moment she tried to seize his grandfather’s lightsaber from him, consequently splitting it in two. That was unforgivable.

At first, he had let the pain of her rejection fuel his anger. The pain of her betrayal...

But finally, with Rey right where he had wanted her, somehow this wasn’t right. No doubt she was his enemy, but she was also his equal. Snoke had said it himself. And he had defied his own master
to save the girl, in hope that she would join him in ruling the Galaxy. She … fascinated him. Finally, he had her in the same room as him. But this wasn’t how it was supposed to be.

Blood began to drip down Rey’s back, onto the polished black floor. Tears were welling up in her eyes ….

He never intended for it to go this far…. If she just gave in, he wouldn’t have to do this to her...

But he didn’t have a choice.

Kylo blocked out his feelings. He was the leader of this empire. He had to do this – to punish their enemy. She was just tempting him – these feelings weren’t real. *Don’t give in.*

In Kylo’s moment of contemplation and silence, Hux has taken over his role of authorising the blows to Rey’s back.

“*More.*” Hux yelled manically.

*Crack.*

Rey screamed again. Her body was clearly starting to give in. She was drenched in sweat, mixing with the blood from her back. She was struggling to hold her weight against the frame, and instead was hanging limply from her arms, tied above her. The clothes on her back were ripped, turning to rags.

Kylo’s eyes darted between Hux and Rey. There was a crazed look in Hux’s eyes – almost a look of enjoyment.

“*More!*”

Rey screamed out again.

Kylo reached out to Rey again through their connection. “You’re still *holding on!*” his word echoed those of their last encounter. “Let the past die. Swear your allegiance to me, and this can stop.” His yells echoed in their connected minds. “*Please.*”

He was begging her. He needed her to give some sort of verbal resignation so he could end this torture. With every strike, he could *feel* her torment. *Why wouldn’t she just agree?*

His jaw was tight and his fists were clenched. He couldn’t take her punishment any further. The part of him that saw their future together…her pained face…… He hated to admit it to himself ….

*I can’t bear to hurt her.*

It was just like his nightmares, except now it was a reality.

Kylo was thinking fast. He was Supreme Leader of the First Order – he had no choice but to complete the punishment. If he showed mercy now, it would undermine his authority. Surely that would hurt him more?

But … the only thing that mattered right now was her.

Kylo felt something inside him shift. In a low voice, almost a whisper, he uttered his final order. “That will be enough. The girl is clearly not budging. Take her away.”

“No, we are *not* done.” Hux stepped forward.
Kylo looked up, startled by Hux’s interruption. “General, you are not –”

“This girl is guilty of high treason.” Hux spoke in undertones, so as not to let the audience hear their disagreement. “No leniency, Supreme Leader. We need to show Resistance-supporters what happens when they cross the First Order.”

Kylo’s fists tightened. Before he could rebutt, Hux was already screaming at the lasher delivering the blows. “Finish her!”

One. Two. Three more lashes were delivered, followed by painful cries from Rey.

Rey…

Kylo couldn’t bear it. “Enough!” he yelled.

But it was too late. Rey’s body hung limply from the frame. The weapon had finally taken all the energy from her and left her unconscious. The audience went wild for it.

Kylo was seething with anger. “Have her removed immediately and taken to her cell.” He yelled at Hux, trying to be heard over the ridiculous cheering from the audience. “General, deal with the proceedings. I will be retiring to my quarters – I leave you in charge. No more harm is to come to the girl. I need her alive, understood?”

“Yes, Supreme Leader.”

The look of triumph smeared across Hux’s face pushed Kylo over the edge. He stormed off the stage and right past his two faithful Knights. He couldn't bear to look at Rey in that state anymore, not with everyone around him.

What had he done? He had never felt so out of control of a situation, yet everything that just happened had been completely within his power to stop.

As Kylo made his way to his private quarters, rage boiling over with him, crowds of personnel parted quickly as he stormed past them. Two unlucky stormtroopers didn’t move quick enough – Kylo Force-grabbed each by the throat and threw them across the walkway.

Finally in the privacy of his personal quarters, Kylo slammed shut the doors and let out a cry of frustration. He ignited his lightsaber, slashing the inside of the door and sending sparks flying.

Rey. She was the only one that had ever cared for him. Her safety was in his hands. And he had just allowed her to be tortured to blackout.

It was never meant to go that far.

Kylo struggled with his thoughts. How could he be a good leader if he was letting this get to him? That damn Hux and the pressure of maintaining his image as Supreme Leader held too much power over him. Should he have carried through without sympathy to secure the confidence of his army, or should he have shown mercy to protect the girl he cared about?

The girl he cared about.

Kylo shook his head and collapsed into a chair, trying desperately to erase the images of the tortured Rey from his mind.
Defeated

Chapter Notes

Just wanted to start off by saying thank you everyone so much for the response so far! It feels so amazing to know that people out there are reading my story and enjoying it. Wherever you are in the world, I hope you continue to enjoy the story as it evolves! I love being part of the Reylo community <3

I will do my best to update every 1-2 days. If you have any requests or suggestions or recommendations, please let me know :) The next thirty or so chapters are written, and just need some cleaning up before I upload each one. I’ve been writing this story for over a year, and it’s still not finished! There will definitely be close to seventy chapters by the end… I have a few weeks off work coming up, so hoping I can finish it then – obviously trying to have it all released before TROS comes out XD

Much love,
ReyStarWalker xx

Rey felt the cold hard ground pressed up against her body, and every part of her throbbed with a dull ache. As she slowly regained consciousness, and her senses returned to her, she realised she was surrounded by darkness and silence, and was utterly alone.

She rolled over and instantly cried out in pain. She squeezed her eyes shut, waiting for the wave of pain searing through her back to subside.

Her back…

And then she remembered the punishment. The lashings.

Tears poured down her face. Every part of her hurt. She was cold. Alone.

Stifling her sobs, Rey looked around carefully. The tiny room was black, and the only shred of light entered through a tiny window at the door. It was a prison cell. She was lying on the hard metallic floor, but off to the side, a low ledge jutted out from the wall, which she guessed must be a crude bed.

Desperately cold, she began to crawl towards the ledge. Every movement of her shoulders and back was agony. She drew herself up onto the ledge, and with a final scream, she slid onto the makeshift bed. Off the floor, she would not be as cold, but she had at least hoped for a blanket. What use for comfort in a First Order prison cell? Of course.

The mere exertion of lifting herself up and pushing through the pain made her head spin uncontrollably, and she felt herself dipping back into blackness. Before she slipped into unconsciousness completely, she heard the heavy footsteps of guards outside her door. They must have heard her screaming out in pain. The light from the window was blacked out as a shadow peered through. The screen of the window was then shut with a resounding bang, and darkness engulfed her once again.
“I told you, I need her alive!”

He released his grip on the prison officer’s throat and dropped him to the ground. His uncontrolled rage was amplified by the grating texture of his helmet’s vocal modulator.

“She is alive, my Lord!” stammered the prison keeper.

It been nearly the whole day since the high treason punishment of Rey, and Kylo had only just managed to escape the formalities and meetings that followed.

“Where is she?” Kylo demanded. He knew they had taken her here to the high-security cells, but he couldn't sense her Force signature nearby.

The prisoner officer, now back to his feet, briskly guided him down the corridor to one of the cells. He opened up the window in the door for Kylo to look through. Kylo growled under his breath – he wasn’t interested in peering through a window. He pushed the officer aside and slammed open the door with the Force, sending it swinging back on its hinges and opening with a resounding crash.

Light streamed into the cell – a simple dark room, several meters wide with nothing but a shelf in the wall as a bed. Kylo’s line of sight followed the light along the floor and up towards the back of the room where Rey lay unconscious on the bed, curled up in the foetal position.

His eyes flickered down to the streaks of red across the floor – Rey’s blood – from where she had clearly dragged herself across the floor.

Kylo’s stomach churned uncontrollably.

“Hrmnnn,” Rey stated to rouse and groaned as the light streamed onto her face.

She was pale and gaunt, and her arms and hands were smeared with blood. The remains of her tattered clothes clung to her now fragile-looking body.

Kylo spoke to the officer firmly and quickly.

“Have her cleaned up and her wounds dressed. Send one of the medical droids down. She will also require rations and water. See that she receives them at the appropriate time.”

“Yes, my Lord.”

Then turning to the officer and speaking sternly through gritted teeth, he added. “No one is to enter her cell, only droids. She is weak, but I wouldn’t be surprised if she could still muster the energy for a Jedi mind trick. That’s how she escaped last time. No one is permitted to see her but myself. Do I make myself clear?”

Rey groaned again and they turned to look at her. One of hands, resting by her chin, lifted shakily to shield her eyes from the incoming light.

“That will be all,” Kylo barked at the prisoner officer. “Now!”

The prison officer gave a quick bow before running off to his duties. Finally Kylo was alone with Rey.

His heart was pounding, and he felt as if a knife was twisting slowly in his belly. He had done this to her. What this what he had wanted? The last Jedi, at his mercy.
Not like this.

What had he done?

Against his better judgement, Kylo stepped forward, following the strong pull he felt towards the injured woman on the other side of the cell.

Rey looked up at him, still shielding her eyes from the light. She was barely able to lift her own head.

“Stay away from me.” Barely a whisper escaped her lips. Her voice was dry and hoarse from lack of water.

Kylo took another step closer.

Rey leaned back, away from him, but groaned with pain, the slightest of movements causing her agony.

“Rey,” he reached out toward her.

“No--” Rey begged again. This time, her voice caught as she fought back a sob and held back tears.

Kylo stopped where he was, studying her face. He could see the fear in her eyes. Every ounce of her was pleading for him to stand back. He was the one that had put that fear there.

Only then did he realise he still wore his helmet. Quickly, he lifted it up and over his head and held it by his side.

“Rey, it’s me.”

“Stop,” Rey continued to plead. A single tear fell down her cheek. “I trusted you.”

Kylo paused to study the fear on her face again. This time her fear was mixed with disgust. Disgust at him.


Why was he feeling this way? He had put her here after. Captured her, locked her up … Why was he even here now? He should be off enjoying the successful capture of his enemy, right?

But it wasn’t a success, having her here this way. And now she wanted him gone. She was frightened of him. More than she had ever been. He had finally become the monster she had always said he was.

So he left. Without a word, he backed out, and shut and bolted the door behind him.

Was he just being a coward?

Leaning against the wall outside her cell, he sighed. He brought his gloved hand to his brow and rubbed his forehead. This would not be his last encounter with Rey. He would need to adjust to having her so close to him.

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Rey let the tears flow down free and fast.

Had she come here for nothing? She knew coming here wouldn't be easy, but she didn't think him
capable of such an act. Why did she keep giving him second chances, always hoping to see the Light in him? Why did she allow herself to be lured in by him again?

What happened to the mysterious bond they shared? She couldn't feel it now. She couldn't feel anything.

After a few minutes, the lock of her door was clicked open again and a small droid rolled in. It indicated for her to sit up, carrying dressings and medical supplies.

She may be a prisoner, but he wanted her alive. That was a start at least.

Rey groaned with pain, but knew she had to let the wound be properly dressed if her physical health was to stay intact. The droid helped her to peel back the remains of her tunic and breast band, exposing her naked torso to the cold cell. Rey was too exhausted to care about maintaining her modesty now.

The medical droid got to work – her back was washed down with a stinging liquid and expertly wrapped her in a long cotton wrap from her belly, up around her torso, and over her shoulders.

Next, she was asked to remove the clothes on the lower half her body. She winced with pain as she bent over. The droid then left her with a pair of loose black pants and a cowl. She left the cowl, unable to muster the strength to pull it over her head, but reluctantly pulled the pants on. She lay down again finally, exhaustion consuming her once more. The pain of her wounds still caused her to gasp with pain every time she moved. Despite the medical treatment, it seemed her condition did not warrant any pain medication.

Shortly after, a second droid sped into the room and did a sweep, mop and disinfect of the floor, collecting the debris of her clothes and the spare bandages left by the medical droid. The environment she was left in was clinical and cold. Still dark, still cold, but at least it was somewhere safe and clean to rest.
“How is she doing?”

The medical droid faced Kylo as it continued to stack supplies in the medical bay. “The prisoner’s wounds have been cleaned and dressed as requested.”

“Will she recover?”

“The droids' scans from the past two days show that she is still recovering from significant blood loss. She’s in a state of shock and still considerably weak. It may take some time for her to recover to normal strength.”

Kylo’s heart sunk. Several days had passed and he had not been to see Rey again, in fear that she would push him away once more. He knew he could help her, better than any medical droid or bacta could – Snoke had trained him in the ways of healing the body, and it had come in useful for his own injuries in the past.

“Is that all, sir?”

“Yes, thank you.” Kylo left the medical bay and contemplated his next plan of action.

It would be against his better judgement to go to her. He knew that she despised him. After everything he just did to her.

The look of fear in her eyes was etched onto his brain.

Yet despite everything, his feet somehow carried him back to her cell.

He didn't care anymore what it meant – why he was so inexplicably drawn to this woman who was his sworn enemy – why so much hate for what she did to him was mixed with so much concern for her wellbeing. He just wanted to protect her.

He knew he had to be careful. Use your head, not your heart, he reminded himself.

Could that be possible?

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Rey felt broken. Physically, she was drained of all energy, and was battered, cold and aching from her healing injuries. Unable to pull the cowl over her head for the pain in her back, she still wore only her bandages and loose pants, leaving her icy cold in the tiny cell. She barely had the strength to walk across the cell without the support of a wall. Her lips were cracked and mouth dry. Her hair fell down around her face in a mess. She was glad she couldn't see herself – she must have looked a mess.

Mentally, she was much worse off. She had been humiliated – not only by the lashings in front of the loud jeering audience of First Order troops, but also by her failed attempt to reach out to Kylo. She had overestimated her strength, beaten like a ragdoll by his Knights, then locked away by their Master. What a fool she had been – how had she expected this to turn out?

Confinement in this tiny cell was torture in itself. She had no sense of time. Its claustrophobic size made her yearn for the wide open landscape of Jakku. She never thought she would miss that place.
What made everything worse was her disconnection from the Force. She thought it might have been sheer exhaustion that prevented her from feeling it, but really it was the sterile and foreign environment. In the middle of space flight, there was nothing familiar for her to connect with. No earth, no wind, no water…the place was barren of the Force energy she was familiar with. Instead, it was filled with Darkness. It made the flicker of Darkness inside her purr, pushing aside the Light.

Rey fought against it – she couldn’t go there. She wouldn’t.

She was trapped in this cold, dark place, cut off from the Force.

Utterly defenceless.

And so she waited. She knew he would come again. There was no point yelling out to the guards – they never responded. She wondered if there was anyone even outside her cell.

It must have been the second or third day when he came to see her again.

Kylo stood in the opening of the door. With the light streaming into the cell from behind him, she could barely make out his face, only his dark silhouette surrounded by a halo of yellow-white light. The light hurt her eyes, which had been confined to darkness for so long now. She squinted and her eyes watered.

He stepped forward and her body instinctively recoiled in fear. This man had beat her – flogged her – to unconsciousness. Her back stung with pain from the memory. What was worse was knowing that in her physical state, she was powerless to defend herself. Never had she felt so vulnerable and exposed.

Kyo stepped back, seeing her recoil. “How are your wounds?”

The question surprised Rey.

“I’m fine,” she lied.

“You’re weak. I can feel it. Let me help you.”

“I don’t need your help.” Rey said bitterly through gritted teeth.

Kylo stepped into the centre of the cell. With the light better positioned, she could make out his features now. Pale skin, and tired dark eyes. And that look – it was the same look from Snoke’s throne room, when he had asked her to join him. His expression was soft.

“Let me help you,” he asked again, holding out his hand to her. Rey looked at it with suspicion – she was certainly not about to take it. Instead, she tucked her legs into her chest, and recoiled further into the corner of her cell.

She wanted to scream at him. She wanted to push him away from her – far away. But she was weak and tired. She could barely muster the strength to yell, let alone speak clearly through the hoarseness of her voice.

“Why should you help me? You put me here.” Rey felt her voice tremble and catch. She couldn’t help it – she was frightened. Yet … she could see the depth of his emotion in his eyes. It was like nothing she’d seen before. Years of pain and loneliness were now joined by deep sadness and regret. His guard was completely down.
This man – this monster… he really wanted to help her?

Kylo shifted uncomfortably. He looked nervous.

“Rey, I’m so sorry. What I allowed to happen to you – it is unforgiveable. Nothing can make it right. But please, let me help you now.” He spoke softly and gently.

Kylo took a final step closer to her bed, and crouched down on his knees before her. It was like how an adult kneels down to speak to a small frightened child.

Rey recoiled again, but with back already pinned against the there was no further back for her to go. Her mind told her to run, but something magnetic kept her in place. She couldn't look away from him – there was a pleading in his eyes she couldn't escape.

Kylo shook his head, defeated. “Please, Rey,” he whispered. “I’m so sorry.”

They watched each other for several moments. The room was silent except for the shallow breathing escaping his lungs, and the heavy rapid beating of her own heart.

Carefully, as if not to frighten her, he ungloved his right hand and, maintaining eye contact, he ever so slowly reached out towards her. He lowered his hand, his bare skin, over her own hand, dirty and blood-stained.

The pair gasped together, caught by surprise at the sudden jolt of seemingly electrical energy that zapped between them. Rey felt her heart jump out her chest. Their eyes locked, each wondering if the other had felt it too.

And then as quickly as it came, the electricity faded. Kylo’s hand remained paused over her own. The touch of is bare skin was unexpectedly warmth… it felt soothing, it felt…

No. She shook her head and pulled her hand away. It’s just a trick. I can't fall for this, she thought. She had to be strong and resist the pull to the Dark. That’s all he was, after all – an infestation of Darkness.

Mustering all her strength, she stood up and edged away from Kylo, leaning heavily against the wall. She didn't have a plan – she only knew she had to pull herself away from him. Fighting past the pain and her spinning head, she swayed off balance where she stood in the corner of the cell. She held out her hand to steady herself.

Kylo jumped up and held onto her upper arm. “I’ve got you.”

Rey panted. No! She couldn't let him in. She couldn't trust him. “Please. Leave me alone. Don't touch me. I …can’t.”

Kylo didn’t retreat, so she continued. “I trusted you.” She gasped for air, fighting back the tears.

Cornered like this, she felt like a caged animal. Her physical weakness was humiliating. She hated feeling so defenceless and out of control. She didn't feel human anymore. She was just existing in this torture.

Rey felt the Dark side of the Force swirl around the room. It was ever-present, inescapable.

Without warning, Rey’s head started to spin violently, and a dull ache throbbed behind her eyes. She tried to shrug Kylo’s hand off her shoulder, but she was too weak. Suddenly, she felt a heavy weight atop her back, and her shoulders were squeezed together.
“Stop, get off me!” she cried.

She clamped her eyes shut as a splitting pain struck her between the eyes.

“What are you doing to me?”

Kylo had stepped back, his hands raised. He wasn’t touching her. “Rey, are you alright?”

Am I alright? Rey scoffed at the idea of him caring. But she had no head space for Kylo right now. The lead weight on her shoulders and the searing pain in her head continued to grow exponentially and she cried out in pain. Something was inside her – something was forcing itself into her mind.

She fell to the floor. Her whole body was in a cold sweat, and she screamed as her body started to shake uncontrollably.

“Rey!” Kylo stooped down next to her and held her shoulder. “What’s going on? Where do you hurt?”

“Get your hands off me!” she snarled. Rey shrugged his hand off her shoulder forcefully.

And then another voice filled the void in her mind. Rey. Yes….A deep, slow voice. She had heard it before….

Rey doubled-over again and screamed. Her muscles were straining as she fought against the invisible crushing power pushing her to the floor.

Everything was becoming a blur, but she heard Kylo’s words echo in her mind. Don’t let it take control.

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Seeing Rey writhing on the ground in agony sent Kylo into a panic. His stomach dropped. In a fluster, he placed his hand to her forehead and reached out with his mind.

Darkness.

Darkness was spreading and engulfing her, taking advantage of her weakened condition. Her fear and hatred for him must have opened up her mind to the Dark side of the Force. And he knew that in her exhausted mental and physical state, she was not strong enough to fight it.

“Rey, you’re being drawn into the Dark. Don’t go there!” He called out to her desperately, but his words fell on deaf ears. “Can you hear me?”

There was no way to tell if Rey simply couldn’t hear him over pain, or if she was powerless to respond. Her hands were pressed up tight against her forehead, like she was trying to push the pain away. He didn’t dare touch her again, for fear of intensifying her agony.

“Rey, open your eyes and look at me. Please – Rey! Don’t let it take control!” Kylo called out helplessly.

Rey continued to writhe with pain. Her screams were becoming more and more agonising. Kylo clenched his fists. Every scream was a stab to his heart. She was in pain, and he had promised himself that he would help her. He was the most powerful man in the Galaxy, and yet he was powerless to help her.
“Fight it!”

With one last thread of hope, and against her wishes, he pulled her into his arms and shut his eyes. If he couldn’t reach her with his voice, he would have to find some other way of drawing the Darkness from her. He opened their connection to feel her heart. Immediately, the darkness poured into him, as if he had opened the floodgates to her soul.

The sensation was all too familiar. He had felt this all before, all those years ago when Snoke had first made a connection with him. Feelings of rage, guilt, sadness, inadequacy …loneliness—they all consumed him. He winced, but they were so much a part of his soul already that they couldn’t hurt him like they were hurting Rey. After all these years, he was immune.

Kylo winced as the Darkness transferred from Rey into himself. It was painful, but bearable.

With the Darkness streaming out of Rey at last, her whole body went limp. The fight had thrown her unconscious. Kylo opened his arms and lowered her to the ground, and he watched as she lay like a ragdoll on the floor. Sweat covered her face and chest, and an expression of pain was still painted across her face. But her breathing had slowed and her body was relaxed. She was free of it—for now.

Kylo stroked back his hair. Panting, he sat back and looked at the unconscious Rey.

At least she was at rest now. He prayed that the pain wouldn’t return when she woke, though she would probably be even weaker than before.

Was this really how he intended to keep her whilst aboard his ship? In this tortuous state? He had told Hux this was his intention—once weakened, she will be vulnerable and easier to convert to the Dark side. She will become a strong ally.

But was this really what he wanted—to turn her to the Dark side, so that she could join him and rule the Galaxy with him? Did he even want to rule the Galaxy? As Snoke’s apprentice, Kylo was used to carrying out Snoke’s bidding. He lived in the hope of gaining his master’s approval by carrying out his every bidding. All the teachings Snoke had promised him, and all the power he had promised Kylo…rarely did they ever eventuate. After Snoke’s death, he had come to realise he may have been nothing more than a puppet to Snoke.

As for Rey, could he really turn her to the Dark? Rey’s confessions about her encounter in the dark cave on Ahch-To had him that while she also had an inner turmoil in her soul, her pull to the Dark was never enough to draw her down the Dark path completely. He could show her…but should he?

Kylo shook his head as he tried to clear his thoughts. No! He couldn’t be half-hearted about his decisions. He needed to maintain his intended course of action.

He scooped Rey up so that he could lay her down on her bed and leave quickly before he could change his mind. Stick to the plan, he thought desperately.

It was never going to be that easy though. The heaviness of her limp body in her arms and her proximity to him, even if it was against her will, was powerfully calming. He couldn’t deny the overwhelming urge he had to protect her.

He felt her shiver. The sweat on her body had left her bandages and pants damp, which were now drawing the heat out of her. He lay her down on her bed and looked around her room. No blanket in sight.

She was utterly defenceless, and she was his responsibility now. Quickly, he unbuttoned the clasp at
his chest and released his robe from his back. What’s mine is hers now, he thought.

If his orders were being carried out correctly, no one else was permitted to enter her cell, except him. No one had to know ...

Kylo flapped open his robe and let it float down on top of Rey.

By now, the pain had relaxed off her face, and she was sleeping peacefully now. It was still relatively dark in the cell, but he could make out the contours of her jawline and her profile. And there were freckles on her nose. He’d never seen anything so delicate and angelic, so simply ...perfect. She was beautiful.

Giving in to this feeling, he reached a trembling hand forward and pushed her hair gently out of her face and tucked it behind her ear. This time, Rey didn't stir at all at his touch.

His fingers tingled as they touched the soft skin of her temple and ear.

Rey...

The sound of approaching wheels broke the moment. Kylo spun around to see a meal droid at the door. Kriff, he thought. He made a low growling sound.

His trance broken, Kylo turned to look back at Rey, tucked in underneath his own robe. What was he doing?

He leapt up and stormed past the meal droid out the door. His head was spinning.

What the hell was he doing?
Broken Trust

Rey peeled her eyes open and let her eyes adjust to the dim lighting of her cell. Had she been sleeping? She rolled over. Only then did she feel the warm heavy weight on top of her. A blanket, or something else…

She ran her hands gently over the fabric. Not a blanket – someone’s robe. The material was coarse, but it was thick and warm, and there was something oddly familiar about it. The weight of it, even the scent on it… she tried to recall the events of the day before, but her head was still a fog. What happened?

Rey pushed through the pain of her back wounds and rolled over to face the interior of her cell, looking towards the door. She must have slept for almost a whole day – three bowls of rations were lined up next to the door. The warmth and safety she felt under the heavy robe kept her from leaping up instantly to fetch the rations, but her better judgement and pang of hunger gave her the strength to roll slowly out of bed. She kept the robe wrapped around her shoulders and edged her way along the room, supporting herself with an arm resting against the wall.

When she reached the cell door, she squatted down at the first bowl. It was some sort of milky broth with chunks of meat and vegetables. It was probably a pittance of a meal for the First Order, but she was used to dregs from her time on Jakku – so in contrast, it was a fairly decent meal. Not bad for a prisoner, she thought. A smile came to her face – the simple joke was enough to lighten her spirits, even if just for a minute. The broth was cold by now, but she drank it down gratefully.

Rey finished the last two bowls – plain rice, and a bowl of bread scraps with butter – and she threw them into the corner of the room. She leaned back against the wall and wrapped herself tighter into the robe. As she wracked her brains, her memory slowly started to return. Kylo had come to visit … and something had happened to her. She remembered the agonising pain and her body writhing in pain as she fell to the floor. She had been consumed by pain, despair, anger, fear…..all at once – and she had been powerless to stop it. And then she vaguely remembered Kylo calling out to her – it was a voice of desperation. What had he said to her?

She couldn't remember what had become of Kylo after the episode – perhaps he was still with her when she blacked out. Then it occurred to her – the robe. Was it his?

Rey traced her hands over the folds of the heavy material. She knew it must be his – no one else was allowed in her cell – but she couldn't understand why he had left it with her. Was this a spark of Ben Solo, rising from the ashes? Surely not, she thought, not after everything that had happened.

She sat for a while, pondering the events of the day before, but as the time passed, she started to feel the bitter coolness of the cell again. I’m alone here, let’s just put it to good use, she thought. Rey stood and pulled the robe over her shoulders. It was utterly oversized on her, dragging along the floor, and the sleeves were wide, so sliding her arms in was no difficult task. She pulled it around her and drew the hood over her head. Warm again – she smiled.

Rey made her way back to her bed, still supporting herself against the wall, with her legs still weak from the episode the day before. With a full belly, and finally some comfort and warmth, Rey turned her thoughts to her conversation with Kylo the day before.

He had offered to help her. And she had pushed him away without giving him a chance. After what he did to her, did he deserve one?
The light in the corridor came on, letting light in through her cell window.

There was a soft knock on the door. Droids don't knock, she thought. Her heart rate suddenly spiked – it was him.

The lock on the door was slowly clicked open and the door opened a fraction.

Kylo slid in, helmet in hand, and shut the door behind him but stayed with his back pressed against the wall. As her eyes adjusted to the dim light again, Rey couldn't help but quickly eye him up and down. As she suspected, he was without his robe – his figure was more defined without it. His shoulders were broad, and his stance was strong. But pressed up against the wall, he somehow looked less menacing than before, more human – and almost as if he were afraid to approach her.

“You’re awake,” he said.

Rey tugged the robe closer around her shoulders defensively. “Don't come any closer.”

“I wasn’t going to,” he said. “How do you feel?”

“What happened to me?”

Rey watched as Kylo chose his words carefully. “What happened to you …. that was the Dark side of the Force at work.”

Rey retreated further into her corner. “You did this to me?”

Kylo sighed. “I guess it’s my own fault you would jump to that conclusion.”

Rey frowned. “It seems pretty logical to me.”

“It wasn’t my doing,” said Kylo. “The Dark side of the Force is calling to you, Rey. It’s trying to consume you.”

Rey narrowed her eyes suspiciously. “Isn't that what you wanted?”

“Rey, no. And I didn't touch you, I swear” She could see he was struggling to hold himself back from her, keeping himself glued against the wall. “It came on so suddenly. You fell to the ground. You were screaming out in pain.”

He seemed to wince at the memory of it. Screaming out in pain … A trickle of memory returned to Rey. She remembered being curled up on the ground. She remembered the searing pain in her head.

“I still can't remember much. How did it end?”

Rey saw Kylo twitch. What was he hiding?

He paused before speaking. “The fight left you unconscious.”

“You were there?” Rey said, the scene all starting to full into place in her mind. “Did you…?” she held up one edge of the robe, wrapped tightly around her still.

Kylo shifted nervously again, and visibly swallowed. Under Rey’s fierce gaze he had no choice but to speak. “Yes.”

Rey’s mind and heart was being lead in different directions. She couldn't wrap her head around this new man in front of her. He was softly spoken – gentle even. His voice was filled with remorse and
sorrow, like yesterday. Yet this was still the same man who had hunted her and tortured her to blackout merely days before. She didn't know which Kylo to believe.

Silence fell between them. Rey’s mind was racing over.

“You need to be ready, Rey. It could easily happen again.”

“Again?”

“You mind has been subject to a lot of torment. From Snoke, and from …me.” Kylo, visibly unsettled by this, hung his head in shame, but he continued to help her understand. “After everything, you’re mentally vulnerable right now. The Dark side of the Force is one to take advantage of that.”

Rey shuddered.

“Have you ever had any formal training in controlling your thoughts, blocking your mind off to intrusion…. focusing your energy …meditation?”

Rey looked blankly back at Kylo as he offered each suggestion. Fabulous, she thought. We’re going to talk again about how little I actually know.

“No,” she said slowly. She felt like a pouting child admitting it.

Kylo finally peeled himself from the front wall of the cell and made a move around the room, toward Rey.

“Stay back!” Rey snapped instinctively.

Kylo froze. Rey was surprised how quickly he responded to her request. “Rey, you are powerful, but you need a teacher. You need to protect yourself from future episodes. I can help you.”

Rey shook her head, trying not to let Kylo’s surprisingly soothing words get to her. She didn't want to be fooled by him. She shouldn’t believe anything he said – she wouldn’t let him take advantage of her.

“You can't be my teacher. Why would you even help me? After what you did to me. How can I trust you?” Kylo opened his mouth to speak, but Rey cut him off, her voice rising in desperation, trying to make sense of everything in her head. “You had me tortured for your own political agenda!”

“That’s not what I wanted. It was Hux’s ruling –”

“--- which you authorised.”

“I shouldn’t have.” Kylo raised his voice. He was clearly starting to become agitated. One of his hands was pressed to his forehead, rubbing his brow furiously. “That never should have happened. I regretted it immediately. I’m … livid.” He slammed his other fist into the wall behind him.

Whether he was actually angry or just frustrated with himself, Rey couldn't tell. But Kylo was clearly becoming increasingly impatient. It frightened her, how easily he had snapped, even if it was to vocalise regret.

He took a deep breath and lowered his trembling hand, extending it out towards Rey one more time, in attempt for her to reason with him. “Please, let me help you.”

His eyes were pleading.
Don't trust him. Rey’s gut instincts screamed against her softening heart.

“I don’t need your help. Here—” Rey shrugged off his heavy robe in an act of defiance. “Take your stupid cape back.”

“It’s not a cape…” Kylo muttered under his breath. Rey heard it and shot him a dirty look. She slid off he bed onto two feet, and made an attempt to throw the robe at him from across the cell. It fell pitifully to the floor directly in front of her, and she screamed out in pain from the abrupt movement. It was louder than she had expected and she covered her face with her hands in embarrassment. With the side of her foot she kicked the robe further across the floor, towards Kylo’s feet.

Kylo clenched his fists at his side. “Rey…. let me help you. At the very least I can get some better medical supplies – bacta for the pain.”

Sensing he was about to approach at any moment, Rey held up her hand and shrunk back into her bed. “No! Just … don’t come near me.”

“I’m not going to hurt you again. You have my word.”

“I can't trust your word.”

Kylo gritted his teeth. “I’m not leaving until you trust that I won't hurt you again.”

“Then you’d better get comfortable,” Rey retorted.

She was bickering with him like a child, but she didn't care. As long as she could keep the distance between them, she felt a little safer.

Rey lay down on her bed and curled up, facing the wall. Secretly she wished he would help her – the normally relentless dull ache pulsing through her body was now searing with sharpness from her embarrassing attempt to return his robe.

She felt Kylo’s presence wash over her. He was reaching out to her with the Force. She tried to push back with the Force, but nothing came. Kriff.

“Stop it,” Rey muttered darkly.

“I can feel how much pain you're in. Let me take it away.”

“I said no. Stay out of my head.”

Rey was naturally stubborn, so her rejection of his offer to help came easily. But she was now starting to wish she hadn’t thrown his robe away. It was cold.

“How can I get you to trust me?” From where she lay, curled up facing the wall, she heard him take a step forward towards her. Her skin prickled with anxiety.

“Promise you won’t come any closer.”

Rey could feel him thinking carefully, mulling over his options. Clearly he was unsatisfied with her suggestion. After a long pause though, she heard his answer. “I promise.”

She heard him sit down where he was, fold his arms, and lean back against the wall. He didn't say anything. He withdrew his Force presence from her, leaving her to lie in pain in relative privacy. But
he didn't physically leave. He sat there.

And there they remained – at either end of the cell, in crisp silence.

When Rey started to shiver again, her teeth uncontrollably chattering, she felt the heavy weight of Kylo’s robe fall over her. Without leaving his post at the door, he had used the Force to cast it over her, keeping his promise that he wouldn't come near.

Rey said nothing, but finally warm again, she was able to close her eyes and sleep.
Our star-crossed lovers might finally be making some progress! Enjoy this one guys - it's on the longer side, but hopefully that makes up for the late update. As always, thanks for your patience and feedback :) I'm loving being part of this passionate little community! xx

Rey’s skin prickled in the cold. It was mostly dark, except for a dull crimson light that filled the enormous room, casting an eerie blood-red shade over the pristine glossy black floor Rey stood on.

She could feel the Darkness swirling around her – the side of the Force that she had been trained to fear. Sounds, voices … quiet whispers of long-forgotten voices echoed in the space and filled her ears.

The sound of the voices drew Rey forward. She stepped onward, one foot after the other, drawn irresistibly to the source of darkness luring her in.

Through the darkness, a figure started to emerge. A figure on an enormous throne. Tall…clad in gold…

Snoke.

Before she had time to resist, Rey’s body was yanked forward towards him, by the power of the Force unavailable to her. Her face came within mere inches of Snoke’s. She felt his cold deathly breath on her skin.

Rey couldn’t move – her arms were locked by her sides, and her ankles held tightly behind her. She started to panic. Her eyes flicked side to side looking for anyone or anything to help her, and avoiding the intense stare of the monster before her, holding her in place.

Snoke raised his long pale hand and rested it on her cheek, drawing her ear to his mouth.

“Nothing can protect you from me,” he whispered mockingly into her ear.

Still frozen in place, Rey couldn’t speak. She shut her eyes and called out to the only one who could help her now. *Ben, please!*

Snoke laughed and dug his long thick nails into her cheek. “He’s not here to save you this time.”

Slowly, the figure of Snoke shrunk, and his face started to morph. Dark, sunken eyes and deep wrinkled skin, hidden in the shadows of his black hood, drawn low over his face… there was something oddly familiar about him, yet terrifying.

His voice was deep, purposeful and drawling. “Good…” He praised her, forcing his way into her mind.

Rey, still frozen in place, felt the sides of her throat slowly start to compress, and the invisible claws of his mind tearing open her own. She gasped for air as the new man holding her in place laughed.
"I can feel your anger. It gives you focus, makes you stronger."

Ben! Rey yelled out in her mind. Ben, help!

***

Rey jolted awake. She panted, clutching at her throat. She was covered in sweat.

“Are you alright?”

There he was. Just like he had said.

Kylo was sitting against the other side of the cell, his hands propped up on his bent knees. He had removed his gloves, which were draped over his helmet next to him.

Rey nodded quickly. “I’m fine.” She pushed the hair out her face. What had that dream been? It was too disturbingly real. “How long have I been asleep?” she murmured.

“Just a few hours.”

“Really?” It hadn’t felt that long. Rey rolled onto her front and propped herself up on her elbows, looking over at Kylo. “Did you sleep?”

“No.”

“But you stayed the whole time?”

“Yes.”

An unexpected fluttering in her heart made her pause. Kylo seemed like a completely different person – was he really so guilt-ridden by what had happened to her? Or should she fear him for it?

Rey sighed. It was time they talked. “Why am I here Kylo? What do you want from me?”

Kylo hung his head and looked into his hands resting in his lap. There was a look in his eyes that softened his whole expression. It was a hint of the lost Ben Solo, lost and confused in a world he didn't belong to.

“I don't know anymore.” He shook his head. He sounded utterly defeated.

But Rey wasn’t satisfied with his answer. After everything he had said, and after everything she had endured …

“You don’t know? You put a bounty on my head. You were set to conquer me, for all the Galaxy to witness. Why are you keeping me here?”

“You came here of your own free will,” Kylo said into his lap.

Rey’s heart skipped a beat. It was true that she had sought him out. But … how did he know?

“Do you deny it?” Kylo prompted.

“No,” Rey said through gritted teeth.

“So perhaps I can ask, why are you here?”

To save her friends. To bring their enemy back into the Light. To end the war. But Rey knew deep
down it was more than that. The dreams… their Force connection … her call to the Dark. She still needed someone to help her understand her place within the Force.

As if in the same wave of thought, Kylo leaned back into the wall and let out a sigh.

“Rey, I need you,” he said softly. “I still don't understand it, but the Force connected us for a reason.”

Rey failed to form words. Need, he had said.

Then he looked straight into her eyes. “I don't know why, and I don't know how. But it’s undeniable. I know you feel it too.”

Rey knew he was right, but out of sheer habit, she fought against him. “It’s falsehood. Snoke forged it to manipulate us.”

“You and I both know that’s not true. Our connection brought us together, even after his death.”

“I…”

Of course she knew it was true. Was there any point in denying it?

The sound of the cell door latch being unlocked resonated in the cold empty room. The door slid open, and a small meal droid rolled in and deposited a bowl of plain looking food on the floor next to the door. Kylo watched as it came in and out, taking no notice of him.

Food…. Rey still had an odd relationship with food.

Rey contemplated her next move. She had made it quite clear that she wanted distance from Kylo, yet her next meal was just inches from him. Years of food deprivation on Jakku had left her with the inability to leave food untouched. Her stomach growled painfully at the mere thought of the food sitting there next to Kylo.

Rey tried to reason with herself. He could have hurt her when she was asleep. He could have killed her by now. But he hadn't.

Without taking her eyes off Kylo, Rey slunk her way off the bed and edged her way around the room, one hand keeping a steadying feel of the wall, the other keeping the robe securely around her shoulders. Kylo watched quietly as she shuffled slowly closer.

Now mere feet away from Kylo, she squatted down next to the wall and reached out for the bowl, quickly snatching it towards her. Kylo continued to watch her, so she narrowed her eyes at him suspiciously. He snapped his eyes away from her and looked out into the cell in front of him.

Rey returned to her meal – another bowl of plain soup and a slice of bread. She tore the bread in half and made a start. It was still warm.

A loud gurgle interrupted her mid-mouthful. It was Kylo’s stomach.

Of course he was hungry, Rey thought. If he hadn't left the cell in that many hours, he must be ravenous.

Rey looked down at the other half of bread in her hand, and then back at Kylo. “Here,” she said, extending it towards Kylo.

Kylo shook his head. “No, it’s yours.”
Rey didn't push it. She happily devoured the rest of the bread and soup.

“Don't you have important First Order business to attend to?”

“You are my business,” a hint of jest in his voice. After seeing Rey’s confused face, Kylo looked away. “Actually, I do have things I should be doing, but it’s nothing Hux can't attend to himself.”

“Uh-huh?” Rey said through a mouthful.

Kylo looked back at her. “I’d much rather be here with you … even if I’m just sitting in the corner.” He shifted a little where he sat and stretched out his back.

“But aren’t they suspicious of you spending so much time here?”

“No – in fact, they probably think I’m here trying to break you.”

Rey raised her eyebrows at him. “Break me?”

“Break you – turn you to the Dark side.” He waved his hands vaguely in front of him “I made it quite clear I wanted you alive so that I could make you a valuable ally to the First Order.”

Kylo, watching the thoughts turn over in her head, added, “They probably think it’s going well, giving all the screaming and commotion that happened yesterday.”

“They must think I’m a pretty pathetic Jedi.”

“I think they underestimate how strong you are.” Kylo said. “I don’t.”

Rey shook her head. “I’m not strong.”

“You’re stronger than me.” Kylo sighed. “What you went through yesterday – you fought off what I simply crumbled to.”

“What do you mean – the same thing happened to you?”

“Yes, when I was a boy. It called to me. Snoke called to me. I fell to the Dark side, and that remains my fate. But you – you fought it off.”

“It’s not your fate, Kylo.”

“It’s too late for me now. Besides, this a role I have to fulfil – you can’t imagine the pressure on me to perform. The fate of the First Order … the fate of the whole Galaxy rests on my shoulders…”

“The fate of the Galaxy depends on you returning to the Light.”

Kylo sighed. “You don’t understand. You’ve failed if that’s why you came – to bring me back.”

“I won’t give up on you. Even the slightest hope, I’ll still try. Perhaps I’m being naïve. I did really believe you could turn. Now I’m not so sure. Perhaps I’m just a fool.”

“Not a fool. Not you.” Kylo leaned in towards her. His arm flinched, as though her were about to reach out and hold her, but he stayed planted firmly on the ground. “You’re right. I feel the pull to the Light every day. I struggle with it every minute of every hour, of every day. But it’s not the path I chose. It’s not a path I can choose.”

“Why won’t you?” Surely he could sense the frustration in her voice.
“It’s not something you can come back from Rey. This is my fate now.”

Rey frowned.

Kylo shifted in his seated position against the wall so that he could face her directly. “I feel the same fight in you, Rey. The pull to the Dark. You fight with it every day.”

It was like he had just read her heart and soul. Rey felt her eyes begin to well up with tears. “I don’t want to go there.”

“Don’t worry. I won't let you fall victim to it again.” Kylo reached out his hand and touched her knee.

She tried not to flinch from the energy that suddenly pulsed through her. She could feel him. He was being honest. She did believe him … her heart started to hammer in her chest.

“Let me look after you Rey.” He stroked her knee with his thumb. “Please.”

“How do I know if I can trust you?” Rey whispered. She wiped a tear from her eye.

Kylo sighed. “You can’t. I know it will take time to regain your trust, but I promise you … I’m never going to hurt you ever again. Nothing bad is going to happen to you while you’re here with me.”

Rey paused. “So, you're not going to kill me?”

“No.”

A million thoughts were rushing through Rey’s mind. She looked down at Kylo’s hand caressing her knee. He made her nervous.

Rey dug deep down into her heart – the part of her heart which wanted to believe that Ben Solo was still in there. Too long now she had been frightened for herself – she had forgotten why she had originally come. Plus, that deep feeling that she had tried to hide deep within herself – the sense of belonging that she knew would come with learning more about the ways of the Force. he was the only one...

“Teach me,” she whispered.

Kylo hadn't expected this. He tilted his head slightly. “What?”

“You're the only one who can show me my place in all of this. I’ve been so lost. But the Force keeps bringing us together. It keeps sending me … visions, and I don't know what they mean. I need to know what it all means.”

“You…” Kylo stammered. “You want me to teach you?”

“Yes,” Rey said simply. “But… that only. Nothing else.”

“Aright,” Kylo nodded, still looking utterly surprised at Rey’s turn around, but trying to roll with it. “Dark, Light – let's forget it all. No talk of sides. We can figure this out together.”

Rey could help but smile a little. “That sounds like a plan.”

“So does that mean you trust me?”

“No, but I will let you help me – for now.”
Kylo nodded – he knew that was the best he was going to get from her. “Are you ready to leave this cell?” Kylo stood up and offered Rey his hand. “I want to make sure you have somewhere safe to rest and recuperate first.”

Rey took Kylo’s hand, and he helped to pull her up.

“But aren’t I supposed to be a prisoner?”

“Hmmm, well…. not unless I proclaim you as my new apprentice.”

“Kylo….”

“I’ve been thinking about it. It’s just a façade – for your safety. It might be the easiest way to get you out of here.”

Only when he squeezed her hand did she realise she had still been holding on.

“Fine.” Rey freed her hand and pretended to sweep her hair out of her eyes. The touch of Kylo’s hand lingered on hers – it was tingling.

Kylo peered out the tiny cell window in the door. “I’m going to need my robe back. And we might need some binders for you.”

Before Rey could protest, he swiftly left the cell and returned with a solid pair of binders, indicating for Rey to put them on herself. Rey raised an eyebrow.

“I promise, it’s just for the walk there;” Kylo assured.

Rey crept up onto her tip toes and peered out the cell window. Surely all this wasn’t necessary?

“There are guards and officers out there,” said Kylo. “Not to mention security cameras. Until I can complete the fake conversion, and until we get you into some proper clothes, I think you have to parade as a prisoner. Once in my private suite, you’ll be able to roam free – no one else is allowed in. I promise.”

Rey gritted her teeth. She wasn’t ready to feel trapped again, but she knew if she was going to move forward, she had to leave the cell – and safely.

She shrugged off Kylo’s robe and swapped it for the binders. The cold air licked at her skin – her bandages were the only coverage on her upper body, hugging her slim figure. She glanced up at Kylo and caught him looking at her. He looked away quickly. Rey’s cheeks burned.

Kylo drew his helmet over his head, returning to his usual menacing appearance, and straightened out his clothes. Then he took the robe and slung it around his shoulders, clipping it in place at his neck and shoulders. Rey couldn’t help but notice how strong and commanding he looked in his full uniform.

“Are you okay to walk?” His voice was coarse and scratching through the helmet’s vocal modulator. It reminded her of Takodana when they had first met, when she had expected some sort of monster beneath the mask.

“I’ll be okay,” she nodded firmly.

“Well then – welcome to the Legacy.” Kylo pushed open the cell door open and walked out with Rey, a hand guiding her gently on her back.
Bright light streamed into Rey’s face, forcing her to squint and shield her gaze with her cuffed hands. Now in the light, she was suddenly conscious of how she must look. Blood stained bandages. Thin loose black pants … bare feet. And her hair – she rarely wore it out, but now it swung freely over her shoulders. She didn’t want to imagine what it must look like now – knotted and unkempt.

She walked a few steps behind Kylo, to his side. He walked slowly allowing her weakened body to keep up. As they made their way out of the high security cell and into the main ship, she lost count of the corridors and corners they turned down – it was the grandest and most lavish ship she ever could have imagined, even more than the Supremacy. She could feel the stare of the officers they passed by, but no one stopped to question them.

After seeing him so gentle and softly spoken for the past few days, she had forgotten that Kylo was the Supreme Leader and probably still the most feared man in the Galaxy. His tall and broad figure dominated any space and his presence brought an air of authority and terror – she could sense the fear in everyone he walked past.

“Keep your gaze down,” Kylo whispered.

“Everyone’s watching,” Rey muttered through gritted teeth.

“Don’t worry about them.” He looked back at Rey. “How are you feeling?”

Admittedly she was already exhausted from the walk and was starting to feel light in the head. Her body felt uncomfortably warm and clammy. She wriggled against her restraints.

“I don’t like feeling trapped.”

“You look pale. Hold on. We’re almost there.”

The pair eventually reached a narrow entrance room surrounding a set of ornate black doors leading to an elevator. Two Stormtroopers with red shoulder lapels guarded the entrance. Both snapped to attention at the arrival of Kylo, but he stormed past without acknowledging them.

Kylo entered a multi-digit code into the security panel and preceded Rey into the elevator. It was a short ride, up only one or two storeys but the lurch of the elevator upwards was enough to throw Rey’s weakened body off balance. She fell back against the wall, catching her balance as best she could with her wrists still restrained.

“Rey!” Kylo grabbed her around the back of the shoulders.

“I feel….” Rey stuttered through her dizzying vision and lurching stomach, “…strange.”

“C’mon.” He hooked his elbow under her knees and swept her up into his arms. He shrugged her into position, let her head rest securely against his bicep.

The elevator doors opened up and Kylo strode forward into the large ornate reception chambers with Rey in his arms.

For a while, Rey lost all sense of direction, even up and down, as her head spun uncontrollably. White noise filled her ears as she drifted back and forth into unconsciousness.

The next thing she knew, she had been lowered onto a large plush mattress and had a cool damp cloth placed across her forehead.

“What … is this?” Rey’s spinning head slowly started to settle. She ran her fingers through the fabric
beneath her. She had never felt anything so divinely soft.

“It’s silk,” came Kylo’s voice, now back to normal with the removal of his helmet.

Rey tried to roll over to get a better sense of where she was, but Kylo placed a gentle hand on her shoulder. “Just lay still for a while, while your strength returns.”

Kylo pulled a chair up to the side of the bed and collapsed into it. “Don’t forget you’ve lost a lot of blood. Plus you haven’t properly slept in days. It’s going to take some time to heal. Just rest – you’re safe here.”

Rey peered around the room. This must be Kylo’s bedroom, she thought. It was a clean and organised space – a four-poster bed, closet, and a few chairs were all that she could see. Kylo’s helmet sat on a pedestal by the door, and his robe was thrown over the end of the bed. An open pair of sliding doors let her view into the rest of his private living quarters – a desk, sitting area, and small dining table filled the moderate space. Most of the décor were in hues of black and dark greys, but the furniture was carved ornately from a dark oak. All the darkness was very suiting for Kylo Ren, she thought – dark, brooding … lonely.

As Rey looked around the rooms, she noticed Kylo constantly watching her, reading her expressions, as if he was anxious to see what she thought of his home.

“You keep looking at me,” she said, glancing at him out of the corner of her eye.

Kylo shook his head, snapping himself back to reality. “Sorry, I …” He stood up abruptly, as if looking for something to occupy himself. “Did you need anything?”

“No … thank you,” she said gently. He was really willing to cater to her needs?

“Water.” He nodded to himself. “I’ll get you some.”

He strode off briskly. Rey thought he seemed nervous. Surely not the Supreme Leader of the First Order, though – nervous?

Admittedly, she did feel much safer in this place, even if she was still technically a prisoner. Rey melted back into the plush bed, indulging in the warmth and softness of it all.

Unfortunately, it was a blissful moment shattered too soon. A hard knock on the suite entrance doors jolted her back to high alert.

An unexpected guest had arrived…
An Old Darkness Reignited

Kylo’s hands were trembling. *Rey was in his bed.*

And she was safe. That’s all that seemed to matter to him right now. How could he care about his other duties when the girl who’d been haunting his dreams was finally … here!

His absence on the bridge would not have gone unnoticed and he knew he had missed several scheduled meetings. Hux was probably fuming with frustration. They would have known he was spending all this time with their prisoner, but he prayed they saw it only as an attempt to convert her. Even if they had any suspicions, they had no right to question him. He had made it quite clear to Hux that he would turn her from the Light side and make her a powerful ally of the First Order. Frankly, he didn’t care what they thought now.

But what was he going to do with her? He had already vowed to himself that he wouldn’t let her fall to the Dark side. It was calling her, taking advantage of her … it was something he wanted to fight. He wouldn’t let her become what *he* had become – a monster, a failure … a murderer.

*BANG BANG.*

Kylo jumped as the entrance doors to his suite were hammered on from the outside.

“*Master Ren!*” a voice called out.

It was Dagran.

*Kriff,* thought Kylo.

He turned back and looked at Rey, who was looking at him with wide eyes. “You said no one else could come here!” she said, betrayal written across her face.

“The office and anteroom are for public use – its where I have some of my meetings. But my private quarters – no one comes to my private living quarters, except….”

Kylo had always invited his Knights into his private space. Only one of them would have the nerve to come calling at this time of evening.

“Stay where you are – and keep quiet. I’ll sort this out.”

As Rey nodded, Kylo pulled the sliding doors shut, sealing off his private suite, and strided towards the entrance hall. Using the Force, he de-activated the lock, letting the doors to his office swing open.

“Ren!” called out Dagran, his arms open wide in greeting.

Now well-rested from his journey, Dagran’s spirits and energy were once again at their usual high. He had removed his helmet already, now off-duty. Tall and lanky, blue-eyed and blonde-haired – he was the baby face of the group, but deceptively cunning and quick.

“Dagran, to what do I owe this unexpected pleasure?” Kylo said grimly. He didn’t greet his comrade with equal enthusiasm, and he hoped his coldness might send his guest away sooner.

He was sorely out of luck. Dagran’s gusto wasn’t a force to be reckoned with.

“I tried to get in touch with you yesterday, but you were not to be found. General Hux told me you
were preoccupied with the conversion our Jedi captive.”

“Hux…” Kylo growled. He didn't trust Hux with his Knights one bit. “What were you meeting with him for?”

“Nothing. He sought me out himself. He was hoping to get some information about the process from me.” Dagran shrugged. “Of course I wasn’t much use – I’ve been just as much in the dark as everyone else.” He pouted playfully.

“Hux should know better than that by now, not to question me behind my back. That weasel will do anything to find a weakness in my leadership.”

“Anyway don't try distract me from the main passage of discourse here, Kylo. Have you broken her yet?”

“Broken her?” Kylo was suddenly taken aback by Dagran’s choice of words.

“You know … is she one of us now?”

“Oh,” Kylo stuttered. “That is not your concern, Dagran.”

Dagran pouted again and folded his arms. “Oh c’mon, Kylo.”

“She is strong, even after her ordeal. This isn’t going to be simple.”

There – at least he wasn’t lying, Kylo thought.

“So…where is she?” Dagran grinned slyly at his leader.

“Excuse me?” Kylo was getting tired of Dagran’s enthusiasm. He was exhausted and desperate for privacy.

“I know you're hiding her in here.” He peered over Kylo’s shoulder hopefully. “The ship is buzzing with rumours that you took the prisoner to your lair.”

“Tongues will wag, won’t they,” Kylo said dryly.

It was no use. There was no point trying to lie to Dagran. He was a natural with the Force, and particularly attuned to people’s truth radars. He was a master charmer and manipulator.

And it was all becoming a game for him.

“Where are you hiding her?” Dagran proclaimed loudly. He strode quickly across the room to the doors to Kylo’s private suite.

“Dagran!”

“What, am I no longer a welcome guest in your home?” Dagran mocked playfully.

The pair eyed each other off, locked in an intense stare between Master and Knight. But Dagran’s zest for fun had taken over and all hierarchy was lost to him now. Before Kylo could stop him, he had swung open the doors to Kylo’s private suite.

Through his office, the two men had a perfect view directly into Kylo’s bedroom, where Rey was sat up on Kylo’s bed, silk sheets pulled up to her chest in an attempt at modesty. Kylo blushed realising that from here, she looked like she wasn’t clothed at all behind his bed sheets.
Rey made a small sound of surprise. Half frightened and half betrayed, she shot Kylo a dark look.

“Well well well…what do we have here?” Dagran laughed, stepping forward towards Rey. “We meet again – the famous Jedi, Rey of the Resistance!”

“Get out.” Kylo growled. He grabbed Dagran by the back of his shirt and pulled him out of the room, slamming the doors behind him.

Dagran, totally unruffled by Kylo’s rage, winked at his leader. “I didn't think you had it in you.”

Still seething at his childish Knight, Kylo narrowed his eyes in confusion. “What do you mean?”

“You know….” Dagran waves his arms around suggestively. “…claiming the prisoner as your own?” he chuckled smugly. “Is she for sharing?”

Was it possible this man was suggesting that Kylo was … that Rey was …

The wildest animal broke loose inside Kylo and sent him into full fury. He grabbed the front of Dagran’s shirt and pushed him against the wall.

“You make another suggestion like that and I will personally send you out an airlock.”

“Alright, alright,” Dagran said, still unable to wipe the cheeky grin off his face. “I didn't want your sloppy seconds anyway.”

Kylo slammed him harder into the wall. “I don't appreciate the banter, Dagran,” he growled.

Dagran looked carefully at Kylo. The joke was clearly over. Finally, he was silenced by his leader’s obvious display of disapproval.

With the way he felt right now, Kylo was sure he must have flames licking off his back. He was infuriated by what Dagran had been suggesting. But of course, how could his young Knight know any better? He could only make assumptions based on what he saw, and with Rey in his bed and apparently naked, Kylo couldn't blame Dagran for making conclusions like that.

Dagran just has an immature dirty mind, Kylo thought to himself.

Kylo pressed his lips together and tried to relax his stance. In time, he would need to tell his closest allies what was really going on with Rey, but for now…. Rey needed him, and she needed privacy. So Dagran would need to leave.

“I will meet with Soan and yourself tomorrow.” Kylo released Dagran. “For now, it's time for you to leave.”

The young man brushed down the front of his shirt. “Yes, my Lord.” He looked back towards the doors closing off Rey from view. “I look forward to our meeting tomorrow.”

Kylo watched as Dagran tucked his hands into his jacket pockets and made a smooth exit, offering a quick bow before strutting out of Kylo’s suite.

Kriff, Kylo thought. How the hell was he supposed to explain everything? He certainly hadn’t thought that far ahead.

He took a few deep breaths before returning to the private part of his suite. He knew these rooms weren’t sound proof and Rey would have heard everything…
Kylo pushed open the doors. “Rey…? I’m so-“

Something was wrong.

Rey was curled up on the floor next to the bed, her head pressed against her knees. She was moaning softly. “Kylo…” she whispered softly on hearing him approach.

Kylo’s whole body was thrown into fight or flight mode. Adrenaline pumped through his body. There was no doubt in Kylo’s mind that this was another episode.

“Rey!” He threw himself onto the floor next to her.

She clasped her hands over her eyes and squeezed her head tightly. “No no no no.”

“Rey, what's going on?” He tried to prise her hands away from her head so he could get to her easier, but her whole body was stiff, as if every muscle were contracting involuntarily.

“Help….me,” Rey whispered.

“Look at me. Please, Rey. I need you to look at me.”

Rey groaned and shook her head. She was beginning to hyperventilate, and her fingertips were digging into her skin.

“Sno…”

“What?” Kylo’s heart started to race a million beats per minute. Surely not…

“It’s …Snoke.” Rey gasped between her staggered breaths. "I can hear him."

Kylo immediately pushed his hands underneath Rey’s, and held onto either side of her head. He shut his eyes and opened up her mind.

It was too easy.

Pure Darkness, pure evil, was circulating through Rey with a power she just didn't have the strength to fight off.

Her mind had been torn open by something … or someone. Something was trying to possess her mind – and it was more than just a simple call or temptation to the Dark side of the Force. It had intent.

He hadn't realised it before, back in her prison cell, but he knew what this was now. It was too familiar to him.

Damn it. Damn it all!

“Don't listen to him, Rey!”

Rey had her face pressed up against her knees, her hands still against her ears, and locked over Kylo’s hands, as if to squeeze out the pain inside her head.

Kylo wrenched both her hands out of place and pulled them forward. “Hold my hands. Look into my eyes.”

Rey lifted her head slowly and looked up at Kylo. The fight inside her mind was clear from her
expression - pain was plastered across her face.

“No!”

“Just let it go Rey.”

She shook her head. “He’ll … get in my head,” she gasped.

“I won’t let that happen. I’m going to protect you. But you have to let go.”

“Can I trust you?” she stuttered.

*You have to,* Kylo thought desperately. Rey had no choice but to trust him, and Kylo hoped she could see that. Her eyes darted back and forth across his face, reading him, almost *pleading* with him.


Rey let out a shaky breath as she let the walls in her mind crumble down. Now free flowing, the Darkness gushed forth, but Kylo funnelled it directly into himself, barring Rey from its rampage. Every pain she had felt, every dark thought she had had – it was within him now.

And so was his old Master.

The deep menacing voice of Snoke filled his ears.

*You are still a failure.*

Kylo’s hands trembled with anger where they still held Rey’s delicate face. “I beat you once! And I’ll *beat you again*!” Kylo yelled aloud.

An unfamiliar hollow laugh filled his mind. It wasn’t Snoke …

The strange Dark prescence quickly dissipated from him, but the he was left behind with all the Darkness he had just filtered from Rey. It fuelled him. It transformed him. It was all too much a part of him already to hurt him physically, but he hated it. Fury had taken over and the wild creature within him sent him storming out of his bedroom. He was a monster – he was unsafe – and he had to get away from Rey.

Kylo grabbed the nearest thing he could find, his desk, and threw it violently across the room, breaking it in two pieces against the wall. Papers and texts scattered everywhere. He kicked the chair against the wall and stormed over to another corner of the room. His hands curled up into balls and smashed against the wall.

Chest heaving, and his blood boiling, he yelled out as loud as his body would physically let him. “Arghhhhhh!!!!”

He thought he had escaped Snoke. He had *killed* him. He had been *free* of him. Had he really survived beyond his physical form, only to haunt Kylo from beyond the grave?

But … *was* it Snoke? Now that he thought of it, the voice had been similar to Snoke’s, but … Perhaps something else had used Snoke’s voice just to taunt him? Or was it just an old memory coming back to mock him?

One thing was certain though. He had to protect Rey at all costs. He wouldn’t allow what Snoke had done to him, to happen to Rey. Snoke had lured him in, whispered in his ears … all those years ago.
He was sure that must be what Snoke, or whoever it was, was after – another powerful Force-sensitive to carry out his bidding. Rey was unusually strong with the Force - she was a target.

_Not Rey_, he thought, _please not Rey._

“Kylo?”

Kylo whipped around and saw Rey standing just meters from him, supporting herself against the doorway.

“Are you okay?” she asked. Her voice trembled. She was still extremely weak from the episode.

Kylo looked down at the wreckage of the room and back at Rey. He suddenly wished he had been better able to control his temper. He didn't want her to see him like this – as the monster she had once described.

He shook his head.

There was nothing they could say. Kylo knew what Rey had felt, and Rey knew what Kylo had felt. They had been acutely linked in that moment he had drawn the Darkness from her – their minds had been connected.

“Are _you_ okay?” Kylo echoed her question.

Her face scrunched up in pain and confusion. “I don't understand. You _killed_ him,” said Rey.

“I _did_.” Kylo said, his temper flaring again. He slammed his fist into the wall again “Damn it! I don't understand.”

“So it wasn’t really him?”

Kylo sighed, and clenched his fist against the wall, trying to calm his anger. “No – just an echo I think. His signature – his being – it’s etched onto your mind now – he _tore apart_ your mind on the Supremacy – made his mark. He did the same to me. And now even after death, he’s still haunting us.”

“You heard him too?”

“He’s taunting me beyond the grave. That bastard.” He shook his head. “I thought I was free of him. I want to be free of this pain.”

Perhaps he had said too much – he let his last comment slip without thinking. He could see the understanding in Rey’s eyes, and he knew that she knew now too – he had also suffered these same episodes of Darkness, a long time ago. Not just in his nightmares, but also in his waking hours – the only difference to Rey was that he was almost immune to the physical pain that Rey had to endure. The Darkness was already such a part of him that he was simply numb to the pain now.

Rey walked towards Kylo, still shaky on her feet, and rested a hand over his tight fist, clenched against the wall.

“I wish I could take that pain away,” she whispered.

Kylo’s head swum with confusion, blinking through his anger. Why was she comforting him? After everything that had happened? She was _hurt_ because of him. _Weak_ because of him. _Powerless_ because of him. And she had just seen him in a raging temper. She should be running in
the other direction. And now she wanted to take his pain away?

He looked back at her. His heart was skipping just seeing her so close. Too many emotions were hitting him at once – bewilderment, anger, confusion, rage, anxiety…. 

He had to escape it all, otherwise he would surely explode.

“You shouldn't see me like this.”

Rey frowned, about to offer a rebuttal, but Kylo shook his head and continued. “You’re safe for now, but I think I need to leave you … just for a while.”

There was also the matter of all the rumours about him and Rey that were no doubt buzzing around the ship amongst his followers. Dagran at least was bold enough to confess exactly what he thought was happening with Rey being imprisoned here, and it was highly probably half the ship was also thinking the same. If he didn't want it to get out of hand, he would have to go deal with the situation and step up to the role he had been neglecting the past few days.

Besides, busying himself with work was the best way to numb himself after that ordeal.

“I've been gone far too long. I don't need anyone making any more rash assumptions about what’s happening in here.”

“What do you mean?”

“You must have heard everything that Dagran said? They think….” Kylo felt disgusted inside. “I can't say it. But Dagran….” He sighed. How could he say this without repulsing her? “He saw you in bed and made assumptions.”

“Oh….” she said.

“They can think I’m turning you to the Dark side, but I won’t let them make assumptions like that.”

Why were his cheeks burning?

Rey looked concerned. It broke him knowing how helpless she was here. “What if …something happens again?” she asked softly.

“Trust me, I’m more of a danger to you right now.” Kylo could feel the quivering anger in his body. She might be vulnerable right now and need his protection, but he could snap at any moment again, and she would need protecting from him.

He stepped over the wreckage on the ground. He pulled open a desk drawer and rummaged through its contents. Two communication devices, perfectly linked so that they could communicate in private, without having to connect through the Force. He passed one to Rey and pocketed the other. “Just in case, you can reach me if you need.”

“But…”

Still, Rey seemed hesitant to let him leave. Kylo couldn't understand. After seeing him so angry. After being subject to another episode that she was vulnerable to because of him?

“I'll only be gone for an hour or two.”

“Kylo…please don't go.”
“Nothing’s going to hurt you.”

Rey looked back at him stubbornly. There was something she wasn’t saying.

Kylo let out a deep breath. He had to do what was best for both of them right now. “You are welcome to use my refresher. What’s mine is yours. Please make yourself at home. It’s the least I can do. I’ll have a droid send up some food and a fresh change of clothes.”

Before Rey had a chance to say anything more, he turned and left.

His mind was turning over as he clutched the communication device safely tucked away in his pocket.
Rey looked down at the small comlink Kylo had placed in her hand. With their unusual connection through the Force, she had a feeling they wouldn't need such a device. Even still, it was a small comfort, since she had now been left alone, and possibly very vulnerable once more.

The thought of experiencing another episode when Kylo wasn’t there to help her was frightening. But there was something far more pressing Rey’s mind – something she wish she could tell him, but had to keep to herself. Watching him leave, she knew there was a chance he could set something in motion that would deepen the war or harm the Resistance. After all, he was still the Supreme Leader of the First Order. Enemy of the Resistance. Enemy of her family.

As long as he was Supreme Leader, he was a threat. She couldn't allow herself to forget why she had come here – to bring him back to the Light. Or to end him once and for all. To end this war.

But what state was she in to stop him now? Rey sighed. In her current state, she needed food, and she needed rest. Kylo was right.

Returning to the bedroom, Rey located the en suite refresher and stepped inside. The room was lined with black tile but was well lit. Rey stood in front of the mirror, and for the first time was able to inspect the extent of what she had been through in the past few days. Her face was pale and discoloured, a mix of dried sweat, blood and dirt covered her face and body. Her hair was knotted and wild. She traced her hands up her arms and over her shoulders. It wasn’t that she had lost any muscle or weight yet, but she had never felt this weak. Slowly she turned to inspect her back. She unwound the bandages and winced as the mess of half dried gashes across her back was revealed. This was going to scar badly.

Stripping off the rest of her clothes, Rey stepped into the refresher and let the warm water flow down her body. Still shaky on her feet, and not wanting to slip in this wet tiled environment, she sat down and let the dirt run off her. She reached up for the soaps and hair products – as expected, the private suite of the Supreme Leader was equipped with all the commodities anyone could need. She had never known such luxury, and she couldn’t help but smile as she finally started to relax.

Rey combed through her hair slowly and carefully, and scrubbed herself down from head to toe. She must have been in there for almost an hour, enjoying the solitude and safety. Then, once every muscle in her body had been relaxed by the warm water, she wrapped herself in one of Kylo’s oversized grey towels and dried off.

Looking back at herself in the mirror, she decided she had the time to go the extra mile. Teeth, eyebrows, underarms, legs…. Rose had been the one to teach her about personal grooming.

Now, Rey thought. Clothes….

Kylo said he would have some fresh clothes sent up. Clutching the towel closely to her chest, she peered out into the bedroom, and seeing that the coast was clear, she wandered into his study. A few droids must have been here already while she was showering. The desk had been repaired and replaced in its original position, and a pile of dark grey and black clothes were draped over the back of a chair. And ---
Rey’s eyes widened.

Food.

A whole tray of food – a large silver platter on the small table surrounded by armchairs in Kylo’s study. Cheeses, fruit, bread, nuts, spiced meat, bowls of steaming rice…. Rey started salivating just looking at it. Food.

Quickly, she dropped her towel and changed into the fresh clothes. Her wounds were closed enough now to go without bandages, but she still used the wide band to wrap around her chest for modesty. The black pants were relatively loose, as before, and was paired with a tight wrap-around top that cut off at her shoulders and buttoned right up to her neck.

Rey quickly patted her hair dry with her towel, grabbed a blanket from Kylo’s bed to wrap around her shoulders, and curled up into one of the armchairs in front of the food.

As Rey dug into the finest meal she had ever had, she let her thoughts return to her mission. Kylo … Ben Solo … learning about the Dark side of the Force … ending the war. Now that things had finally slowed down, she realised that her mission was surprisingly on track. Of course it hadn’t happened in the way she’d expected, not that she’d had a plan to begin with, but – it felt … good. She knew her friends had escaped, and she had drawn the target away from them by her being here. That was the first accomplishment. Secondly, Kylo had agreed to teach her about the Force. And lastly … she was in Kylo’s private suite. All she had to do now was to convince him to see the Light again.

This should be easy … right?

Rey continued to indulge in all the food. There were things on the platter she didn’t know the name of, and everything she did recognise was more delectable than she’d ever known. For the first time in a long time, possibly ever, she felt her hunger satisfied.

Rey had her mouth full of a large slice of brown bread when the doors opened and Kylo walked in.

Kylo stopped and looked at her. The half-eaten slice of bread dangled from her teeth, and she was suddenly conscious of how ridiculous she must look. She quickly ripped it off and swallowed what was in her mouth. It went down rather uncomfortably.

“You’re back.” Rey managed, coughing a little.

Kylo shut the door behind him, but stayed where he was. He looked exhausted, as usual, but also apprehensive.

“Thank you …” Rey said, pointing at the now half-empty platter of food and wiping her hands on her crossed knees, “…for the food.”

Kylo made a small grunting sound and nodded silently.

Rey shifted uncomfortably in her chair. He just stood there, looking at her. Was it something she said? Was there food on her face? She wiped her lips quickly with her fingers.

“Are…. are you okay?”

“Oh,” Kylo twitched, as if shaking himself back to reality. “Yes… yes I’m fine.” He rubbed his hands together nervously then adjusted his belt. “The food … you’re welcome. Um…”
This was incredibly awkward, Rey thought. She tilted her head to the side. “What’s the matter?”

“Nothing. It’s just … I’m not used to coming home to someone else here.”

“Well … you brought me here.” Rey shrugged. “Do you …” Rey fished desperately for something to say. “Do you want some food too?”

“No, it’s all yours.” Kylo swayed back on his feet and rubbed a hand through his long black hair.

“No really, I think I’m full.” Rey put a hand to her belly – it felt painfully stretched. “You, on the other hand, look like you need some sustenance.” And it was true. He still looked shockingly pale and gaunt, and incredibly tired, particularly for someone who had this kind of food available to him every day.

Kylo stepped forward and pulled up another armchair to the table. “Do you need anything to drink?” he asked. Without waiting for a response, he added, ‘I’ll get some juice.’

He left the room at a brisk pace and returned shortly with a jug of a beautiful bubbling burgundy juice and two glasses. Then he sat down and poured out the glasses and passed one to Rey.

Rey took the glass but wasn’t particularly thirsty. She watched as Kylo let out a large sigh and shrugged off his robe. Rey couldn't help but notice the breadth of his shoulders and his towering height, even when seated.

He grabbed one of the bowls of rice and topped it with some of the spicy meats and soft cheeses.

Rey’s curiosity got the better of her. “What did they say … out there?”

Kylo peered over his bowl. “I thought we had agreed to leave out sides. I can't discuss any details.”

“But…” Rey frowned.

“What is it?”

Rey hugged her legs close to her chest. “You’re still leading the First Order. I’m worried what you might do, what you might set in motion.”

“You’re really concerned by that? The Resistance escaped, you know that. Can't you be content with that for now?”

Rey frowned.

Kylo sighed. “I promise my business was only administrative. Doing damage control was important – I didn't need any rumours spreading, or anyone undermining me, thinking that I'm neglecting my post. But remember, we weren’t going to talk about the war. We’re just … focusing on getting you back to strength and figuring out … this Force thing.”

“This Force thing…” Rey echoed, nodding slowly.

“Can we agree to at least focus on that for the time being? Chasing down the Resistance is not my main concern right now – you are.”

Rey blinked back at him. His priority.

“You’re in no position to fight off whatever’s trying to force its way into your mind,” Kylo continue. “That is what you should most concerned about right now. You asked me to teach you, and that is
what I plan to do, to the best of my ability.”

Kylo was right. She needed to learn to shield her mind. She needed to regain her strength. He was the only one that could help her – she had no choice.

“What are we going to do about Snoke?” she whispered.

“I don’t know.” Kylo responded quietly. “I’m not sure it’s even Snoke. Whether it’s just a memory, or something else at work…” Rey could hear the anger start to bubble in his voice.

“But how… how could it be him, or anyone else?”

Kylo dropped his face into his hands and rubbed furiously. “I don’t know, but – I think it’s similar to what happened to me, all those years ago, when Snoke first leached into my mind. He must be weak, without a physical form, just a Dark spirit lingering in the void.” Kylo looked up at Rey. “There’s a darkness in you Rey – a potential – that you need to come to terms with. You’re so strong with the Force – you’re a target. Something’s tapping into that. He feels it. From somewhere… I don’t know.”

There was defeat in his eyes. He looked positively miserable and defeated. “How can I fight off something if I don’t know where its coming from?”

Kylo put down his bowl and leaned forward in his chair, his hands gripping the sides of the chair firmly. “I’m going to teach you Rey. I’m going to teach you everything I know. I promised no more harm would ever come to you – and I intend to keep that promise.”

Rey felt stunned. The blazing look in his eyes was undeniable – he truly meant what he was saying. But Rey couldn’t help but feel ashamed of herself. “You talk about me like I’m strong with the Force, but I’m not – I know nothing. If I was strong, I would have been able to fight whatever attacked me. The Force…”

“You are strong Rey, just --”

“But I can’t feel it anymore,” she said defiantly. “Ever since I came here, it feels different – I’ve lost it.”

Rey’s hands trembled and she tried to take a deep breath to calm herself. Kylo, on the other hand, looked completely calm and collected.

“You have an unusual way of wielding the Force, Rey. I think that’s why you’re having trouble accessing it out here.”

“What do you mean?”

“Think about it. You’ve never had any formal training. You’ve had to learn to tame it and wield the Force by yourself. You’ve come up with something authentic, something new. You haven’t been restricted by any code or guidelines.”

“Well, I imagine it’s different to how you use it.”

“I don’t mean Light and Dark. It’s more than that.”

“I still don’t understand.”

“How do you normally source power from the Force?”
“I … feel it around me?”

“But where from specifically?”

“From … from the world around me …” Rey thought back to all her training on Saphin and her meditative practice. “The earth, the wind, from the warmth of the sun – I feel the Force in all of those.”

“It sounds very elemental to me. And there’s none of that out here.”

“Elemental?”

“You draw your power from tangible sources, and more physical entities. I think that’s quite unusual. In which case, of course you’re struggling if that’s the only way you know how.”

“Well … where do you get yours from?”

“The Dark side of the Force …” Kylo twirled his finger along the rim of his glass, “…deals more in emotion. These emotions – hate, fear, anger – are all part of being human, and supposedly easier to succumb to, but mastery of the Dark side is not without its challenges. Without the proper training, you can get swept away in it … fall victim to it.”

“Is that what you’re going to teach me?”

“Yes … and no. To access it – yes – but also to protect yourself from it.”

“To protect myself from you?”

Kylo’s eyebrows creased together. “We are still enemies then?”

Rey gazed up at him and soaked in the haunting expression in his eyes. Yes, she thought, he was her enemy. He knew it too. Nothing could deny that they were on opposite sides of the war. But right here, right now…

She paused before answering him. “No.”

Kylo looked up, a hint of surprise in his face.

Rey shook her head. “No, I thought we weren’t going to talk about sides.”

Kylo’s expression was blank, but she could see deep within his eyes – a look of deep concentration. He understood her meaning.

“This won’t be easy Rey. But I hope you can eventually trust me. I don’t want to be your enemy.”

Silence fell between them. But after a while, Rey whispered, “I don’t want you to be my enemy either.”

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Kylo finished his meal in silence while he watched Rey curled up on the chair with his blanket wrapped around her. What an unusual situation he had gotten himself into … He had never expected to feel so strangely protective over the girl. Make her an ally – yes. But let suffer at the power of the Dark side – no. Never.

And he felt so strangely at peace with her. They had conversed so easily, as if they’d known each
other for years.

Rey stifled an almighty yawn and her eyelids started to droop. It made Kylo oddly happy to see her so relaxed.

He put his bowl down. “You need to rest. Rey.”

Rey blinked sleepily back at Kylo, with a gentle smile on her face. “So do you. I think you’ve had less sleep than me.”

She wasn’t wrong. He was almost certain he hadn’t had more than two hours sleep in the past three days.

Rey was looking at him with her head gently tilted to the side. She was warm and safe. Her wounds were clean. She had fresh clothes. And she had a full belly for the first time in what must have been a very long time. Kylo wondered if she’d ever been fed like that before.

He felt his fingers twitching, eager to reach out and touch her – to scoop her up in his arms and rest her down on his bed, where he knew she would finally have a decent rest, but he had to hold himself back. He couldn’t explain why he felt this way. Why was he so desperate to keep her here? To protect her? And to reach out and hold her?

Rey yawned again and rubbed her eyes.

“I may have had less sleep, but you come first. You’ll sleep in my bed tonight.”

“In your bed?” Her eyes widened in shock.

“Yes,” Kylo said, before suddenly realising what that must sound like. “I mean—”

_Damnit Kylo._

“Not --- not together – not like that, uh…” he stammered. “Think of it as your bed. I’ll sleep in a chair.”

Rey shook her head. “It’s okay, I’m used to roughing it – I’m but a poorly scavenger from Jakku, remember. I’ll sleep on the floor. It’s your bed.”


He wouldn’t hear a bar of it. The mere idea of her sleeping on the floor made his blood begin to boil. Only the best for Rey.

He couldn’t control himself – he just had to hold her in his arms and carry her to safety. He swiftly scooped her up from her chair, still wrapped in the blanket, and walked her over to his bed. She was relaxed in his arms, half-asleep already. He pulled back the sheets with the Force, then lowered her to the mattress and pulled the blankets over her before she could object.

“Thank you,” whispered Rey in a sleepy voice. She had melted into the soft mattress.

“You’re welcome,” said Kylo, speaking softly so as not to jolt her out of her slumber. He watched her for a moment as she closed her eyes and started to breathe slowly and deeply. It was truly a precious moment, watching her finally at peace.

“Kylo?” she whispered. Kylo jumped at her call, and knelt down beside the bed. “Yes?”
“Who are you?” Rey asked sleepily. “You can't be the same man I met on Takodana.”

The blanket curled under Kylo's fingers as his hands clenched into fists. A wave of shame engulfed him.

_Yes, I am, _he thought. _Aren't I?_

Rey was asleep before he could respond.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all for your patience on this one - I hope you all enjoy it! Our star-crossed lovers are finally finding some peace and starting to understand each other. They're going to have to get used to living with each other now because the Reylo slow burn is real.

I'm curious to know what you all think - will we get a kiss in episode 9? Don't worry, it's definitely coming in this fanfic ;) (and more!)
The was a certain tranquillity in the air when Rey woke.

She breathed in deeply and stretched out her arms, feeling the coolness of the silk sheets over her bare skin. She rolled over, peeling herself from the bed where it had swallowed her in, and her eyes fell on Kylo.

He had pulled up one of the armchairs next to the bed and was slumped back in it, head tilted back and still fast asleep. Rey watched the slow rise and fall of his chest. It was such an unusual sight to behold – this man, clearly too large for his chair, and who was the highest authority in the First Order, seemed just as innocent as a small child in his slumber. Rey couldn't help but smile at how peaceful he looked.

Who was this man now? Without realising it, she had slowly come to trust him. After all, if he had really wanted her dead, he would have done it easily by now. On top of that, she had never seen anyone so remorseful of their actions before. But still she sensed the Darkness spiralling inside him – the way he had torn apart his study yesterday evening in an uncontrollable rage… Rey’s heart ached with sadness for him but shivered in fear simultaneously. He was in turmoil and pain, but still dangerous and unpredictable.

She wanted him to change, but it had to be done organically – he was a complex man and she knew it was going to take more than simply asking him to come home.

How much had changed since he had succeeded Snoke? Rey recalled one of their last Force connections on Saphin … they had argued …

*I have changed. You’re just too blinded by the single-sided beliefs of your friends to see it.*

Had he been right? *Had* she really been too blinded by the war to see it?

Rey continued to watch over Kylo, lying crookedly in the tiny armchair, fast asleep. Jedi Killer, murderer of his own father, Supreme Leader of the First Order – but still sleeping innocently and vulnerable to the world. If she had been anyone else, she might have taken his life then and there. But she couldn't - not when there was a chance she could still save him.

There’s Light in him, she thought. There has to be.

She couldn’t bear to wake him, so she decided to make a start to her day in solitude. Rey sat up and steadied her head. She still felt like she’d been knocked out by a starfighter. Gritting her teeth, she pushed through the dizzy spell – when was this going to get better? She felt so frustrated trapped in this weakened body.

Guilt boiled inside her. It was Kylo’s fault, wasn’t it?

Artificial light from the living quarters suggested that it was sometime during the day, but without a horizon to gauge a proper sense of time, Rey felt utterly disoriented. This was the longest she had been away from land, and she wasn’t quite sure she was very good at it.

Rey slipped into the refresher to freshen up for the day ahead, treading carefully so as not to wake
Kylo, who now snoring gently in his chair.

After showering and changing, she ventured back into the living quarters. There was still some food on the table from last night. Rey grabbed a slice of bread and ate it slowly while she wandered around Kylo’s study, killing time until he woke up. Could there be any valuable information in here that she could work to her advantage? The datapad needed a code for access, and all the texts on the desk were unreadable to her. She flicked through some of the loose papers on his desk, her fingers tracing over the beautiful penmanship.

Kylo did ….. calligraphy?

It was nothing Rey could understand, but she could see each letter was beautifully crafted and styled.

She smiled. He was an old-fashioned man!

Rey suddenly froze in her tracks as she heard a loud knocking in the distance. She looked over at Kylo. He hadn't heard it.

The knocking came again.

Still, Kylo slept on.

It definitely wasn’t knocking for her. Rey walked over to Kylo and whispered his name gently. “Kylo…”

No response.

This time she spoke a bit firmer. “Kylo.”

Still nothing. After some hesitation, she sat down on the bed beside him nudged his shoulder. “Kylo!” She shook him a little, and he suddenly jolted out of his slumber.

“Mmm—” Kylo’s eyes blinked open and fell on Rey. “R---Rey! You’re awake. Oh --- Are you alright?”

“Yes, I’m fine. There’s ---“

The knocking came again, louder than before. “There’s someone at the door.”

Kylo snapped to attention. “Stay here.” He peeled himself out of the chair, twisting his neck uncomfortably as he rose and stretched out his back. His hair was in a mess and his uniform creased and ruffled from the night’s sleep. Rey heard an angry growl escape from deep in his chest as he stormed toward the door.

She peered down the corridor, getting a glimpse into the reception chambers of his suite. Kylo threw open the entrance doors and yelled before he even saw who had called on him.

“What?”

A First Order official dressed in black uniform jumped to attention and almost fell backwards in surprise. “Supreme Leader, sir. General Hux has requested an audience with you.”

Kylo growled angrily. He grabbed the officer by the front of his uniform and pulled him towards him. He was a terrifying sight to behold. His bed hair was dark and wild, cast across his eyes, and his wide stature towered above the poor officer.
“General Hux?! Calling this early?” he spat.

“My Lord – ”

“What?!” Kylo barked at the officer.

“It’s -- it’s an hour past midday, sir,” the officer said in a panic, trying desperately to lean away from Kylo’s fierce face, mere inches away from his own.

Kylo froze, then released the officer. “Oh.” The officer quickly straightened his jacket.

“I will meet him on the Bridge shortly.”

“My lord.” The officer bowed and scurried away.

Kylo slammed the doors shut with the Force and returned to his private suite, where Rey took a seat on the bed, pretending that she hadn’t been peering around the corner to watch the scene.

His eyes shifted from Rey to the chair he slept on, and then back to Rey.

“I haven’t slept like that in half a year. I had no idea….it’s already so late in the day.” His eyes were gentle but surprised. “Thank you.”

Did she just hear him correctly? “Thank you?”

“Somehow, it’s because you’re here”

“I don’t understand. Why … don’t you normally sleep?”

Kylo made an attempt to straighten his bed hair and realign his uniform.

“I just can’t sleep…” After a pause, he muttered, “…nightmares.”

He looked embarrassed, and somehow, Rey felt the urge to comfort him. “It’s okay, everyone has nightmares from time to time.”

“Not like this…I have a predisposition for rather vivid ones. They feel like visions. Sometimes they keep me up. Sometimes I choose not to sleep to avoid them.”

Rey could feel the suffering in his voice. “What … what do you dream about?” She was almost too afraid to ask.

Kylo looked down and Rey could see that his mind was ticking over. His jaw stiffened and his eyes dart across the floor.

“I’d rather not say.” He let out a deep breath, letting the tension leave his body. “I’m just glad I finally had a decent night sleep.”

Rey frowned, but was surprised to see him bring his attention back to the present, and sit down in the chair next to her where she sat on the edge of the bed. Now level with Rey, he looked directly into her eyes.

“I can’t explain it, but I feel … peaceful, with you here.”

It was like a cool breeze had tickled her neck and sent shivers across her skin. She could possibly bring peace to this man? This man who had the weight of the Galaxy on his shoulders and a lifetime
of trauma. Peaceful?

The room was so silent, she could hear her own shallow breathing.

Kylo blinked back at her. “My duties call. I have to go. But I’m going to come back as soon as I can. We need to teach you some shielding techniques.”

His hand reached forward, as if he were about to grab hold of her hand, but he pulled back at the last moment and grabbed his knee instead.

His tone softened. “Please don’t go anywhere.”

“You’re worried about me trying to escape?” Rey pushed some loose hairs behind her ears. “Don’t forget why I’ve come here. I’m not going anywhere.”

And she wasn’t. If there even the slightest chance that there was good in this man – and after what she had seen of him in the few days was anything to go by – she would stay. She had to try. She had to have hope. Even though he had already told her he couldn't be persuaded to return to the Light, she wasn’t giving up that easily.

Kylo’s mouth open and closed a few times as if he were about to comment, or perhaps he was shocked by her honesty and determination to stay here, of all places.

Without thinking, Rey leaned forward and placed her hand over Kylo’s hand, resting on his knee. She squeezed it gently and felt the electricity of their Force bond shoot up her arm and into her heart.

He must have felt it too. It was an undeniable connection, yet of polar opposites. Light. Dark. Meeting halfway to find common ground.

Kylo quivered under her touch. She couldn’t tell – was he blushing?

She released his hand and stared up at him. Still he said nothing.

What was she doing? Trying to get close to him? Offering him support? These feelings – she cared for him. Why? How? It shouldn’t be this way.

Rey took a deep breath and centred herself. The Force was to blame for this. Nothing more. Nothing less.

It was a trick of the Force - the Dark side luring her in.

As if suddenly now in a rush to leave, Kylo stood up and began donning his gloves and robe. “I’ll have some food sent up. Keep resting. I’m only a call away if you need me.” He pulled the comlink out of his pocket and showed it to her, reminding Rey of their instantaneous connection.

And he left, leaving Rey alone once again.

Except somehow it felt like only half her remained. The other half had walked out the doors with Kylo.

Chapter End Notes
This chapter was brought to you by: "being locked outside my house for an hour and half, and waiting for my fiancé to come home with the keys." Doesn't bother me though, because I can work on the story in peace and quiet! ;)
Hope you have a great day, wherever you are in the world.
ReyStarWalker xx
Kylo kept his promise and returned within a couple of hours.

In the meantime, it was infuriatingly quiet being left alone, and there was nothing for Rey to occupy herself with except resting. Kylo’s living quarters were minimal. Even his wardrobe was bare – all black uniforms and a few dark grey casual shirts. Rey ran her fingers through the folds of garment, searching for some sort of sign … a hint into his past, or a softer side she might not have met yet. There was not much to be given away, save a locked metal safe hidden at the back of the wardrobe. What secrets lay within?

A meal droid delivered another large platter of food a few minutes before Kylo returned. It was still the most ridiculously extravagant thing Rey had seen. She frowned thinking about how oddly priveledged she was to be dining like this. She had known poverty, and she knew they were still millions living that way in the hundreds of the underprivileged star systems out in the Galaxy. Thanks to the First Order’s rule, and the remnants of the Empire’s rule before that, there were so many who had barely enough to survive.

It was hard to turn a blind eye, but she had to remind herself that they had decided to put the war to the side for now. If she dwelled on it too much, everything would surely fall apart. For the greater good – for the chance of redeeming Kylo and bringing down the First Order – she had to turn a blind eye. Just for now.

Rey sat down on the floor at the low table and made a start on the food.

After a few divine mouthfuls, she heard the familiar sound of the suite doors opening, and Kylo strolled in, erect and purposeful. His soft black waves of hair brushed his face as he removed his helmet.

Her body responded without her permission – her face felt warm and her stomach did a backflip when she saw him.

“How are you?” he asked, as he removed his gloves and robe.

Rey goggled back at him. And then she mentally slapped herself. Say something!

She couldn’t figure out what her face was doing – she tried to stretch her cheeks out to form a smile. It must have looked awful. If she had been watching this scene from afar, she might have rolled her eyes at herself. What an absolute dork.

“You arrived just in time for the food,” she managed to spill out.

Gods, she felt like an idiot.

Thankfully, somehow, Kylo didn’t seem to notice. “You eat first – you need it more than me.”

Rey raised her eyebrows at him. “There’s more than enough for both of us here.”

“You’ve barely eaten anything yet.”

“But you also need food.”

Gods, he was so fiercely protective and stubborn, Rey thought. She felt like she had to demand him
to look after himself. “I think you forget how much bigger than me you are – you need it more than me.”

“Hm,” Kylo muttered.

He sat down in an armchair and reluctantly put together a bowl of food, under Rey’s watchful eye. There was a certain fascination watching him put together his meal – he was so purposeful and elegant with his utensils. Was there a particular order certain foods must be eaten, thought Rey, or perhaps some flavours that tasted better with others? When Kylo caught her watching, she snapped back to her own food, chewing slowly and savouring the warmth and flavour.

An easy silence fell between the two. Rey couldn't put her finger on it – there was something nice about sharing a meal together. It created mutual ground … it humanised him in a way she hadn't thought of him before.

Rey reminisced on the numerous times she had sat around a table with her friends – Finn, Poe, Rose … she wondered where they were now. What must Finn be feeling? She had left him so suddenly, and unfairly. And how would have Poe reacted when they told him what she'd done – what she'd risked? He would have been devastated. At least Rose would understand her drive to help Kylo. Rose understood Rey’s compassion for people and her strong sense of hope – it was something they shared, even in the hardship of the war.

Rey’s stomach started to sink – with her mind wandering back to reality, she suddenly realised where she was again.

She heard Kylo breathe in, ready to say something. She looked up from her food, and saw his dark eyes studying her carefully. He must have noticed the lull in her mood. “What’s on your mind?”

“I know we aren’t supposed to be discussing the war, but I have two questions I’d like to ask…” her voice trailed off, hoping that Kylo would agree to her request. Instead he stayed silent, so she carried on. “The Resistance – did they really escape? How bad were the casualties?”

She saw his hands clutch at his bowl firmly, and his expression stiffen.

“Yes. It wasn’t a mission intent on destroying them. They simply got in the way. No prisoners were taken. As far as I’m aware, most of your numbers were able to escape.”

*Your* numbers. Clearly they were still on opposing sides.

Rey nodded, just thankful that he could confirm their safety. If something had happened to them, she wasn’t sure if she could justify her being here. But there was still hope after all.

Kylo swallowed a mouthful of food as he studied Rey’s expressions. He dabbed his mouth clean with a napkin. “I don't suppose I can ask you where their base is? A question for a question?”

Rey glared at him. “I hardly think that’s a fair exchange.”

“Fine. But you’re treading on ice with a second question. I don't think this is a good idea.” He looked anxious – like Rey, perhaps he wasn’t eager to break this dreamy illusion that seemed to have engulfed them over the past few days – a bubble from the real world, where they were safe to converse on neutral ground.

Rey bit her lip and twisted her hands together anxiously. She needed to know. “Who are the Knights of Ren?”
Kylo took a deep breath and relaxed back into his chair. “Hmm, that question doesn't count – they're not part of the war.”

“Then … who are they?”

She couldn't explain this deep fascination with Kylo and his life, and the people in it. She had to learn more. She knew the Knights must be Luke’s former pupils, just like Kylo had once been … back when he was Ben Solo. These people were like her. They were Force sensitives too, the only she had known apart from the Skywalker family.

“They’re my …” Kylo tilted his head trying to find the most fitting word. “…followers. But you might see them more like … family.” Kylo hesitated. “I’m responsible for them – and for that reason, I have to apologise for what Dagran was saying yesterday when he burst in. He’s the most boisterous of them all. No boundaries that one…”

“Dagran.” Rey said the name aloud, committing it to memory. She had only ever seen him masked, but she recalled the moment he had seen her curled up in Kylo’s bed, before she had had her second episode. Sandy blonde hair over a young handsome face. He couldn’t have been much older than herself.

“Who is the other one?”

“Soan.”

“I don't think I’ve seen his face. Is he young like the other?”

“Yes … although he’s a little more mature.”

“Do they use the Dark side of the Force, like you? What happened to them?”

Kylo seemed taken aback by all her questions. He frowned. “Didn’t Luke tell you?”

“Well…” She didn't know if she wanted to say it out loud. From what she had pieced together from stories, she had some understanding that Kylo was responsible for the murder of students at the Jedi temple. The only students to survive were the ones he had taken with him – the ones Rey presumed to be the Knights of Ren. Admitting this all would mean acknowledging that …..well, he was a Jedi killer. Was there any point denying it?

But that wasn’t Ben Solo – it was Snoke, she thought to herself. Convincing herself of that was the only way she could forgive him for taking the lives of Luke’s students – Jedi– people she could have called family.

As if he could read her mind, Kylo spoke up suddenly. “It may be different to what you think. They believed in my visions. They followed me loyally, but blindly because of my bloodline. Not because I forced them.” Kylo gazed away, remembering that time, almost a decade ago.

“And now…. if they’re not employed by the First Order, what are they doing? What have you tasked them with?”

Kylo paused. “I think that’s one too many questions for now. But perhaps a story for another day.”

Seeing that Rey was dissatisfied with his answer, he attempted to offer something. “As you’ve seen, they do my bidding though – they helped to bring you here.”

“You didn’t have to use them to bring me here, you know. I was looking for you on Jadan V – I
would have walked willingly onto that ship.”

“I’m sorry for that – they might have been a little less aggressive if they’d known you were coming willingly. See … they answer to me only, not the First Order. They don’t hate you the same way the First Order does – you’re not their enemy unless I declare it.”

“They wouldn’t hate me?”

“I think they would be fascinated by you. Especially since you’ve said you renounce the ways of the Jedi.”

“That doesn’t mean I renounce the ways of the Light side of the Force.”

“I know. But you may be surprised at how open they would be to that. I want you to meet them.”

“Meet them? I thought I already had?”

“Dagran and Soan, yes, though not formally. But the others –”

“There’s more?”

Kylo nodded. “Three more. You’ll meet them in time. I’m hoping to convene everyone together in the near future.”

He looked over at Rey. “Actually, I met with Soan and Dagran this morning about … about you.”

“About me?”

“Their council is valuable to me. I’m trying to convince them that you will become an ally to us.” He looked up at Rey from where he sat hunched over in his chair, his face almost glowing with optimism. “I’m hoping you will join us. You can become my apprentice. I can show you the ways of the Force. The offer is still there.”

“Kylo no…. I thought you said you were going to protect me from the Dark side – not ask me to join it!”

“Yes, I did. But … a complete knowledge of the Force requires training in both and Light and Dark side doctrines. If you want to truly understand the Force, you can’t have a biased view. You need balance.”

Balance. He wasn’t wrong. Light and Dark were nothing without the other. But could Rey really trust herself with that power? She was fighting for a cause against the Dark side – surely it was morally wrong?

Rey knew she had to say no, but her heart said yes, and every fibre of her body was calling her to the Dark side for just a taste – just an experience. Why did she have to resist? Was it really so wrong to walk between both sides?

“You’ve felt it, Rey – the pull to the Dark. Even before you came here. It was always there.”

“I feel it – but I fight it.” Rey paused, thinking of her family. “I’m supposed to.”

“But you still wonder what it might teach you.”

It was like he was reading her mind. It was odd knowing that he had probably felt the same way as a student with Luke, tempted by the Darkness. He probably knew exactly what she was feeling. But of
course he’d taken a different path all those years ago – he’d succumbed to it completely.

“The pull to the Dark…” Rey looked down. “I feel so wrong – I’m trying to be a good person – but how can I be, when there’s a part of me that’s like this? There are people counting on me!”

“You are a good person Rey. You’re not like me. You …. the Light shines brighter in you than anyone I’ve ever met. Even more than Luke.”

“You may say that, but Master Skywalker saw the Dark in me.”

Luke’s panicked look and solemn words had etched a place in her mind, she would never forget.

*I’ve seen this raw power only once before, in Ben Solo.*

“He feared you, as he once feared me.” Kylo’s expression was open and honest. “You’re powerful Rey, I’ve told you this before. Let me help you reach your full potential – let me teach you.”

“I want you to….” Rey’s heart started to race. “But I’m scared. Can I trust you? Can I trust that you won’t let it go too far?”

Kylo traced his finger along the ornate arm of his chair, lost in thought. “I want nothing more than your trust, Rey. But I think I can only be deserving of that gift with time.”

Her trust was a gift? Rey was lost for words.

“Let’s make a deal,” she began cautiously. “I want to learn from you. But not as an apprentice. It has to go both ways – if you show me the Dark side, I get to show you some Light too.”

It was subtle, but Kylo’s face twitched at her suggestion. He looked hesitant.

“What was that you were saying about balance?” Rey prompted him.

“There’s no point. It’s too late for me.”

Rey sighed. “You know why I came here Kylo. I want to set you free – I want to redeem you.”

“Hmph, and how exactly do you plan on doing that?”

Rey frowned. She hadn’t come with a detailed plan. “Just let me show you the Light again, just a taste – I know it’s there inside. And I think you know it is too.”

Rey could still see his mind ticking over – it was borderline hesitation and wanting to dive in head first.

Rey leaned forward, and paced her hands down on the table before her. “Please – for me. Besides, you said yourself that I had unusual way of wielding the Force. Perhaps you can learn something too?”

Kylo sighed. “Nothing will come of it.”

Rey could have been offended, but instead she laughed. “Ha! That doesn't sound like a no,” she pointed out, teasingly.

Kylo stood up but made no protest. “Regardless, we start with shielding. You need to be able to protect your mind from the Dark, before you can ever hope to wield its power.”
Rey nodded and pushed herself out her chair, ready to begin.

“It will be your first lesson as my apprentice.”

Rey rolled her eyes when Kylo turned to leave the room. “I’m not your apprentice.”

Even with his face out of view, she could have sworn he rolled his eyes too.

“Sure.”
Something had shifted in the way they interacted. They conversed like old friends, with ease and hints of humour. Kylo had experienced what he thought was close companionship with his Knights, but this felt like something else. The Knights were his dutiful followers – Botek with whom he was the closest – but they were never on an equal playing field. Rey, on the other hand, did feel like his equal. There was an unspoken bond of trust between them, and an undeniable connection.

“It’s visualisation. It’s about creating your own space, and your own safe wall around you. Any areas that are flickering, you simply wipe them smooth again, until you’re completely encapsulated in a thick-walled, silent chamber.”

Kylo opened his eyes and peered at Rey, sitting cross-legged on the floor opposite him. She had her eyes delicately shut, and he watched the rise and fall of her chest with deep and purposeful breaths. He marvelled in how much she had taught herself. He knew that Luke had imparted very little instruction on her. Was it all that time she had spent alone in Jakku that made her so remarkable in tune with her inner self? Perhaps the isolation had made her acutely and easily in tune with her surroundings and with the Force, before she’d even felt its call.

“This is your shield,” he continued, “And as long as you remain within your chamber of concentration, nothing can penetrate it. With practice, you can maintain it whilst carrying on with daily tasks and interactions. But for now, let’s keep it simple. Instantaneous shielding.”

Rey let out a deep breath and nodded.

“I’m going to try access your mind now – you need to block me. I know you can do it – you’ve done it before. But this time, you’ll be better prepared.”

Kylo reached forward, his fingers outstretched towards Rey. He latched onto her Force signature immediately, without any effort at all – it was like a bright pulsating light, with warmth that projected through him. It felt so wrong to be intruding on her this way…

He danced around the edges of her consciousness, hesitating. What a sudden offence it now felt like. He wondered how much pain and trauma he had caused her when he first tried to access her mind on StarKiller Base – when he had first forced himself onto her.

The tips of his fingers twitched with resistance. He calmly reminded himself that this was all a part of teaching her – it was strictly business, and she had volunteered for this. Slowly he let down his own guard.

But what to target in her mind? He had to have a motive – something to search for. One never just accessed an entire mind. His first instinct was to search for the location of the Resistance base, but after thinking back to their promise, he knew he had to find something else, otherwise she really would lose trust in him.

Perhaps this could be a useful exercise – a chance for him to get to know her better. He couldn't deny his curiosity about her life – her past, her present, her thoughts on all things, both menial and deeply political. So instead, he steered his mind’s trajectory towards her happy memories with the Resistance. He pressed forward. He pushed his own consciousness to the border of hers, feeling
around the edges for a weakness in her defences.

To his surprise, he did find one, and he pushed through hungrily, against his better judgement. Rey sat together with her friends, including FN2187… they were laughing over a meal. Then the memory swirled and a dark crystal cave came before his eyes. He didn’t recognise the place. He was seeing it through Rey’s eyes – the lapping of waves on the shore, and the splashes made by men playing out in the water. Her line of sight was directed at one particular man, with his bare back to her, waist high in water. He could sense the flutter of her heart, but --

Suddenly, and strongly, he felt her backlash and the memory was whisked away from his sight. Through her closed-eye meditation, he could hear her let out a small pant of exertion as she pushed against him, sealing her mental shield. Kylo withdrew and his eyes flung open.

“Rey, I’m sorry.”

She kept her eyes glued shut, but the look of disappointment and frustration was clear on her face.

“No. Try again.” She squeezed her knees. “I can do it.”

Who was that man he had seen in Rey’s mind, when her heart had fluttered? His stomach churned just thinking about it. Did she know that he had seen that?

“Are you sure?” If she wasn’t strong enough, he could so easily break into her mind – and what kind of Resistance secrets could he uncover?

“Just do it. I need to learn it.”

Gods, this all felt so backwards, Kylo thought. He was training her to fight against him. The Kylo of seven months ago would have never allowed this. He would have just ripped open he mind and taken what he needed. Now he was hesitating!

“Use your frustration to build the wall,” he offered. “Trust in its power.”

Kylo raised his hand to her again. She was ready for him this time. Her defence was flawless, and Kylo could feel the strength of her walls pushing back against him. The source of the quivering yet powerfully resilient walls of her defence was clear – it was fuelled by emotions…. She was learning…

Kylo tapped around the edges of her defended mind with his own, failing to find a weakness for him to penetrate. She was rock solid. His stomach tightened uncomfortably. When he had first interrogated Rey on StarKiller Base, he had feared her backlash and her power. But now…. It was something different. It felt wrong. It felt so wrong to be locked out of her mind completely. It was lonely – like she was rejecting him, once again. His stomach twisted reminiscing her rejection of him the countless times before.

He hated it. And he hated himself for feeling that way.

How could he possibly allow himself to feel rejected like that? They weren’t partners – she had always made that perfectly clear, and even Snoke had told them their Force bond was fabricated. It couldn’t be real, this close bond he had felt towards her – it couldn’t be.

Kylo withdrew his probing mind. “You did it. Well done.”

Rey opened her eyes and smiled at him, beaming from ear to ear and clearly pleased with herself. “I did it! So I’m not completely useless, after all!”
“You were never useless, Rey. It’s just about regaining your strength.”

“It felt different. I think I used … I used the Force in a different way?”

“You did – you used your frustration to power it. But be careful … emotions fluctuate, and they are harder to control. You have to be careful not to let it get out of hand.”

Rey uncurled her legs and leaned back on her hands, looking upwards and away from Kylo. She seemed deep in thought.

“Why must a Jedi become so separate to his emotions?”

“It’s the Jedi mantra. *There is no emotion, there is peace. There is no passion, there is serenity.*”

“Yes, but isn’t it *human* to feel?”

“It’s about balance. If you allow emotion to rule your decisions and your use of the Force, chaos and regret will eventually follow. Anger is the worst…” Kylo dropped his head and stared down at the soft carpet beneath him. Anger he knew too well. “Anger fuels the Dark side and vice versa – it’s a viscous cycle that is nearly impossible to break. I know it because I live it every day.”

“You’re not trapped Kylo. You can break free from it.”

“Even if that were true, it’s still not a power I wish to give up. But it comes at a cost. I was so fuelled by my anger toward you that I allowed ….”

Kylo struggled to admit it. He rubbed his forehead between his fingertips and thumb. “What happened to you – the high treason punishment – that was my fault. I was so fuelled by anger for so long by what happened on Crait that I allowed it to take hold of my better judgement.”

Rey leaned forward in thought and rested her chin in her hands. “You truly regret it, don't you?”

“Yes, I do.”

Rey watched him carefully. He craved her words of forgiveness, even if he didn't deserve them.

“Then there must be some good in you, Kylo Ren,” she pointed out. “Balance….” She sighed. “I just don’t understand why this dichotomy exists between Light and Dark. Is it possible to access both without without being at the pole of one or the other?”

Kylo marvelled at her curiosity – she was a model student.

“The world – the Jedi Order – was led to believe that use of the Dark side of the Force led to pain and suffering. But they forgot that without the Dark, there is no Light. The galaxy needs *both* for balance. To use the Dark side of the Force is not a crime. It doesn't make you a bad person.”

“That’s coming from a Dark sider though.” Rey managed a smile. Kylo did not, however, reciprocate the joke.

“You’re right about the dichotomy though. Learning and understand both sides makes us stronger. I have trained in both. You should too.”

Rey seemed captivated by his words. “Is it even possible to wield both safely?”

“So many questions, my young apprentice.” Kylo felt the corner of his twitch upwards, the beginnings of a smile.
As expected, Rey shot him down for his joke. “Not your apprentice,” she snapped.

Kylo wasn’t used to retaliation from those close to him – most cowered in fear if they weren’t one his Knights – so Rey’s easy banter excited Kylo in ways he hadn’t expected. He rather enjoyed that she retaliated at the idea of being second to him. This girl had spunk, and she wasn’t afraid to oppose him. He wasn’t used to it, but … he liked it.

“I’m not your apprentice,” she reinforced. “But…. I can’t help myself from asking everything. I’ve been fending for myself for the past seven months, without a clue where to start. And now I’m suddenly learning so much in just one day.”

“What of the Jedi texts you stole from Skywalker? Were they not useful?”

“I…….” Rey blushed, and he could see that she was suddenly ashamed.

“What?”

“I’m embarrassed to say. You’ll probably think less of me.”

“I wasn’t aware that you cared what I thought about you.”

“No!” Rey stuttered. She pouted, realising what he had said. “I don’t.” And then after a pause, she spoke in a quiet tone, “I can’t read.”

It was an unexpected surprise for Kylo. Having grown up in a privileged environment, he had always taken his education for granted. His stomach knotted just thinking about the conditions Rey must have grown up in – what a life she must have had for her not to have received a basic education that included literacy. Kylo growled under his breath, thinking of his plans for the First Order – these were just the kinds of places he was trying to reform and support.

“I can teach you,” he said quickly, “teach you to read. If you want, that is.”

Rey laughed it off. “I think I must be too old for that now.”

“You’re also too old to be successfully training in the ways of the Force, but you seem to be doing just fine at that.”

Rey blinked at him curiously. “Why do you always do that?”

“Do what?”

“Talk me up. You keep telling me I’m strong with the Force, like I have some natural gift. Is this some strange ploy to build my ego or try and convince me to join you on the Dark side? I don’t know what to believe.”

“What? No I mean it earnestly—”

“You said once that I wasn’t able to control the Force – you said I was untrained and inexperienced.”

Kylo could hear a tang of bitterness in her voice. His heart jumped realising how Rey must have misinterpreted his words during that one time.

“Rey, yes, but I meant…. I meant it like --- ,” he shook his head, trying to find the right words, “You’re powerful. I want to teach you, to help you control it better so that you can stay safe but also reach your full potential. I didn't mean any offence by it.”
“And then you didn't mean offence when you said I was nothing?”

Kylo raised his eyebrows in disbelief. Oh what a fool he had been with his choice of words!

“I meant you *came* from nothing – a diamond in the rough. You’re not nothing Rey – not to me. I already told you that. I’ve never seen you that way.”

“What about when I was just a scavenger from Jakku?”

Kylo shook his head in disbelief.

“I don't think you were ever *just* a scavenger from Jakku, Rey.”

Chapter End Notes

Hold onto your horses, the chemistry starts to kick in from the next chapter! Will upload it tomorrow ;)
I'm hoping uploads will be daily over the next two weeks, as I'm on holiday :) Thanks for sticking with the story for this long - trying to pump it out before TROS arrives. Its so wonderful to know there are Reylo fans out there enjoying it <3
Rey settled back into Kylo’s bed for the evening, and fell asleep instantly, exhausted from the afternoon of training.

Once he was certain she had settled into a peaceful deep sleep, Kylo sauntered back to his study. He reached for his datapad and opened up the communications applications. He needed council and he needed it now. And there was only one man he trusted for this job.

His message to Botek was short and simple. I have the girl.

Kylo watched over Rey silently for a while. He had never felt this way about someone before. What was it? Affection? Friendship? Kylo leaned back into the armchair and continued to watch her as she slept. Sheer exhaustion was dragging down his senses, but he fought against it so he could watch over her.

Snoke had visited him too many times in his dreams, taunting him into nightmares and continuing his mental abuse even beyond the grave. Kylo doubted that the dark signature of Snoke burned into his mind would ever truly go away. Years of abuse would make sure of that. All he could do now was protect the same thing from happening to Rey. He had already left his mark when he had tortured her of the Supremacy. He prayed that Rey wouldn't experience the same recurrent episodes of darkness and nightmares that he now had to endure. By watching over her, he hoped he could prevent the Darkness invading her mind again, especially in slumber when she might be most vulnerable.

Rey shifted in her sleep and let out a long breath. A small groan escaped her lips, sending Kylo into an almost frenzied state. He shook the sleep from his eyes and watched her carefully. Her body seemed stiff and her eyebrows were knitted together in pain. What was dreaming about? Her breath became shallow as the rate of her breathing increased.

Kylo carefully reached out to her mind with the Force and felt the outskirts of her dreamscape. It wasn’t an invasion of privacy, more just a gauge of her superficial emotions. There was Darkness there, without a doubt. Whether or not it was a higher power at work, he couldn’t tell without delving deeper into her mind, and he didn’t want to probe where he wasn’t welcome – she may never forgive him for something so intrusive.

Was this the same battle Luke fought when he sensed the Darkness rising in Kylo, all those years ago? Luke had given up on him, believing he was lost to the Dark side. Perhaps he had been right. Nevertheless, Kylo was determined to rise above his old master’s mistake: he wasn’t willing to take any chances with Rey. It didn’t matter that Snoke was dead and his influence on her mind was just an echo – once a powerful dark force like that falls, there was always something to rise and take its place. And something new was at work…

Rey moaned again in her sleep and her face contorted in pain. There was no denying the outskirts of her dreams were tainted with darkness. No more, Kylo thought. He leaned forward and gently touched her hand. Immediately he felt the surge of exhilarating dark plaguing her mind with crystal clarity.

“Rey!” He whispered firmly, and squeezed her hand gently.

Rey opened her eyes and looked straight up at him. She gasped a little, seeing him so close, terror in her eyes that quickly turned to relief.
She panted, and her breath was shaky. “Oh Kylo, I felt….”

“I know, I sensed it.”

“Why is this happening to me?” she threw back her head onto her pillow and let out an exhausted breath.

After a moment, she looked down at his hand, gently holding hers. Kylo felt the heat rush to his face. Gods, why was he still holding on?

“I don’t understand,” she whispered, looking strangely perplexed at his hand, “If this was a few days ago, I would have cursed you and accused you of bringing this on me ---”

“Rey, never!” He quickly withdrew his hand. “I wasn’t feeding the Darkness into you, I was just ---”

“I know,” Rey said. “But just now, when you held my hand…” Kylo gulped as she spoke. “I remember now…. The first episode. You helped me. You held me. And like you did before, you drew the Darkness out of me.”

Kylo could feel the heat flooding to his cheeks. He had hoped he would never have to explain the close physical contact he had with her in those moments.

Rey’s gaze was soft. “I want you to know – I trust you.”

Kylo’s heart did a somersault in his chest. She trusts me.

“Thank -- thank you.” He stuttered. Gaining her trust felt like such a rare and precious gift. He wanted so badly to protect her, even if he still couldn’t understand why, and now he finally could, to the best of his ability.

Rey pressed her cheek into her pillow and looked up at him, her eyes shaded by her long batting lashes. “Kylo, can I be honest with you?”

“Anything.” He leaned forward in anticipation, butterflies starting to grow in his belly.

Even with the lights dimmed for sleeping, he could see the gentle smile on her face. “That chair is far too small for you.”

A giggle escaped her lips, and it rung like a bell in his heart.

“Oh——” Her unexpected comment threw Kylo off guard. He fumbled with his words. “I’m fine here. You need the rest more than me. The bed is yours.”

“You’re looking after me, but I also want to look after you. You need a decent night’s rest. There’s plenty of space here. I don’t mind. Really.”

Kylo couldn’t believe what she was saying. She wanted him to lay in bed next to her? She trusted him to be within such close proximity of her? After everything he had done to her? After she had been so frightened to even let him near?

He stared back at her, unsure of how to respond. Did she expect him to go in …now?

“Kylo, get changed into something more comfortable and come lie down. You know you’ll sleep better.”

It wasn’t a question – it was an order.
He certainly wasn’t used to anyone telling him what to do, not for the past decade anyway.

“Please, I….I’d also feel safer with you here anyway, close by.” She looked almost guilty saying it.

He pursed his lips together and nodded. He couldn't argue with that logic. He pushed himself out of his chair and rummaged through his clothes in the bedside drawers.

He wasn’t quite sure about Rey seeing any part of himself unclothed – not after that incident when she caught him bare chested after an unexpected Force connection – so he pulled out a long sleeve cotton shirt and his usual black silk pants for sleeping. He changed in the ensuite refresher and returned to the bed.

Rey had already rolled over, facing the centre of the large bed, and curled up ready to sleep again. Kylo couldn't explain why he felt so sick to the stomach. Was there some creature in there doing backflips?

He lifted up the blanket and slid into the bed, next to Rey. As if frightened she would somehow disappear, his eyes never left her, until he was lying right beside her, facing her directly. She kept her eyes closed, sleep taking her once again. Her hands rested up near her face. Her….beautiful face. She looked so peaceful. Loose strands of hair framed her face softly and her lips were dewy and pink. Her skin looked so soft – he couldn't believe the urge he had to reach out and stroke her cheek with his bare fingers.

Sensing that she wasn’t yet in a deep sleep, he softly asked, “Are you sure this okay?”

“Mm,” Rey cooed softly.

“I’ll protect you,” he whispered. And oh so carefully, he reached forward and slowly eased his hand into her palm resting by her face, and curled his fingers around her small soft hand.

The creature in his stomach started to dance – fast. He was never going to sleep now. But at least he knew she would be safe. If any vile Dark force tried to enter her mind, he would know, by the touch of her hand – and she would stay safe.

The skin on his neck prickled as he felt Rey move under his touch, eyes still shut in peaceful slumber. Was she going to pull away? His chest was about to explode from the thunderous beat of his heart.

But she didn't withdraw like he thought she would. Instead, her fingers clasped around his and squeezed. And once again, she fell into a deep slumber.

He couldn't believe it - she was finally here with him. Not running. Not fighting.

Holding him.
Love Unlocked By Darkness

Chapter Notes

In which Rey harnesses the Dark side of the Force for the first time, and has a pivotal revelation .... (about time if you ask me - honestly these star crossed lovers are taking their time figuring things out!)
Enjoy xx

Rey woke up sprawled across the bed, melted into the soft mattress. She tried to stretch her arms above her, but she felt the weight of Kylo’s heavy hand, still wrapped around hers. Careful not to pull her hand away and wake him, she rolled onto her side and looked him up and down. His dark hair cascaded across his brows, his lips were soft and red, and through the V-cut of his loose sleeping shirt, she could see the contour of his wide chest. In his slumber, he looked so peaceful and gentle – not the terrifying leader the Galaxy knew him as.

There was something incredibly soothing about the sound of his deep steady breaths and the gentle rise and fall of his chest. Also the weight of his hand – or was he actually gripping hers? The way his fingers curled around her hand and the security of his hold made it apparent that even in sleep, he was holding onto her – to protect her.

Rey let down the barricades in her mind and felt along the golden thread of connection between them. With his close proximity and physical touch, it was almost instantaneous. And heavens, it felt incredible. It was a connection she had never known – a closeness to this man she could never have imagined. She felt whole in his presence.

But curiously, it wasn’t a mind plagued by darkness that she found. There was still youth and innocence there. He wasn’t totally corrupted, even though he constantly claimed to be. Perhaps it was a part of himself he had simply abandoned or turned a blind eye to in his waking hours. What did Luke feel when he watched over Kylo sleeping? Didn’t he also sense the Light in him, or had the Darkness been stronger back then?

Kylo shifted in his sleep, clearly having felt her open up the link between them. Not wanting to embarrass him when he woke up, Rey attempted to wriggle her hand out from under his, but halfway through she felt Kylo’s hand grasp around hers tighter, not letting her go. Rey tried flexing her fingers – it was no use.

Kylo’s mouth gaped open with a giant yawn and he smacked his lips together sleepily. Rey didn't know whether to feign sleep when he opened his eyes. But it was too late to decide by the time his eyes did open and start to focus. He doe-brown eyes looked right at her, staring at him.

“Good morning,” she said sheepishly. She was suddenly hyper aware of having just shared a night’s rest with a man in the same bed. And not just any man – her apparent arch enemy.

Kylo blinked sleepily, still coming to his senses. “Rey?”

“I do need my hand back.”

Kylo looked down at his hand and quickly released her. “How did you sleep?” he stuttered.
“Much better,” Rey smiled and tucked her hand under her cheek, pressed into the side of her pillow. “Thank you for looking after me.”

“The pleasure was all mine,” he replied softly.

His eyes almost seemed widened, watching her. For a few long seconds, Rey simply stared back at Kylo. It seemed as if their breath and heart beats were in sync, and the golden thread of connection burned between them.

Kylo rolled onto his back and threw his hands behind his head. His hair fell back on his pillow, revealing his striking profile. Rey subconsciously traced along the contour and angulations of his face with her line of vision, and breathed in his warm scent. The bed sheet was pushed down to his waist – it was oddly humanising seeing him out of his uniform and in something more loose and comfortable.

Kylo shut his eyes and drew in a long and satisfied breath. “I’ve never slept so well.”

“No nightmares?”

Kylo shook his head.

Rey smiled at him. “I don't think I’ve ever seen you so calm.”

Kylo peered over to her and raised an eyebrow. “I think you may be right.”

His eyes flickered over her face, and Rey suddenly felt the warmth flush to her cheeks.

“But I don’t want to be caught sleeping in again,” he said gruffly, “so it’s time to rise.” He threw himself up and out of the bed and opened up the large dark oak wardrobe. As he pulled out the various pieces of his uniform, Rey saw the locked metal safe at his feet, hidden at the back of the wardrobe.

“What’s in the box?”

Kylo froze.

Rey sensed the immediate hesitation in him. “Kylo?”

He shut the wardrobe door, blocking the safe from view. “Nothing.”

“Oh come on, you expect me to believe you’ve got a safe with nothing locked inside?”

Kylo gathered his uniform in his arms and turned around. His mood had instantly flipped, and he spoke without looking at her. “Don’t ask me about it again,” he said abruptly.

He marched to the refresher and shut the door behind him.

***

Rey twirled her hair in her fingers. Three buns? One bun? Hair out? She gazed back at her reflection in the mirror – her tresses now fell beyond her collar bones. It was possibly the longest her hair had ever been, as she hadn’t cut it since Jakku.

She picked up the comb again and ran it through her hair once again, combing out every last knot. After a few more attempts at tying it back, Rey settled on one look: half her hair up in a high knot, with the other down – this seemed to be the most favourable look. Practical and out of her face, yet
Rey huffed and threw down her hands. Why the hell was she spending so much time fussing over her hair?

*It’ll have to do, she thought, let's just get on with this.*

Kylo had returned from his morning meetings and it was time for more training. Rey brushed down her clothes and left the refresher, ready to meet Kylo in his study where he was already waiting for her.

“I think we’ve both come to the realisation that you’ve been out of touch with the Force since you arrived. I’ve come to wonder if it’s simply because we’re not in an environment that allows you to wield the Force in the way you normally would.”

“The way I normally would – you mean what you were saying before about it being more *elemental* – like, from tangible sources?”

“Exactly – there’s less warmth and earth …. water. Yes. And it’s unusual – you’ve had to teach yourself everything, so some things are a little unorthodox.

“So … what are you proposing?”

“Let me teach you how to use the Dark side of the Force – *safely,*” he added when he saw Rey hesitate. “It draws on the power of emotion – a resource unlikely to be in short supply.”

“But you said before that use of the Force by means of uncontrolled emotions was a path to the Dark side.”

“Ah yes, but the key word there is *uncontrolled.* Reacting impulsively is often the issue. That’s when things can become out of control. But there is no use in negating one’s emotions altogether. To deny one’s emotions is to deny oneself.”

Rey found herself entranced by his voice. It was deep and evenly paced. She could hear every consonant, articulated with his tongue and his lips. And what he was saying – there was so much more to him than she could have known. Behind the mask of the Supreme Leader, he was a wise teacher. She had never thought so much about it, but she suspected he must have been quite a diligent and talented pupil when he was training with Luke.

“The Jedi always aimed to be selfless. It was a useful quality in allowing them to devote their lives to serving others. But on the other hand, it also cut them off from the Dark side – the idea of emotion … individualism … a sense of self – and therefore they lost balance. It lead to their eventual demise.”

“Balance…” Rey whispered.

“Rey, learning to use the Dark side of the Force will help you – it will make you stronger and bring you the sense of balance and understanding you’ve been craving.”

“I’m ready to try. Show me.”

Kylo grabbed the chair from his desk and placed it in the middle of the room. “Let’s start with something simple.” He reached out in front of him and then with a gentle push forward with his outstretched palm, he tipped the chair over with a gentle Force nudge. “Just something small.”

With his index finger curled, he summoned the chair back up into position. “Your turn.”
Normally a task like this was child’s play for Rey. She breathed in and shut her eyes. Instinctively, she let her mind’s routine take over and she searched for a sense of the land around her.

But nothing. She felt like her mind was floundering, grasping at something blindly in the dark, something she couldn’t find. Frustration started to well up inside her. She really was out of touch with Force out here. Was she going to have to relearn everything?

“We already figured out your way doesn’t work up here. You need a different strategy. Like I said – power it with what you feel inside – draw on your own raw emotion.”

Rey opened her eyes. He was standing so close she could feel the heat radiating off him. She almost leaped back in surprise when he delicately pushed her outsretched arm back down to her side. “Feel. Use what’s inside.”

“I don’t understand.”

“What you’re feeling right now – let it swell up in your core. Can you feel it? Tap into that energy – it wants to escape. Let it.”

Rey did as he asked. She stood motionless, eyes firmly shut – searching within herself … feeling her heart, and her raw emotion. Her hands balled up into fists. She could feel the nails of her fingers digging painfully into her palms.

_Frustration._ That’s what she grasped onto. She had grown up feeling it on Jakku, but had always suppressed it. _Nothing good comes from feeling frustrated – better to be patient and wait_, she used to say to herself. She was good at waiting, after all.

“The power is within you, Rey. Can you feel it?”

It was like letting down the floodgates. Frustration at her parents for never coming back. Frustration at herself for believing they would. Frustration at how she had seemingly lost all her power on board this ridiculous starship.

And there it was. She felt the tickle at the ends of her fingers. The floating, lifting feeling inside her. She felt like her body was about to bolt forward. She kept herself there, powering up the energy inside, and then –

BANG.

Rey gasped at the sudden sound of splitting wood as the chair pummelled the back wall of the room. It lay in several pieces on the floor. She stepped back and clutched at her chest. The feeling of icy claws wrapped around her beating heart – the Darkness..

Kylo’s dark voice was neither angry nor disappointed. “I thought we were going to start with something simple.”

“That was …..a bit more than I intended.” She panted.. “Sorry.”

“That’s not a problem – I’ll have a droid come up and replace it.” Seeing Rey still a shaken by the power she had just released, Kylo lowered his voice. “How are you feeling? That must have been some strong emotion you drew on.”

Rey rubbed her sternum. The icy claws were still there and now she was starting to worry it was the beginning of another episode. Her vision was beginning to tunnel.
“I feel it. The Dark. It’s coming again.” Her voice was dry.

Kylo stepped forward and placed a hand along the side of her face, caressing it gently. His thumb pressed down securely on her cheek bone as he shook his head. “Set up the blockade in your mind. Just like we practised. Try it now.”

Rey breathed in through her nose and out slowly through her lips.

“You’re in control of this, Rey. But I’m here in case you need me. I’m not letting you go through another episode. Take the lead – fight it.”

With the Dark side already working its way into her mind, it was more difficult to construct the mental barrier than it had been yesterday.

*Concentrate,* she screamed in her mind. *Build the shield.*

Her mind was spinning and she needed something to focus her attention on. Something to distract her from the swirling Dark thoughts now seeping into the cracks of her weak defence.

She went for the thing right in front of her. *Focus.*

Rey latched onto his Force signature with the last of her mental energy. And it wasn’t the Dark silhouette outlining him that she grasped onto – it was the very core of him. The Light part.

There was Light in him. Ben Solo.

She was lost in his eyes – the deep brown of them, staring right back at her, quivering beneath his furrowed brows of concern.

Ben Solo.

The shield in her mind started to build up again and she slowly felt the Darkness in her mind retreat, locked away safely – controlled.

Ben Solo.

The touch of his hand against her face felt like hot iron. Keeping him fixated in her mind’s eye had simultaneously shut out the Dark and opened up floodgate to comprehending him much more that she thought she could. He was still caressing her face, guiding her away from the Darkness that could so easily have consumed her. He was helping her. This man – this man cared about her.

Rey breathed out and tore her eyes away from him, shaking. “I …I think I’m okay.”

Kylo dropped his hand away from her face, but Rey could feel his eyes still beating down on her. Part of her wanted to stay with him – hold him. But the other half was screaming for her to run and hide. Run and hide from this overwhelming situation that was now laid bare before her.

Her mind starting to whirl again, lost in a confusion of feelings. How could she fight it? This gravitational field pulling her uncontrollably towards him. *Should* she fight it? Yes, yes yes!

“I’m tired,” she forced out. “I have to lie down.” By this time, her body felt like a lump of rock, secured to the ground, but she somehow managed to turn and leave, hurling her stony body step by step, rigidly back into the bedroom.

*Breathe, Rey,* she thought desperately.
She felt as if a blindfold had been removed and she could suddenly see the world for what it truly was. Light. Dark. Balance. And at the centre of it, one man. The one man she was bound to by the Force, but separated from by the war. It couldn't be this way. No, no, no!

And she suddenly realised. This connection between them – her persistence in staying – her determination to see him safe and happy, away from the First Order. It wasn’t just about stopping the war…

It was about him … and her.

She was in love with Ben Solo.
An Unlikely Ally

Rey lay down in Kylo’s bed, sweating like nothing else. She felt ridiculous, feigning sleep while Kylo settled into an armchair with a data pad. Surely the man realised she was faking it. But she couldn't worry about that now. She needed the time alone – the time to sort out this ridiculous mess in her head.

She was in love with Kylo Ren. She had been in love all this time, she just hadn't recognised it until now.

But was it really love? Did she really care that deeply about this … monster? The man who was sentencing the Galaxy to a violent and unfair dictatorship? The murderer of half the Resistance fleet? The man who had once tried to kill her, and not to mention several of her close friends? The man that still swore his allegiance to the First Order?

Yet this was the same man who had catered to her every need after she had been locked away as a prisoner. He had seen his wrong doing and begged her forgiveness. Could this really be Ben Solo shining through? Were Kylo and Ben two separate people, or was she simply falling in love with the latter?

Rey chewed her lip anxiously. During their last lesson, just minutes ago, she had opened herself up to the Darkside, even if only for a moment. It was like finally tapping into the forbidden Dark side had thrown an epiphany violently and undeniably into her understanding of the Force. And there was no denying how right it felt. She felt limitless now. She felt whole.

On top of that, it was the first time she had used the Dark side. It had come from herself – not inflicted upon her by another. Having control over it suddenly opened her eyes to the possibility of using it … for good. Could that be possible?

Rey heard Kylo shift behind her as he stood up and placed his datapad down on the chair. In the distance, she heard the sliding of doors and the voice of another man – unfamiliar, but warm. It was coming from the reception chamber at the entrance of Kylo’s private suite. Kylo left the bedside and exited the bedroom, toward the other man’s voice. Nestled under her blanket, she couldn't make out what was being said, but from the tone of Kylo’s voice, she figured this visitor was a welcome one.

Kylo left the bedroom door open which Rey suspected left him with a direct view of her from the reception chambers through open doors.

“She’s sleeping,” she heard Kylo say in hushed tones, as the two men retreated into the private quarters, just outside the bedroom.

Rey didn't dare turn around to look, for fear of revealing her faux nap.

Who was here? Was it one of the Knights?

Rey felt the uncontrollable urge to chase after Kylo – her heart was crying out just from the mere separation of him leaving the room and conversing with another. Oh, what had become of her? What ridiculous feelings were now consuming her? And what was she going to do about these feelings? Nothing … surely?

Perhaps it would be allowable to feel compassion for this man, but not … romantic love. Rey shuddered at the thought. No, no, no, no! Her loyalty was with the Resistance! She had to do what was right for her family – and getting intimately attached to the enemy was utterly and
preposterously wrong.

Rey could hear the hushed tones of the two men through the opened doors. She lay awake for what felt like almost half an hour, listening intently, but never quite making out what was being said. When Rey finally plucked up the courage to rise out of bed, she found the two men in Kylo’s reception chambers, deep in discussion over a hologram display. When he saw her, Kylo quickly wiped his hand over the hologram and shut it down. He stood up abruptly.

“Rey – this is Botek.”

Rey took a step back instinctively as the man rose to greet her.

“It’s okay,” reassured Kylo. “You can trust him – he’s a friend.”

Botek extended his hand and embraced Rey’s in a warm and firm handshake.

Rey was momentarily stunned by the gesture. It was something so simple, but she never expected to receive such treatment in enemy territory – it was as though he treated her immediately as an equal.

“Hello Rey, it’s a pleasure.”

His voice was deep, like Kylo’s, but warmer. He was beaming from ear to ear – he certainly seemed a more openly cheerful man than Kylo. Judging by his appearance, Rey gathered that Botek must be the same age as Kylo, perhaps even a little older. He was clad in the typical all-black that she had now come to associate with the Knights – although not the same black military uniform of the First Order officers. His brown hair seemed windswept, as if he had just returned from a busy journey.

“I hear you broke Kylo’s lightsabre.” Botek winked. “I’m impressed.”

Rey’s eyebrows shot up. This was not what she was expecting. “No – well – it was – Kylo was half responsible for that!”

Botek threw back his head and laughed. “I’m not surprised, he has a knack for destroying things.”

Kylo looked back at his friend sternly. “Here, have a seat Rey.” He indicated for Rey to take the seat next to Botek.

“Rey, Botek is one of the Knights of Ren. I wanted you two to meet. He is a close confidante of mine – you can trust him too.”

Botek smiled at Rey. My allegiance is first and foremost to Kylo Ren, not the First Order. If Kylo says not to kill you, then I cannot lay a finger on you.”

He winked at Rey. She wasn’t quite sure if she appreciated his humour. Nonetheless, there was something nicely warm about his character, and she found herself oddly at ease in his company.

“You must forgive Botek, Rey,” said Kylo with a sigh. “He has a wicked sense of humour, but I promise he means well. I’ve been discussing your … condition with him, if that’s alright.”

“Oh…”

“These episodes you have, Rey” Botek asked, “there is a pattern?”

“I’m not sure.”

Botek leaned in towards Rey. “The Dark side of the Force can penetrate a weakened mind, given the
right trajectory. As you know, emotion is integral to harnessing the Force. The Jedi restrained their emotions to wield the Light side. The Dark side … we use emotions to our advantage.”

“What are you saying?” Rey asked.

“Intense emotion, particularly negative emotions – I would say these open your mind to vulnerability.”

Of course, that would make sense, Rey thought. Just before the first episode, she had been frightened of Kylo, desperate to escape and feeling hopelessly trapped and betrayed. The next, she was physically drained and anxious from one on Kylo’s Knights bursting into his private suite. And then before, she had mentally opened herself to the Dark side in order to wield it herself. But the power of … well, love, had warded it off. A strong positive emotion… Light-side emotion…


“I still think your theory holds firm,” said Botek nodding towards Kylo. “Snoke weakened her mind when he tortured her, and he left an imprint of his Force signature there.” He turned back to Rey. “You may have heard Snoke’s voice, but it was merely a memory. He left a scar in your mind when he ripped it into it.”

Rey’s heart sunk in disbelief.

“How do I stop the episodes then? Why doesn’t this happen to you too? Both of you use the Dark side of the Force – surely you’ve encountered the same. Why must I be punished for it?”

There was a brief moment of silence, and Kylo hung his head, looking into his lap defeated. “It’s because you fight it.”

Rey’s eyebrows shot up. “Of course I fight it – what else am I supposed to do?” Rey asked exasperatedly.

Botek narrowed his eyes. “Give in to it.”

“I will do no such thing!” Rey snapped.

Botek chuckled. “I like this girl. She’s got fire.”

Kylo seemed to growl at Botek through his dark tone. “You can’t suggest such a thing – who know what will happen? She can’t. I won’t allow it!”

“She has to face it head on eventually. She’s certainly strong enough – maybe not now, but she will be soon.” Botek pointed his finger at Rey promisingly. “Rey must learn to wield the Dark side of the Force. Fight fire with fire, as it were. Use the Dark side of the Force – give into it.”

“And you think she will be strong enough? She has barely any strength now. Physically yes, she is practically recuperated now – but her connection to the Force is weak.” Kylo tapped impatiently on his knees. “Rey’s normal Light-side connection to the Force is virtually gone out here.”

Botek passed his fingers through his beard again. “Planetfall,” he said calmly. “You’re right, Rey’s strength in the Force is primarily elemental. She needs her feet on solid earth. She needs wind. She needs the warm sun beating down on her face. Only then can she rekindle the connection to the Force she knows.”

Rey saw Kylo shift uncomfortably in his chair. Surely he wouldn’t agree to planetfall with Rey still
his captive. And even if he did, how could she make it off the *Legacy* without raising suspicion?

But he had helped her so far, hadn't he? Rey looked over at Kylo. When their eyes met, she felt her heart rate jump and she forced herself to look away.

"I will … consider it. There’s other factors at play though – how can I possibly Rey walk off the *Legacy* freely? She’s at the top of the First Order hit list. As she was mine. Hux even had her bounty tripled."

"If Rey’s health and strength is a priority, you will find a way," Botek said gently.

"How are you feeling, now?" Kylo asked Rey earnestly. “After your rest. You seemed out of sorts earlier.”

Rey blushed heavily. *Out of sorts, indeed.* She prayed neither of the men could see the colour in her cheeks. “I’m fine,” she blurted out. “Actually, I didn't end up sleeping much.”

"You made a strong barrier in your mind. I was impressed.”

*Only because I had you,* Rey thought. It was true – opening up their connection had somehow made her doubly strong.

"Kylo tells me you have a lot of potential," said Botek. “He wants you on our team.”

“I’m not an apprentice, if that’s where this is going.”

Rey looked over at Kylo, and their eyes met, acknowledging their inside joke.

“You should be. Kylo is an excellent teacher. He has wanted to teach you for quite some time.”

Rey pouted at the two men. “Like I said – *not* an apprentice.”

Botek smiled charmingly. “An *equal.*” He peered into Rey’s eyes, almost look straight into her soul. He extended his hand to her. “May I?”

Rey let him take her hand and he shut his eyes briefly, feeling the Force course through her.

“What an interesting woman you are.” Botek stroked his fingers up and down his jawline with his free hand, tugging at the tip of his short rugged beard. His eyes narrowed in on her as he leaned forward, studying her closely. “You’ve never had any formal training, yet you are so powerful – you’re like the spirit of the Force itself. Unbound by laws – you can do anything.”

Kylo looked disapprovingly at Botek. Clearly he wasn’t about to elevate Rey to the rank of ‘spirit of the Force’ in such a poetic way. “Once she is trained, she will be one of us. One of the Knights of Ren.”

Before Rey had the chance to let out her snort of disapproval – the *nerve*of him to throw that on her now – Botek shook his head and threw himself back into his chair. “Rey deserves more than that. But either way, she will never be a Knight. She is a *Jedi.*”

“What?” Rey slipped. “I am no Jedi, I –”

Botek held up his hand, cutting her off. “Ah, but you *are* Jedi, whether you all yourself one or not. You are simply redefining what it means to be one, in this modern era.”

Rey cocked her head to the side, questioning his logic.
“The Light in you is undeniable and unshifting, Rey. Anyone can see it, plain as day. You are the embodiment of a Jedi. However, rather interestingly … I would be lying if I said you weren’t also as strong with the Dark side of the Force.”

“No….”

“I know that’s maybe not what you want to hear – or at least your Resistance followers wouldn't want to know it. But deep down, you always knew it was there, didn't you?”

Rey bit her lip. She didn't want to admit it, but Botek was right.

The Darkness inside her gurgled, ready to discover, hungry to learn more…

A light suddenly flashed up on Kylo’s datapad resting on the low table between them all. He snatched it up quickly to find a report requiring his attention. “I need to attend to this immediately. Botek you are dismissed from your missions until further notice – I need you here on the Legacy for a short while. Rey –” he turned to look at her, “We’ll resume your training once I return. I trust you are now well rested. Botek?”

“I'll see myself out, my Lord.” He bowed his head.

Kylo was clearly in a rush to leave, but seemed to hesitate knowing that Rey would be left alone with Botek.

“She is safe with me, I assure you,” Botek said instinctively.

“I am perfectly able to look after myself!” Rey snapped to both men.

Kylo pulled his helmet over his head, and Rey could hear the sound of his breath modified and scratchy. “I’ll return shortly.”

In that moment, it was like he had transformed, back to his former self – the true form of Kylo Ren, the Dark unforgiving one. Rey’s heart twisted seeing the vivid difference. How could her heart love such a man? How could she allow herself to love something so cruel?

Rey sighed, perhaps a little louder than she meant, and sunk back into her chair, hugging her knees into her chest.

“He is different.” Botek broke Rey’s trance. “You’ve done that.”

It wasn’t an accusation – just a mere observation.

“You love him.”

What?! Rey stared wide-eyed at Botek. “No! You can't say such a thing!”

Botek smiled slyly at her. “It’s okay, your secret is safe with me. I can tell just by the way you look at him.”

Rey found herself blushing furiously. The skin on her face was surely going to burn off.

“I don't know what you're talking about!” she stammered.

“Say what you will Rey, but I see right through you.”

“I don't know what to say…..”
“So it’s true?”

“I – I never said that.”

“Think about it Rey – you have every reason to hate Kylo Ren, yet here you are, quite comfortable and in no rush to escape. You’ve given up your own safety to be here. There’s something inside you that draws you to him. If that’s not love, I don’t know what is.”

“That’s not true. It’s business only. Redeeming Kylo Ren would bring an end to the war.”

“Don’t try to deny it Rey. Besides, love is a beautiful thing. And it’s something Kylo has long been without. I fear he would struggle to recognise it these days.”

“What do you mean?”

“Hmm, just between you and me, alright? And this is only because I like you.” Rey nodded quickly.

“Right, let’s talk.” Botek shuffled back into his chair and crossed his legs comfortably. “Kylo’s parents sent him away when he desperately didn't want to leave. Even if it was out of love, he was just a boy and saw it as abandonment. He was lonely, an outcast amongst the other students at the Jedi Temple. This was long before we forged our friendship. Through this time, his mind and better judgement was already becoming clouded by Snoke’s grooming. And that’s when the real damage began…”

“Damage?”

“Kylo is a complicated man with a complicated past. He doesn't know how to love. Or how to beloved. His own uncle tried to murder him while he slept. He was made to murder his father in the belief it would make him stronger – he trusted in Snoke’s promise. Of course that tore him apart. On top of that, he is torn between loving and hating Snoke. He was practically raised by Snoke. And now he now deals with the guilt of killing his own master to save someone who rejected him straight away – you.”

“I….”

Rey could have protested, saying that she had every right to reject Kylo’s offer in Snoke’s throne room, but the way Botek described Kylo made her begin to think. Damage – she understood now. The inner turmoil in that man must be unimaginable.

Botek sighed. “He’s been torn into a million pieces and lost his true self along the way.”

“So he really is two different people then – Kylo Ren and Ben Solo?”

“Ben.” Botek said the name slowly and purposefully, as if relishing in the strangeness of saying the name aloud for the first time in a decade. “The name he was so desperate to shed … no, he’s still the same man to me – the same man I pledged my lifelong allegiance to.”

“But I don't understand – you were a student too, with him. Why? Why follow him down a Dark path? After he killed the other students?”

“Snoke made him believe they were against him, that they were the enemy.” Botek shook his head sadly. “I saw how it destroyed him, devastating the Jedi temple and Luke’s students. But it was all part of his vision – they couldn't be allowed to live because the Jedi couldn't be allowed to continue.
It was all part of his plan to create a new order by ridding the Galaxy of the old traditions which held it in a state of imbalance. We followed him loyally – myself and the other Knights – blinded by the legend of his bloodline and his newly accrued power. We were young too. We believed in his visions – it was for the greater good, you see. I still do believe in him. We all do.

“Why wipe out the Jedi traditions?”

“Ben always wanted more. You see, Skywalker feared the Dark side because of what it did to his father, Darth Vader, so he continued the old Jedi tradition of strictly upholding the Light side. Ben, however, saw things differently… he wanted the truth – both sides.” Botek paused, his eyes wandering across the room, pondering a new thought. “Interestingly, it’s not much different to the same hunger for knowledge you also possess right now. Except, there is one difference …”

Rey started to catch on to where Botek was heading. “Kylo can teach me, but no one was there to teach him, except…”

“Exactly. Luke wouldn’t teach him – who else was he supposed to turn to? Snoke was a master manipulator and offered him limitless power. Could you blame him? And having grown up with the belief that his parents didn't care for him, of course he latched on to Snoke.”

Rey shook her head gently. Never had she heard someone talk out Kylo in such a sympathetic way. Her heart ached thinking of how a young impressionable Kylo submitted himself to such an evil power, partially from unsatisfied lust for knowledge and power, but also for love. What a cruel love it must have been. How much must have Kylo suffered under the influence of Snoke?

“Can you see now, Rey, how similar the two of you are? You’re in the same position as Kylo all those years ago, except you… you have someone to guide you down that path safely.”

“And that’s why…?”

“I think that is why Kylo is so adamant about teaching you about the Dark side of the Force. He can see your potential. He knows your curiosity – your thirst for knowledge – but he wants to protect you from its dangers. He understands the dangers of going too far and succumbing to it – trust me, he is very well aware of what he has become because of his manipulated training.”

Rey’s heart was pounding. Suddenly everything was becoming so much clearer. It was never just about turning her to the Dark side. He really just did want to teach her. Did he really just care for her in that way?

But one still think itched in her mind.

“It’s all Snoke – everything. Everything that he’s done. You’re saying Kylo isn’t responsible for anything he has done?”

“No, he is responsible. Nothing can take back what’s he’s done, even if it was under Snoke’s orders. Snoke warped his perception. He used Kylo. And Kylo only really admitted this to himself right at the end, when he finally struck his master down.”

“But what now that Snoke’s dead? How is anything different?”

“Everything is different, Rey! Kylo is free – no longer doing the bidding of a crazed power-hungry leader. Kylo wants to be a strong ruler – it’s just a matter of time.” Botek nodded and smiled to himself. “I support him.”

“But … I mean this because you seem like a reasonable man – how can you support him, knowing
everything he’s done?”

“Do you know what he’s done? Really know?”

Rey opened her mouth in protest, but closed it once she realised Botek raised a decent point. “I guess not… we’ve agreed not to discuss the war – it’s just, it might complicate things.”

Rey thought that keeping neutral ground in that regard had helped keep things a little simpler between them, for now. But perhaps, had it just closed off a branch of communication between them?

Botek smacked his lips together. “Until the two of you bring reality back into the picture and start to discuss the war again, I suggest you leave your judgement at the door. There’s still a lot you don’t know about Kylo.”

“But…”

“Kylo wants to be a good ruler, Rey.”

“Do you think he can be redeemed then?”

“Redemption is not even the question here. He is free of Snoke now – his work is his own. The question now is –” Botek stood and brushed down his uniform. “what kind of man will he become? How will he bring peace and balance to the Galaxy?”

Rey couldn't believe what she was hearing. In such a short period, her perception of the Knights of Ren had been completely flipped upside down. Instead of a ruthless killer, she had met an intelligent, calm and caring supporter of Kylo. She should have hated the man who supported the Supreme Leader of the First Order, but instead she found herself oddly warming to him.

She even trusted him.

“I hope you're right, Botek.” Rey said softly.

“You can help him, Rey. You might need him right now, but I think he needs you more. He still has a long way to go.”

“I want to help him.” Rey’s heart swelled. “Ben. I feel like I see him sometimes – I feel him, within the shell of Kylo.”

“I know. Me too.” Botek smiled gently.

Rey let her head fall into her hands. “I can't believe this. I’m, I’m --- I’m …….”

“I’m in love with my enemy, she wanted to scream out, but the word ‘love’ didn’t dare leave her lips. I’m in love with Kylo Ren. I’m in love with Ben Solo!”

Botek saw right through her though. “You’re in love with him, Rey.” He chuckled to himself. “I bet you didn't see that coming.”

Rey didn't even try to fight him off this time. “You won’t … tell him, will you?”

Botek laughed again, more jovial than before. “I’m glad you’ve come around. You’ve nothing to worry about. It’s not my place to tell him something like that.” He winked at her. “It can be our little secret.”
Rey studied the outline of Kylo’s face as he slept peacefully next to her. He returned shortly after Botek had left, and had thrown himself into bed with exhaustion as if he just returned from a long and tiring journey. Rey could only presume his work was mentally draining – ruling the Galaxy and what not. Within a few minutes he had fallen fast asleep.

Rey had always grown up seeing naps as the rich man’s privilege. Scavengers like herself were never allowed to take breaks like that. Besides, right now Rey’s mind was too busy to sleep, reeling from the events earlier and Botek’s stories about Kylo. For now, she relished in the time to herself, and watching Kylo sleep – he was in his purest, most untouched form like this. She could feel Ben Solo lingering just beneath the surface.

Now that she had come to terms with her blossoming feelings for Kylo, Rey couldn't help but notice how his black locks gently cascaded across his face, or how his lips were a delicate pink. Or how the fine sun spots on his cheeks played up brilliantly on his porcelain skin. Everything beautiful about him seem magnified. He was like a prince in those stories younglings used to share – the stories where everyone lived happily ever after, but no one really believed could be real.

Kylo sighed in his sleep and Rey sighed in sync with him. The connection between them burned like a flame.

The hour passed and Kylo finally woke. Rey was sitting at Kylo’s desk, tracing her fingers over his books and loose paper, waiting for the time to pass before they could resume their training. Turning the pages of his books, she felt so small and insignificant knowing how deeply educated Kylo must be, compared to herself and her non-existent education on Jakku.

“Sorry, I didn't mean to fall asleep.”

Kylo approached her from behind, wiping the sleep from his eyes. He had fallen asleep in his uniform, but loosened his collar and removed his gloves and boots for comfort. Rey secretly enjoyed seeing him in this relaxed state.

“Calligraphy?” She pointed at the ink pot and hand-carved pens on his desk.

“Oh.” Kylo swept back his hair and rubbed the back of his ear in embarrassment. “Something I enjoyed when I was younger. I come back to it from time to time – I find it meditative.”

“So… you write letters? Seems awfully slow and old-fashioned.”

“No, it’s art.”

“Can you show me?”

“We should resume your training.”

“Please? I’d like to see.”

Kylo bit his lip, but after a short moment’s hesitation, gave in. “Alright.”

He pulled up a chair next to Rey and loaded up one of his pens. Rey watched as he carefully drew
out different letters, each elegantly and carefully created. “I always loved developing my own way of writing the letters – everyone is different, whether more curved or angled, thin or gradated…” He demonstrated the different styles as he spoke, and his eyes relaxed as he concentrated on his work.

Rey smiled with wonder. She had never thought of Kylo as artistically or creatively inclined, especially in such a fine art. It was something so simple, yet something so ...human.

“Can I try?”

Kylo re-inked the calligraphy pen and passed it to Rey. She tried to copy how he had wrapped it in his fingers, but it felt horrifically awkward. Kylo grabbed another less ornate pen.

“Try your name – here are the letters.” He penned out three symbols – it looked vaguely familiar to Rey.

Her spark of confidence from the letter’s familiarity was shortly dampened when she put pen to paper. She felt as if she was scratching on the paper, and the angles of her letters were not attractive like Kylo’s.

“That’s it,” he encouraged.

Rey wanted to curl up with embarrassment. She was conscious of how close he was sitting and how he watched her every movement – watching, judging …

“Oh … they’re not as beautiful as yours,” she muttered.

“Here, let me show you.” Kylo demonstrated the position of the pen in his fingers. Rey nodded as he pointed out each feature. Rey attempted to make quick mental notes as he spoke – thumb tip on top, circle fingers, knuckle pad…

“The first letter – R…” Kylo showed her each stroke individually.

Rey tried to copy, but again her ink came out blotchy and unrefined.

“It's the way you move your hand – feel it coming from your wrist. Here.”

Kylo gently placed his hand over the back of hers, guiding it over the paper. An energy fizzed between them where their skin touched. Rey felt the hairs on the back of her neck stand up. Was she holding her breath?

Rey looked down at their success – a set of three beautiful letters. She couldn’t understand them, but the style of them she knew was beautiful. They had created it together.

Kylo held onto Rey’s hand, his eyes still firmly planted downward on the paper.

Does he feel what I feel? Rey thought.

“This connection…” Kylo whispered under his breath. “This happens every time we touch – this feeling.”

This feeling …. I think I know what it is, Rey yelled in her mind.

Kylo released Rey’s hand and looked over his fingers, searching for something to explain the electricity that had passed between them. He then peered at Rey curiously. “I still don't understand why the Force is pulling us together like this.”
Don’t you also feel what I feel? Rey thought, her eyes looking back into his pleadingly. Perhaps Botek had been right, and Kylo really didn't know how to recognise love, even when he loved someone else. Perhaps he was denying it – maybe he couldn't bear the thought of a romantic coupling with Rey, a scavenger from Jakku. Nobody.

Rey’s heart crumbled at the thought.

“Why would the Force be drawing together two enemies?” Kylo pondered aloud again.

“Don't say that Kylo – we’re not enemies. At least, not here, not right now.” Rey wanted to shake him. I’m not your enemy!

“Let’s stay in the present – you’re training me, remember – your fake apprentice.” Rey smiled.

“I like it when you say that – that we’re not enemies. I always wanted it that way. You and I make a good team.”

Rey prayed to the gods that her pounding chest couldn't be heard outside her body.

***

Kylo trained Rey once again that evening. Her mental blocking was becoming stronger and her ability to focus her feelings was growing. He peaked at her as she sat cross-legged, meditating on the floor opposite him. The electric feelings that had passed between them earlier today had ruffled him. His inner storm battled on, constantly conflicted by his uncontrollable will to protect Rey, and his former beliefs which had urged him to destroy her. He couldn't explain the constant urge to hold her, and to feel her skin under his.

At the core of it all, Rey was still his prisoner, trapped on an enemy ship and in no physical state to execute an escape. But at the same time, Rey needed her strength to make a full recovery and to protect herself from the Dark side of the Force, which seemed to be ever present, lurking and waiting, ready to pull her in again.

He remembered what Botek had said…

*Planetfall. She needs her feet on solid earth. She needs the warm sun beating down on her face. Only then can she rekindle the connection to the Force she knows.*

If they were to make planetfall for the sake of Rey’s strength, he would risk her escape. Did he trust her to stay? Even still, how could they get her off the ship without raising suspicion?

There only seemed one plausible option…

Kylo cleared his throat, rousing Rey from her meditation. “General Hux has been asking questions about your captivity here. He thinks I’ve been trying to convert you to our side.”

Rey smiled back at him cheekily. Kylo gulped – her smile always made him feel giddy.

“What have you told him?” she asked.

“That I’ve managed to break you down, and that you’re now my new Knight in-training.”

“And he believes that?” Rey looked sceptical.

“Even if he didn’t, Hux is in no position to question me. Although…it does still seem early. I’m not sure anyone would be convinced if I simply let you walk off this ship…”
“What are you saying?

Kylo paused. After a deep breath, he continued. “You and I both know you need to make planetfall. Nothing will return your strength more than re-connecting with the Light side of the Force. There is only Darkness out here.”

“You want that for me?”

“Of course.”

“And you’re not worried about me escaping?”

“Of course I am. I don’t want to lose you … I only just got you.”

Rey blinked rapidly and looked away, as if suddenly embarrassed. “You don’t have to worry about me escaping. I came here for you, Kylo. You know that already.” She sighed, and hugged her knees to her chest. “I know you won’t admit it, but I know there’s Light still inside you. I still want you to find it.”

“You think I’m a monster.”

“I think you’re a complicated man with a complicated past.”

“Hmm.”

Kylo rubbed his hands together, anxious to tell Rey his plan. “We’re currently in orbit around the Naboo system, in the Chommel sector. I won’t say what for. But I will say that there are a number of beautiful planets down there – including the pastoral planet, Naboo. If it’s alright with you, I’d like to take you there, tomorrow.”

He saw Rey’s face light up. “Is it green?”

“Very.” Kylo knew instantly she would fall in love with the planet too. “I’m not sure if you know this – whether Luke or my mother told you – but my grandmother grew up there. I visit there from time to time. I know my grandfather also spent time with her there, before he became …”

“Darth Vader,” Rey whispered.

Kylo nodded carefully, feeling apprehensive about what Rey may be thinking.

“She loved him, even after he became a Sith.”

“Is that why you go – to feel reconnected with your history?”

“In part. It’s not just a place of family history. Sheev Palpatine used to be the Naboo representative on the Galactic Senate before the time of the Empire. He became the Empire – the last great ruler of the Galaxy.”

Rey’s expression dropped. Did she really expect him to be that sentimental about his family history?

“Still, it seems strange…” she said.

“What do you mean?”

“I’ve never heard you speak about your family before. I thought you hated ---”
“My parents sent me away, too consumed in their own political agendas to pay attention to their son. And Luke betrayed me.” Kylo could feel the spite in his own voice. “Luke was somehow able to see the good in Darth Vader, his father. But he couldn’t see the Light in me. I was too far gone for saving in his eyes. He was prepared to take my life for it – yet he never would have laid a finger on his father.”

“I think ...” Rey said softly, soothing him. “I think even Jedi Masters can be wrong sometimes.”

Could Rey really be siding with him, and not Luke?

“And your parents wanted nothing more than to love you.”

“Don't talk to me about my parents.”

Rey leaned forward, trying to get through to him. “The life you had before you became Kylo Ren – it's still a reality, a possibility…”

“That life is behind me. I can't go back. There’s nothing for me there anymore.”

“Kylo—”

“It’s pointless Rey. I couldn't ever return. My mother abandoned me long ago – nobody wants me there.”

“She wasn't abandoning you. At least your mother cared about you.” Kylo could hear the bitterness in Rey’s voice. She sighed. “Your mother – you broke her heart.”

The image of his lightsaber striking through his father’s heart flashed before his eyes.

“Kylo … your father…” Rey asked carefully, watching Kylo’s expressions warily. “How could you?”

Memories flooded back to Kylo, forcing their way into his mind. No, no! He pushed them away, but it didn't take away the cold icy grip in his chest. His father...

“Don’t ask me that,” he said coldly, blocking up his mind.

“I’m only trying to understand you.”

Stop stop! The grip in his chest tightened, twisting at his heart.

“You have no idea. You couldn't possibly understand – and I hope you never do. It split my spirit to the core.” He gazed down at his palms, shaking. “I did it for Snoke. I thought it would bring me strength … I gave everything to him….”

Kylo felt his shoulders tremble. It was the anger bubbling up inside him now. Stop – not now, not here.

“But you knew Han loved you.”

Kylo’s chest exploded.

“Don’t ask this of me!” he stood up abruptly, ready to storm out of the room, but something kept him locked in place.

Rey jumped up and took hold of his arms.
“I’m so sorry, I shouldn’t have pushed. Kylo?”

Kylo was too busy fighting the rage that was bursting out of him, trying to hide it from Rey. Exploding in front her was not a good idea while she was in her weakened state. It was taking every ounce of his energy to contain himself.

But why should she question him anyway? His father … Han Solo … he took matters into his own hands. He couldn't question his decision now, even if the demons that haunted his nightmares every night made him question his reality.

“It was my choice!” he growled, mostly to himself now.

“Kylo, it’s okay – it’s normal you feel this way.”

“No, it’s not!” Kylo growled, “I shouldn’t feel this way. It makes me weak. I can't be weak. I have to rule this empire and bring order to the Galaxy!”

“Kylo, you’re not weak…”

“I feel weak. You make me feel weak. Just your being here. I don’t understand it. And it’s tearing me apart. I don’t know the difference between right and wrong anymore.”

Rey stared back at him. He felt like he was pleading with her. Even since she had stepped into his life, she had made him question everything. It made everything so much harder … Everything he was trying to achieve.

He felt Rey squeeze his arms. “Please let me take your pain away,” Rey whispered.

“You can’t,” he said simply.

“When we make planetfall, and I’m touch with the Force again, let me show you the Light side again.”

“It’s too late for me.”

Slowly pulling himself back together her took hold of Rey’s shoulders and pushed her gently away from him. He missed her touch already, but knew every further inch she was away from him, the safer she would be.

“I lost my temper – I’m sorry for that.”

“It’s okay.”

Kylo sighed, and looked back at Rey. Her eyes shimmered with worry – worry for him.

“I wish you didn't have to hurt like this,” she said softly. “I don't know what it will take, but I swear to you, I want to help you. If only you’ll let me – I’ll be waiting.”
The Knights Of Ren

Chapter Notes

In which we meet four of the five Knights of Ren, and they concoct a plan to get Rey to Naboo. I wanted my version of the Knights to be human and real, not killing machines. Forgive me for introducing so any new characters! I've included images at the end of the chapter to give you an idea of what my Knights look like. Please note I do not know the people in the photos personally and do not own these images - they're just photos pulled off Google to depict what I think my characters would look like. We are yet to meet the fifth Knight - she'll show up in the later chapters. Sweet Reyloromance coming up next xx

Kylo rose early the next morning, leaving Rey asleep in his bed. He took one last wistful look at her gentle sleeping face before heading off for his morning’s business.

Today he would take her to Naboo, the home of his grandmother, and the birthplace of the Skywalker legacy and his grandfather. He returned there several times per year to reflect and pay respects to his past. Of course, the planet was under the jurisdiction of the First Order now, so it would be easy to make planetfall with Rey there. The only issue was getting Rey off the Legacy without raising suspicion – suspicion about his prisoner, but also suspicion about his own activities.

Since becoming Supreme Leader, Kylo had become acutely aware of what it took to rule an entire political movement – and that meant dictating with more than just brute force. People needed to be won over in order to gain their trust. They were not like his Knights who had so easily sworn the loyalty to him. No, to them, the Force was a dying art, old-fashioned and unreliable.

With the former Supreme Leader’s death, it would have made sense for the power to shift to General Hux, the leader of the First Order’s armies, not to Snoke’s apprentice. When he had first taken the political throne, he had sensed the unease and uncertainty amongst the First Order officials and personnel. Was it because they felt the throne rightfully belonged to Hux, or was it because they knew they would be serving under an unhinged and wildly tempered Force sensitive? Hell, he didn't blame them for thinking that, but he still needed his people to see him as a powerful and visionary leader. He did want to bring balance and order to the Galaxy – could it really be that difficult for everyone to see that?

The shift into ultimate power had been difficult, and admittedly, he had not enjoyed watching over his shoulder at every corner.

And so he would not take any chances with Rey.

He would need support to pull this off smoothly, and there were only a handful of people he truly trusted – the Knights of Ren.

By now, all but one had been recalled to the Legacy upon his orders, and were now at his disposal. They had no true military power in the First Order, but they were free to roam and become as heavily involved as he allowed. Unlike other operations run by Hux and himself, the Knights could easily be dispatched for tasks that required a little more … finesse. Political manipulation … undercover investigations …. inconspicuous murders in the night…. Back in the day, the Jedi Order would have
been able to stop forces like theirs, but in this era, nothing could stand in their way. The were undercover and deadly.

There had been six, of course, but one had been lost that night on Bespin. Even still, the surviving five remained strong and loyal to his cause.

Botek – one year his senior, and Kylo’s closest confidante, Botek was grounded and good humoured. In many of Kylo’s darkest and trying times, Botek had been there to support him. Despite Botek’s strength with the Force, knowledge had always been his quest – not power or violence – and so Kylo had never had to doubt Botek’s loyalty.

Meena – petite, but lethal. She had always been the stealthiest of the Knights – small, fast, and cunning. Ever since her romantic coupling with Botek had blossomed, they had made an excellent team, balancing each other out in the skills and strengths. She had arrived last night.

Dagran – a few years younger than Kylo, the jester of the group, and best friends with Soan. He was sweetly innocent and charismatic, but extremely dangerous. His shaggy blonde hair and blue-eyed baby face made for a good cover on stealth missions.

Soan – dark skinned with brilliant icy blue eyes. The Knights had always joked that he was the “pretty boy” of the group, but in reality Soan was so much more than that. He was built like a tank and was the most fearsome-looking of them all. Dagran and him made a good team in that regard. They were like brothers, those two. The pair were the youngest of the Knights, requiring more guidance than the others. In recent years they had grown in independence and autonomy. With their short tempers and hunger for power, Kylo was still unsure if this was a good thing.

The only one left now to join them was ….

Aleina – she had been on the outskirts of Kylo’s Dark circle before he became Kylo Ren. Only after he destroyed the Jedi temple had she sworn her allegiance to him, in a desperate act of mercy. She had truly changed after embracing the Dark side – cold and ruthless, she was a killing machine. No man could stand in her way after she had placed a target on his back. Everyone spoke of how beautiful she was, but Kylo had never paid attention. Back then, when he had been power hungry and wildly violent, he had simply brushed off her advances, leaving her wounded and hurt. She had eventually given up on him, and he was grateful she had – Snoke had always taught him that romantic attachment would make him weak.

Aleina’s most recent mission was in the Outer Rim, where she was investigating rumours of young Force sensitives. No doubt she was doing her best to polish off the job to the best of her ability before presenting back to the Legacy. Journeys from those parts were long, so it was nothing out of the ordinary. She would have to meet Rey after Naboo…

Kylo tapped into his datapad, sending messages to all his Knights in succession.

Assemble in an hour. Reception chambers.

***

“If we’re going to make planetfall without raising suspicion, we need the Knights of Ren. We are going to need their support.”

Kylo walked with Rey into his reception chambers, a hand on her back, and guiding her into the new space. Rey wasn’t quite sure yet how she felt about meeting all the Knights. Botek had been fine, yes ….. but two of them had knocked her down and taunted her on her way to her public punishment.
So much had changed since then – Rey knew Kylo had already talked to them about her, but would that be enough to keep her safe from them? They weren’t just murderers and accomplices to all of Kylo’s past misdeeds – they were also all strong users of the Dark side of the Force.

“Rey, relax.” Kylo whispered in her ear as he helped her into her seat. “I swore to protect you. Things will be no different here. No one is here will hurt you – you’re protected under my orders.”

Kylo pushed open the doors. The room was ornate, of course, like everywhere else in Kylo’s part of the ship. Seven seats were positioned in a tight circle, one seat larger and more ornate than the others – obviously Kylo’s. As they approached the circle of seats, Botek appeared through a door on the other side of the room.

He smiled at Rey, then greeted his master with a crisp bow. “My lord.”

He took a seat while two more men walked into the room. Both were still masked and clad in black uniform. Rey knew instinctively who these two were – the Knights from Jadan V. Rey instinctively recoiled, taking a step behind Kylo.

“Rey, this is Dagran….” The taller of the two removed his helmet. A happy smiling face was uncovered – this was the young man who had burst into Kylo’s private chamber a few days ago. Tall, blonde, blue eyes. He must have been close to Rey’s age.

“It’s a pleasure to finally formally meet you.” He winked at Rey playfully and shook her hand. Rey smiled back weakly. She could feel the growl ready to escape Kylo’s throat.

“And Soan.”

The second man removed his helmet. This one, dark skinned and brooding, seemed less playful than Dagran, but was equally young. He didn’t offer her a smile like Dagran, but did shake her hand firmly under Kylo’s watchful eye. “It’s a pleasure.”

Rey sensed that he didn’t quite mean it.

A final Knight swept into the room. A petite slim figure, smaller than Rey, carrying her helmet at her side. A woman…

“And this is Meena.”

Rey looked cautiously at Meena, then back at Kylo, but her suspicions were quickly dampened when she saw Meena skip over to Botek and plant a light tender kiss on his cheek.

Meena then bowed to Kylo. “My lord.” She smiled at Rey. “Who do we have here?”

Her voice chimed like bells. Her raven-black hair was short, cut just at her jawline, and her equally dark eyes were somehow warm.

Kylo indicated for everyone to make themselves comfortable. “Thank you for meeting with me. Everyone please take a seat.”

Rey fell into a seat next to Kylo. The seat on her other side was empty, but for that she was thankful – she wasn’t quite sure how she felt about being in close proximity to such dangerous folk …

“I need to introduce you all formally to Rey,” Kylo began. “She’s one of us now. My apprentice, if you will.”
“Apprentice?” Dagran chuckled.

Rey rolled her eyes in private. Was Kylo going to lie to his followers about how he truly saw her? Perhaps to keep his own standing, he wasn’t about to admit how he had asked her to join him in ruling the Galaxy as equals. She may have to settle for the role of “apprentice” if they were going to convince the Knights of her place within them.

“She’s had no formal training – it only makes sense she receives a basic education. She is strong with the Force, and I am training her. She is one of us now.” Kylo said. “And like us, she operates independently of the First Order.”

“Are you suggesting that she completes our numbers?” Dagran asked, indicating the circle of seats.

“Seven seats … six Knights.” Rey spoke her thoughts before she could stop herself. “But there are only four of you here?”

“Good maths, my dear,” said Dagran, smiling at Rey. “Two we are misisng. Aleina is still on her way. The other we lost many years ago on Bespin –”

“Dagran!” Kylo barked.

Rey looked between the two men. What happened on Bespin? She had never heard of that place. Dagran shrank sheepishly back into his chair and Kylo looked peeved.

“What…” Rey asked cautiously. “What happened on Bespin?”

“A story for another day.” Kylo brushed aside her question, and Rey couldn't help feeling he was hiding something else unnecessarily from her. First the mysterious metal safe in his quarters, now this …

“We’re not here for stories, we’re here for business.”

“Rey tell us about yourself,” Meena chimed up. “Where are you from?”

Rey cleared her throat. It felt horribly dry.

“Jakku. I grew up there alone. I was a scavenger.”

“And what of your Force-sensitivity? We’ve all heard about your run in with Kylo at Starkiller Base. You must be strong with the Force if you can stand up to him.” Meena leaned forward and tapped her chin in thought. “You’ve been working with the Resistance, but here you sit, side-by-side with Master Ren, like … allies.”

Rey gulped. Meena’s intense gaze was hypnotic.

“The Resistance are my family. But … I’ve needed to find out about the Force. Skywalker wouldn’t teach me. But Kylo can –”

“Skywalker…” Dagran tutted.

Perhaps discussing their mutual teacher was dangerous territory, Rey thought.

“Skywalker wouldn't have taught you.” Meena commented absent-mindedly, curled up in her seat. “He saw the Darkness in you.”
“Is it … really that obvious?”

“Mmm,” Meena smiled cheekily and nodded. “Yeah, pretty obvious.”

It was Dagran’s turn to question Rey. “So tell us, that day on Jadan V – you were seeking out Kylo, weren’t you? We thought we would have to catch you unawares, but you walked right into our clutches. Were you seeking him out as a teacher?”

“Yes, but also…."

Rey hesitated.

“Yes?” Dagran urged, smiling intently.

“I want to save him.”

“HAH! Save him? He’s already been saved! Now that Snoke is dead, Kylo finally has space to be the ruler he was meant to be.”

“And what kind of ruler is that?” Rey said, peering over at Kylo who was staring sternly at his hands in his lap.

“Well, he –” Dagran began.

“Hush, Dagran,” growled Kylo. “No discussion of the war in front of Rey – we’re keeping everything neutral at present.”

“Oh, don’t be shy, Kylo!” Dagran teased.

Rey couldn’t help but feel mildly hurt from this exclusion. There continued to be so much that Kylo still hid from her.

Kylo peered back at Rey. “It’s mutually beneficial – I would love nothing more than for Rey to share the location of the Resistance base, but I think secrecy is a fair exchange given the circumstances.”

Soan stirred from his seat, looking as broody as ever. “So … really, what is Rey doing here?”

Something about Soan made Rey extremely uncomfortable. So far, he had been the only one not to greet her warmly or even offer a smile.

“Shut her here to learn.” Kylo answered for her. “The Knights operate independently of any side of the war, and so Rey fits in to that picture well.”

Botek, a charming smile smeared across his face, leaned in towards Kylo. “Are you sure there’s no other reason, Kylo?”

What? Rey tried not to glare at Botek in surprise. Was Botek suggesting what she thought he was? No – shut up! Rey thought.

Kylo merely glared back at Botek.

Dagran, catching onto Botek’s drift joined in the jest. “Yeah Kylo, are you sure?”

“If you’re making that suggestion again Dagran, I’ll have your head,” Kylo growled.

“Nope … nope …” Dagran melted back into his chair, his lanky limbs folding in front of him.
As the attention turned back to Kylo in the room, Botek winked at Rey. She smiled back weakly, but was thankful that he still kept her secret.

Soan’s dark voice cut through the awkward exchange. “I’m still not sure about this. Let the girl speak – I want to know what she thinks she’s here for. She says she wants to save Kylo. What for? To turn him against us and the First Order?”

“No –” Rey began, feeling cornered. “Kylo speaks about balance. Doesn’t balance require Light and Dark? I guess in that sense it goes both ways. First and foremost, right now, I’m here to learn the Dark side of the Force.”

“What for? So you can take your new found knowledge back to your Rebellion and later use it against us?” he turned back to Kylo. “This is the girl Snoke spoke of, yes? The Light that rises to meet the Dark?”

“Snoke was blinded by his power. He wanted to squash any power that stood in his way. He blinded us from the true purpose of our circle – true balance of the Force. That is what we stand for, after all. Rey seeks balance, just like the rest of us. At least while she is with us on the Legacy, she is an honorary Knight of Ren.”

“I don’t like it.” Soan’s piercing blue eyes shone out underneath the shadow of his brows. “You so easily bring an outsider into our secret circle. What makes you think we can really trust her?”

“If you do not trust my judgement, you are welcome to leave.”

Soan shook his head. “I’ll ask again – what makes you think we can trust her?”

Kylo was not about to explain the Force bond to Soan – it was only a matter he had opened up to Botek about. But it was the Force bond that secured his trust in Rey – feeling her through it, and their mutual understanding of each other.

“There’s more to this than you understand, Soan.”

“She doesn’t even --”

“Do not defy my decision, Soan! My word is final.”

Soan stood up, clearly feeling unheard by his leader. “She’s not trained in the Dark side of the Force.” He pointed aggressively towards Rey. “This girl is not even trained in the Jedi arts – and yet you are willing to let her into our circle.”

“I’m afraid you don't get a say in who I let in –”

Kylo, so far seemed to be controlling his temper. Soan’s temper, on the other hand, only seemed to flare. Dagran, sensing his best friend’s anger rising, attempted to pull Soan back into his seat. “Come now, let’s not --”

Soan pushed Dagran’s hand away angrily and continued his argument toward Kylo. “If she’s as powerful as you say she is, she’s a threat to us. She’s not on the same path as us – are you sure her motives even align with our own?”

Soan took a step towards Rey, raising his pointed hand toward her again. “She can't stay –”

Kylo jumped out of his seat, temper finally snapping, and grabbed the front of Soan’s tunic, pulling him violently towards him, so that their noses almost touched. “I’ve had enough, Soan. The next time
you raise a hand against me, will be the \textit{last time you have a hand.}” He threw Soan back. “She’s a part of this team whether you like it or not. Threaten her again, and you’ll be the one leaving this circle.”

Soan scowled but said nothing.

“My word makes her untouchable. Don’t forget that. Ever.” Kylo growled.

Dagran dragged Soan by the back of his tunic into his seat. Rey could sense the unease in Kylo, having one of his Knights so openly test him.

“If anyone else has an issue with Rey, feel free to take a hike. I trust her, and therefore you must also.”

Kylo waited for another rebuttal, but there was none.

“Now, back to the matter at hand … planetfall. We need to get Ret off the ship without raising First Order suspicion. Any suggestions?”

Meena smiled cheekily. “I think we can cook up a plan.”

Meena seemed to have taken as instant liking to Rey. Perhaps it was that she finally had female company. Or perhaps Botek had shared Rey’s secret with his soulmate. Either way, Rey was thankful she didn’t have to feel cautious around this Knight.

Meena dropped herself into the empty seat next to Rey. Her sharp black bob swung playfully and her eyes sparkled beneath her low cut fringe.

“I like you, Rey.” Meena’s voice was like a bell, tolling in in an icy landscape.

Rey’s eyes darted downwards awkwardly. “Err…”

“Come, Meena. Don’t make her feel uncomfortable,” Botek chuckled from the sidelines.

Meena pouted in jest, but kept her eyes firmly on Rey. “I reckon we’re about the same size.”

With a quick sharp movement, she whipped out a short metallic blade from her belt.

Rey flinched backwards at the blade shone mere inches from her face.

Meena grinned even wider.

“What do you say – ready for some dress ups?”
Rey stroked her fingers through her freshly cut hair. As it turned out, knives made for good haircuts. It was shorter now, even shorter than when she had been a scavenger. But she liked it – it was refreshing, letting the air at her neck.

She finished buttoning up Meena’s spare black uniform and stepped out of the refresher.

Meena clapped her hands happily. “You look wonderful!”

Rey looked down at her new attire – a loose black shirt and form-fitting black pants with boots and gloves, designed for travel and combat, completed with a long hooded black robe and a helmet that modulated her voice, the same way Kylo’s did. She was a replica of Meena in uniform, and perfectly disguised.

The haircut, as Meena had explained, was necessary – it made taking a helmet on and off much easier. Moving in and out of the helmet was far too tricky with Rey’s longer hair, and her usual buns would not fit inside. Rey brushed the back of her hair with her fingers, looking at Kylo through the corner of her eye to see if he was watching her.

He was. Rey smiled hopefully, and Kylo looked away quickly, as if embarrassed.

“Here, let me help you.” Meena raised the helmet over Rey’s head and lowered it over her face. The vocal modulator slid into position with a click. “How does that feel?”

“Claustrophobic, I –” Rey instinctively reached for her throat, hearing her altered voice. She certainly didn’t sound like herself, but it was definitely for the best.

“Ready?” Kylo asked, resting his hand on her shoulder.

“Ready.”

***

The plan was simple. Kylo would leave the Legacy accompanied by Botek and Meena, really Rey in disguise, while Dagran and Soan would stay behind to guard “Rey”, played by Meena. The two women had essentially switched places. The Knights had overriding authority in Kylo’s chambers, so even if suspicion was raised, First Order personnel would have no access to Kylo’s suite. It was fool proof.

As they made their way to the hangar, Rey tried not to goggle too much over the grandeur of the ship. It was through two lenses that she saw it. Firstly, the imagination of her inner scavenger was running wild, thinking of all the worth in this ship. But secondly, with such might and grandeur, she knew there also came strength – and that strength was not a force the Resistance could reckon with right now, or ever.

Rey and Botek followed Kylo into the Command Centre.

“Ready my shuttle,” muttered Kylo.

It was an easy passing order, and was attended to immediately. It seemed the First Order was well-oiled first machine. Somehow, perhaps wisely, Kylo did not want to spend so much time here – it would save any First Order secrets from making their way to Rey’s ears.
Rey spun around and her blood instantly boiled. General Hux. The last time she had seen this man, he was ordering her violent lashings – the very reason she had been so weakened to begin with. Her heart froze as he glanced at her, but then he looked away, uninterested.

Kylo, sensing Rey’s unease, angled his body in front of her.

“Have any reports sent through to my ship, General. I will be away for most of today.”

“Very well, my Lord. And the prisoner?”

“She is secured in my quarters, under the watch of two of my Knights. Her conversion is complete, but I’m still wary of her power.”

Hux’s upper lip curled in disgust. “She makes me uneasy – too many times has she jilted this Order.”

“You have nothing to fear. You forget she was the one who turned herself over. She finally caved and accepted my offer to join the Knights.”

“I’ll take your word for it, Ren.” Hux replied in a flat tone. Rey could tell he really didn’t Kylo. Rey got the impression he wasn’t particularly keen to have another trained Force-user at Kylo’s close disposal.

Moving into the hangar, the trio marched up the boarding ramp of Kylo’s Command Shuttle and headed for the cockpit. Safely inside, Rey relieved herself of her disguise.

Kylo settled into the co-pilot seat, while Botek finished setting up the automated flight controls in the pilot’s chair. The hangar disappeared in a second, and their view was replaced by the dazzling what star beams of hyperspace. After a few more seconds, the ship jolted back to a steadier speed, gliding the Galaxy in a new star system. Botek removed his helmet and kicked his feet up on the dashboard, settled in for the short flight. Kylo and Rey made themselves comfortable in the adjoining quarters.

“So you told Hux that I turned myself over to you?”

Kylo eyed her cautiously. “There are only so many lies I can tell to protect you. I may trump Hux in authority, but that doesn’t take away his license to be suspicious. He’s a clever weasel, and not easily outsmarted.”

“Do you trust him?” Rey asked.

“Only just. He’s in no position to oppose me.” Kylo relaxed back into his seat, and threw his head back, remembering back almost a year. “Hux was beside himself with the death of Snoke. Idiot man. Luckily, I don’t think he’s been smart enough to work out it was me who killed Snoke. But I know he’s suspicious…”

Rey frowned. “You’re worried about being overthrown.”

Kylo gave a small nod, still looking up at the ceiling. “It certainly plays on my mind…”

“Kylo … I want to thank you, for helping me do this today. For trusting me.”

Kylo straightened his posture and looked back at Rey. “I trust you.”

“Trust me not to escape, I mean. Perhaps not in other ways though,” a dry laugh escaped her. “It didn’t escape my attention that I may have adopted Meena’s guise, but not any of her weapons.”
“I suspect she wanted to keep them for herself.”

“You would lend me a weapon then, when we disembark?”

“On Naboo, I hardly think you’ll need one. But …” Rey’s glare must have got the best of him. “I suppose it won’t be any harm to lend you a blaster.”

Rey hummed in agreement, but it was not quite the weapon she would have chosen.

“You’re not satisfied with that?”

“I noticed … you all have lightsabers – all your Knights. I thought lightsabers were traditionally a Jedi’s weapon?”

“Yes, they are. But … they were all Jedi in-training once, my Knights – they simply changed the colour when they turned, as a symbol of their commitment to the Dark side of the Force. That’s a tradition too, you see.”

“You must have had a different lightsaber also then? Different to the one you have now.” Rey saw Kylo shift nervously. “What became of it?”

“Destroyed.” Kylo looked away abruptly. “It was destroyed. I crafted my current weapon myself.”

Botek, clearly eavesdropping, grunted from the pilot’s chair, confirming Rey’s instinct that Kylo was lying. It was too obvious. His first lightsaber had not been destroyed. But why lie about it?

Rey decided to play along, just to keep the peace.

“Is that why you wanted the Skywalker lightsaber so badly then? To replace the one that was destroyed.”

“No. Although … it was mine by birthright. One of the last relics of Darth Vader…. ”

“And of the man he was before he turned to the Dark side.” Rey added.

Kylo eyed Rey. “Either way, it’s destroyed now. We both saw to that…. ”

“We? So you admit it wasn’t just my fault?”

“I shouldn’t have tried to take it by Force. It …. it chose you Rey. In the forest. When I called it, it went to you instead. It’s a curious thing, but I think the Force meant for you to have it.”

Rey wasn’t so convinced. Kylo really thought it was rightfully hers? “But then in Snoke’s throne room,” she suggested, “we had an equal pull on it – neither of us could take it from the other.”

“As far as I’m concerned, you won that round.”

“Kylo, I’m sorry that it broke. You can say it belongs to me now, but I still acknowledge it belonged to your grandfather and Luke after him … it belongs to your family. I’ve been trying to mend it. I haven’t been able to.”

Kylo’s eyes widened. “You still have the pieces? The crystal is intact?”

“The crystal shattered in two with the rest of the weapon.”

Kylo sighed and swung back into his chair. “Not completely irreparable, but it will never be the same
weapon, now that the crystal has been damaged.”

“But it's possible – to fix it?”

“I can show you how, if we ever get our hands on it again.”

Rey noticed the way he said “we” – together, a team.

“I’d like that.” She smiled.

A tired voice broke the calm in the cockpit. “Ahem, lovebirds.”

“Botek!” Kylo growled.

Botek leaned back in his seat and swivelled around to face the now blushing pair.

“We’ve arrived.”

***

Places like Naboo didn't even exist in Rey’s dreams – it was far more beautiful than she could have possibly imagined.

Kylo’s Command Shuttle landed in what must have been a fairly small town, outside the capital and away from the politics of the First Order. The ground crew seemed to be familiar with the ship, so Rey could only assume this town must be close to the birthplace of Kylo’s grandmother, the place he frequented.

“How are you feeling?” Kylo asked. His question was kind and honest, but through the vocal modulator and under his masked face, he kept the appearance of a fearsome leader in front of all the ground crew.

“I feel…..so much better.”

Stepping on to solid earth had never felt more incredible. Rey was used to space travel, but she had never been away from land for so long before.

“It's a small town, but they know me here. I’m going to take you somewhere more secluded, away from prying eyes, where you can feel safe to remove your disguise.”

“I’d rather remove this helmet soon too.” Rey noted. She could feel her lungs desperate to breathe in the fresh cool air, beyond the reaches of her headgear. Her body was already swelling with the Force, with the sun beating down on her back and the earth solid and firm beneath her feet, even on the tarmac. Every inch of her was tingling with the Force and its overwhelming potential.

“Botek will stay here with the ship and the locals. You and I will take a smaller vehicle off road. We’ll have more space to train.”

“Mmm.” Rey was simply too entranced by the beauty of her surroundings to pay attention to the plans. She nodded absentmindedly, gazing around at the landscape. Kylo had walked off somewhere.

Rey shut her eyes and felt the Force streaming through her entire body. With her strength slowly returning, she felt untouchable – indestructible.

“Rey.”
Kylo revved the engine on a speeder, pulling Rey out her dreams … but yet somehow throwing her into another.

Her love, on a long sleek speeder, ready to race through the countryside. What more could a girl want?

Rey grinned broadly, thankful no one could see her face – she felt like a giddy teenager, high on life and love.

“I’ll meet you back here at dusk.” Botek waved to the pair, as Rey finished mounting the speeder behind Kylo. She wrapped her arms around his torso, feeling his rock hard chest and abs beneath his uniform. She peered over his shoulder and rested her chin on his back. Freedom to hold onto him felt amazing in ways she could never have imagined.

Botek gave them one last salutation before Kylo revved the engine again. “May the Force be with you.”

Rey smiled and whispered quietly under her breath.

“Oh it will.”
Naboo

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Naboo was stunning. After ten minutes of high speed into the countryside, Kylo and Rey were now well and truly surrounded by nothing but nature and fresh air. Fields of lush green grass dotted with pink and white flowers extended as far as the eye could see.

If this all happened three weeks ago, Rey may have tried to take Kylo down, or escape, but her perspective on everything had changed in such a short period. Now, she simply … wanted to be here. With him. She didn’t feel restrained – he wasn’t keeping her captive at all.

Kylo brought the speeder to a slow stop on the edge of a river bank, a short walk away from a waterfall, cascading magnificently down a dark stoney cliff face. Rey could make out the mossy edges of the rocks – a delightful mix of soft green against the hard cold rock of the cliff face. The water sparkled under the sunlight, with barely a cloud in sight. Nothing could be more perfect than today.

Rey didn’t wait for Kylo, she sprung off the speeder, threw off her helmet and ran into the grass. Fresh air flooded her lungs and the cool breeze brushed her short hair against the bare skin of her face.

“Yes!” she cried out, almost laughing with joy.

She threw herself down onto the ground and lay in the grass. She shut her eyes, feeling the warmth of the sunlight beating down on her. Had her bones been chilled all this time? The sunlight had never felt so invigorating.

Rey unclasped her robe, loosened the top button of her shirt and kicked off her boots. She had seen greenery before, yes, but never had she been able to indulge so tangibly in it. She rubbed her hands into the soft blades of grass and let the delicate flower petals tickle her toes. It was a tactile cocktail.

Kylo, also now free from his helmet and robes, crouched down next to Rey sprawled in the grass. “The Force is flooding through you right now.”

“It feels that way.” Rey shut her eyes peacefully and smiled. “Thank you for bringing me here.”

She heard Kylo sit beside her and could sense him watching over her.

“You look happy – I take it you’re feeling better already?”

Rey nodded gently. “I forgot what this feels like – to be reconnected with the Force.” She opened her eyes and looked up at Kylo sitting close beside her. “You’re the only one who understands what I mean. Back home, I’m alone in this. They think it’s some mystical power…”

“They fear you.”

“No they …don’t.” Rey looked up at Kylo puzzled. Why would he suggest that about her own allies?

“They will. If you’re not careful. They will never trust you completely. It’s because you’re different – you have a power they can never understand or match.”
Rey let her head fall back into the grass, gazing up at the sky. Maybe he was right. It might explain why she didn't seem to have a formal position in the Resistance like everyone else. She knew Leia would trust her, but D’Acy, her second-in-command never seemed openly honest with Rey. Or perhaps Rey had brought it on herself, by isolating herself the way she had. She had felt so alone and lost – there had always been something missing. But somehow … she hadn't felt that since being with Kylo. It only confirmed the all too reality that she cared for more this man than she ever intended.

“Kylo…”

“Yes, Rey?”

His voice was deep and gentle. She breathed in his voice like it was a drug.

“I ….”

Rey looked away. She couldn't bring herself to say it. Her stomach knotted violently.

She shouldn’t love him. He was still a murderer. He was still the enemy. She wanted to feel disgusted at herself, but there was nothing to stop the overpowering magnetic pull to him. No, she thought, he’s only my teacher.

“What is it?”

Rey’s thoughts were running wild. Could he ever love me back?

“I …. nothing.” Rey sat up. Now, both seated side by side in the soft grass, her eyes were level with his, she tried to speak honestly. “Thank you for bringing me here, it’s so beautiful. Perhaps, we can go for a walk. I’d like to go to the shore and see the water.”

Kylo stood and held out his hand for Rey. Smiling, she took it and he helped pull her up.

“Tell me more about your grandmother. Is this where she lived – nearby here?”

The pair began their stroll through the grass towards the waterfall. Rey was somehow hyper aware of where Kylo’s hands were, swinging by his sides. She longed for his gentle touch again.

“She did. Her family owned an estate nearby. She must have come here, I’m sure of it.”

Kylo looked wistfully out across the landscape. “Padme was her name. She was a compassionate woman – she only cared about others. From what I’ve heard, she was an excellent queen –”

“Queen of Naboo? Your mother was a princess and your grandmother was a Queen?” Rey laughed. “You truly are royalty by blood then!”

Kylo flinched at the mention of his mother, but continued on cooly. “It was a temporary position. Her true love was democracy – she became a politician when she was still very young. I think that’s where it was all destined to fail for Padme and my grandfather. He was a Jedi, bound by a broken and outdated Jedi Order. Padme was a modern and progressive politician. Besides, it was a forbidden love.”

Much like ours, Rey thought.

“A Jedi is not meant to become attached to another romantically,” Kylo continued. Attachment is a path that can lead to the Dark side.”
“But you always say the Dark side is important for balance. How could romantic love be such a bad thing?”

“Well in the case of Padme and my grandfather, their love is what led to his turn to the Dark side. And then she chose not to follow him down that path – their political views were just too different. He chose the Dark side to become powerful – powerful enough to save her from death. But in the end it was too late.”

Rey looked up at Kylo, his face pained. It seemed so unusual to hear him speak so fondly of family – barely any mention of his mother or father would snap his temper, but he almost seemed to long for the grandparents he never met.

Rey dropped her gaze, remembering when she had first met Kylo and he had interrogated her. She had seen into his mind – seen how much he wanted to be as strong as Darth Vader, how he worried he would never be strong enough…

Kylo and Rey reached the water’s edge. The sand was pristine, white and soft, not like the coarse yellow sand of Jakku. The water stretched out far, a small lake pooling at the waterfall’s mouth, before sending a trajectory down the hillside. Like the lake in the crystal cave on Saphin … but sunnier, and more open.

“It’s nice being away from the ship. I feel like we’re on neutral ground here. Like equals.”

“We’ve always been equals, Rey – I’ve always seen you that way.”

“Except when you call me your apprentice,” Rey joked.

And it happened. Kylo actually smiled. Rey’s heart skipped when she saw the corners of his mouth press upwards, deep dimples imprinting in his rounded cheeks. Even wrinkles formed at the sides of his eyes. And even a hint of a chuckle!

Rey looked back at him stunned.

“You…”

*I've never seen you smile before*, she wanted to say, but she thought better than to spoil the moment and shut her mouth.

“You’re right though,” Kylo said, continuing as if nothing unusual had happened. “It does feel more peaceful being away from the ship. Here, with you. Let’s use our time well. It’s a beautiful day – there’ probably only a few more hours until dusk.”

“Agreed.” Rey smiled up at him. The smile was now gone, but the glow in his face remained. He looked more youthful, and less tired than before.

“I’m curious to see how you’ve been training yourself, Rey. I know you haven't had much guidance. But now that you’ve got your strength back, why don't you show me where you’re at – maybe we can work from there and fit some training in.”

“You still want to teach me? Aren't you worried about my getting stronger – what if I use it against you?” Rey teased.

“I’m not afraid of you, Rey.”

“Perhaps you’re right. You have Skywalker blood in you, after all. Nothing can beat that.” She
smiled. She enjoyed the banter with him.

“You flatter me, Rey. But I beg to differ.” Kylo stepped back and gestured for Rey to stay on the shore. He folded his arms. “Show me what you’ve been working on.”

Rey suddenly felt mildly intimidated. She was not used to having a teacher expect something from her, and she had never had her own work critiqued before. “Well…”

Rey wasn’t one to flaunt her skills in front of another, but she had been itching to see where her power now sat, after so long disconnected from the Force. Besides, Kylo was her teacher after all – she ought to open up, right?

“I feel the Force around me. Here, just let me … concentrate for a bit.” Rey turned away from him to face the lake, and shut her eyes.

First, something simple, Rey thought. Start small.

She felt the breeze brushing through her hair and across her face. She raised her hands out in front of her, ready to harness the wind’s hidden power.

Swaying her hands gently in front of her and rocking side to side with knees bent, she caressed the Force in front of her, taking control of the wind. She threw a strong gust of wind across the lake, causing the water to ripple and shimmer under the sunlight. Bringing it back again, she turned to face Kylo and send the gust of wind back inland. Kylo’s long hair whipped across his face as the gale swept past him.

Rey let it storm around them, circling their position on the shore.

Kylo yelled through the gale. “I’m impressed Rey. But is that the best you can do?”

Rey realised he was only teasing her, just to test her limits, but she played along.

Rey released the wind, let it settle back to a gentle breeze, then concentrated on the waterfall across the lake – particularly, the dark stoney cliff it ran down.

Using the strength in her body and her concentrated power across the long distance, she hammered a crack in the cliff face with her mind and broke off a large portion of stone. Rey felt her muscles tremble with the weight, but summoning up all her energy, she called the hunk of stone towards her. It sped across the lake at an increasing speed. Turning swiftly around, Rey guided above her and let it hurtle into the ground behind Kylo, pulling up chucks of grass as it skidded across the meadow.

Kylo looked back at Rey, a look of disbelief on his face. “You have grown strong. I was right, you’re a very physical Force-user. But don’t forget about the Force within you, too” He stepped towards. “Let me show you.”

He stood behind Rey and placed his hands on her shoulders. “Look out to the water. Breathe.”

Rey did as he asked and tried very hard not to think about his broad hands gently caressing her shoulders.

“Try focussing on the water now,” he spoke softly, his voice drifting into her ears from behind. “I’ve seen you do it before, but this time … really feel it. The Force is in everything, but is also the same Force – it runs in the water, it runs in the air, the ground beneath us, the warm of the sunlight above us…. That same Force is within you.”
Rey focused her breath and let her body relax.

“Can you feel that?” Kylo asked.

“Yes,” Rey smiled. It wasn’t about brute force, she realised. It was about feeling at peace and one with her surroundings. But there was still one thing holding her back.

Fear.

“I can feel your hesitation, Rey. What is it?”

The moment was broken. “The water,” she said, too ashamed to face him. “I can't swim.”

“You’ve never learned to swim?”

“I grew up on a sand planet, Kylo,” Rey drawled.

“What about the cave on Ahch-To you told me about? I remember that evening – you were very wet.”

“I wouldn’t exactly call that swimming. I feel like I almost drowned getting in and out of that cave. It wasn’t fun.”

“Well, we can't have that, can we? Consider it part of your training.”

“Consider what?”

“We’re going in.”

“No!”

“Yes! I fancy a dip anyway.”

Kylo unfastened his robe and threw it on the sand. He then proceeded to remove his boots and jacket.

Rey’s heart raced – from fear of stepping in the water, but also from the fact that Kylo was now removing his clothes rather rapidly in front of her.

Kylo stepped closer to the shore. Now stripped down to just a pair of tight black shorts, he raced into the water and once in thigh-high water, dove head first into the lake.

Rey’s heart was pounding, the image of Kylo without, well, practically anything on, burned into her mind. He clearly wasn’t embarrassed at the prospect of bare skin like her. Why did she suddenly feel so warm? She had seen him without a shirt before, through their Force bond, but this time was different. His broad muscular chest and shoulders seemed so ….. argh no, she thought. It was like she was so suddenly attuned to how handsome he was. And he was – he really was.

But where was he now? It had been a good few seconds since he had dived into the water. Was he still underwater? Didn't he need to breathe? Rey felt panic rise up inside her.

A few more seconds passed then Rey heard the splash of Kylo breaking back up through the water’s surface, far from where he had dived in. He had swum so far underwater….

“Come in!” Kylo called out. And there was that smile again. He looked like a young boy! It was as if the water had washed away Kylo Ren – all his woes and past trauma – and left the core of Ben Solo
remaining.

Rey went to loosen her pants but then looked back up to Kylo.

“Turn around. I -- I’m getting undressed,” she yelled across the lake.

Kylo obediently turned away and swam off in the water.

Rey stripped down to her breast band and shorts. Not wanting to wait for Kylo to turn around and see her, she stepped into the water and waded deeper until it reached her knees. The water was cool but not uncomfortable -- the prospect of immersing herself was, however, extremely uncomfortable.

However, it was a choice she had to make -- either Kylo saw her practically naked, or she would immerse herself into the water and risk drowning.

She chose the latter.

Rey pushed through, letting the water rise further and further up, until it reached her chest. Then the fear kicked in. If she went any deeper, surely she would sink and the water would fill her lungs, she thought.

“Okay I’m done. Not going further,” her voice came out as a squeak.

Kylo swam up to Rey. “No, no, you’re staying with me. Relax.” He swam up behind her and rested his hands on her shoudlers once again. She felt his Force signature so strong, it was almost burning into her.

“Lean back,” he said gently.

Rey let her weight fall into his arms. Carefully, he began to lower her backwards into the water.

“Now, let your feet come up off the ground.”

“No, I’ll sink.”

“No, you won’t.” His was voice commanding yet gentle. “Let yourself float.”

Rey did as he asked, pushing past her fear. With his strong body behind her and and his gentle words, Rey felt more at ease than she expected. She lifted her legs and Kylo pulled her floating body back, walking backwards in the water and letting her body rise up and float.

Rey watched as the water swept smoothly past her body and laughed with joy.

Kylo continued to walk backwards, dragging Rey through the water. “Relax. Let me do the work.”

Rey let her head sink back, allowing the water to rush past her ears. They continued like this for a minute, calming Rey’s nerves until she felt unusually relaxed.

The pair of them in the water … it reminded her of her time with Poe in the crystal cave. Poe… Rey’s stomach twisted thinking of when they had last seen each other -- he had confessed his feelings for her, and she had rejected him, for no good reason. They would have made the perfect couple. She found him attractive, and she was certain that she had had some feelings for him.

But now in this strangely parallel scenario, she knew for certain her feelings for Kylo were different. It wasn’t just physical attraction. And it certainly wasn’t because he was a good man. There was something else at work -- destiny? Poe made her feel warm inside, but Kylo made her feel nervous.
The electricity between them was undeniable, not to mention the Force bond between them. Just being with him made her feel strangely safe and whole.

In the middle of her thoughts, Kylo suddenly released her into the water and swam backwards without her. Without him holding her, she felt her body begin to sink. Panic set in again. “No!” she shrieked.

Rey waited for her feet to hit the groud, but they didn’t. Kylo had taken her out to the deeper water.

*That asshole!*

Rey reached for Kylo but he swam backwards.

“Kick, Rey. Use your arms, push upwards,” he called out.

Frantically, Rey pulled at the water in front of her. And then again, and again. Using her legs, she pushed the water back and forth beneath her. She was rising, and moving. But not enough.

“Kylo, help!” She reached out to him, but he swam backwards again, out her reach.

“Use the Force!” Kylo laughed.

Of course, the Force! Rey would have rolled her eyes if she wasn’t so panicked. “That’s not how the Force works!” she shrieked. She reached Kylo and latched onto his arm. “Take me back. Shallow water.”

“See, you made it. You swam to me.” Kylo’s devilishly handsome smile was back. “You can swim.”

“You tricked me,” Rey pouted. “Take me back.”

Kylo shifted Rey onto his back. She clung at his neck as he swam them back to shallower water.

As soon has she felt the the ground at her toes she let go of Kylo and turned around. The touch of their near naked bodies had caused such an intense blush, Rey was sure her face must have been red as Kylo’s lightssaber. Perhaps Kylo felt the same way because he was slowly wading away, putting some distance between them.

Out of nowhere, Rey felt a wave of water hit the back of her head. “Well done, apprentice!” Kylo called out with a laugh.

She swept the wet hair off her face, and somehow, she couldn’t stop smiling.

**Chapter End Notes**

Just in case any of you are ready to jump out of an airlock, frustrated by the extremely slow burn of these two space idiots, I can promise you it’s all happening next chapter. Will be up within 24hrs!
It was peaceful.

Silent.

Calm.

Under the water. There was something oddly therapeutic about it. Cleansing, almost. Far far away from his responsibilities, he was overwhelmingly calm. He finally had space to slow down.

Only the muted sounds of the distant rumbling waterfall and the back and forth kicking of his legs could be heard. The sound was heavy in his ears, blocking out reality – blocking out the truth.

The truth that he was still a monster.

A murderer.

Kylo’s head broke through the surface of the water and he pushed the wet hair out of his eyes.

Was it time to open up to Rey? She had been nothing but honest with him so far. It only seemed fair to be equally raw with her.

They had played in the water for more than an hour and Rey had picked up her confidence swimming – he loved seeing how happy and relaxed she was. But now she had returned to the shore, changed back into clothes and walking through the shallows, practising her movements with the Force and experimenting with her power. She had asked him not to look when she exited the water, but he had taken a peak when her back was turned. Why was it so tantalising, seeing the way her wet hair clung to her neck, or the way her hands brushed delicately over the water’s surface? Her body was like an hourglass, hips swaying as she waded through the shallows. And so lean and muscular.

He saw the thick scars on her back – the scars he was responsible for. Bacta was only able to do so much against the work of the electric whip, especially since treatment for her wounds had been delayed. Rey may well be left with those scars for the rest of her life. It would be a constant reminder of his failure to protect her in his bid to save his own image before his followers.

Kylo lay back in the water and let the water engulf his ears again, shutting out reality once again. He wanted to forget that dreaded day.

It still rattled him that he cared so much. She was, after all, his enemy in war and his prisoner. And she was powerful too, probably the only one who could have the power to overthrow him. The Force worked in mysterious ways, he concluded. It was the only explanation for his strange protectiveness over her.

He knew he was incapable of love … it couldn't be that …

And even if it was love, and it was reciprocated – he wasn't worthy of receiving it.

Kylo headed back to shore, dried off with his robe then slipped back into pants, leaving his chest bare to soak up the warm sunlight.

Rey walked up to him and sat by his side, looking out at the water, dusk slowly setting in, casting a
twinkling light across the water.

“Something’s troubling you,” she said.

“I’m fine,” he instinctively lied.

“I can feel you, Kylo. I feel the Force within you, it’s so strong. But…. You’re blocking out the Light.” She reached out and placed a hand on his knee, sending a shockwave of electricity up his spine. “Why?”

“What?”

“You choose to block it out. I thought… I thought maybe you had forgotten it or buried it deep within yourself. But it’s there, just at the cusp of your being. Why won’t you let it in?”

There was no point hiding from Rey anymore. No one saw him the way she seemed to.

“I block out the Light because the Dark side is my destiny. I’m responsible for ruling the Galaxy – it’s my bloodline, it’s my legacy.”

“But that’s not you. I see the good in you. Surely you can’t believe that’s all you meant for – Darkness?”

“You’ve seen good in me?” Kylo asked in disbelief. “After everything I’ve done? Rey, I killed my own father!”

By this point, his temper would normally leave him shattered in pieces, but with the gentle weight of Rey’s hand on his knee, he felt in control.

I killed my own father. The words resounded in his head like a tolling bell. What kind of monster was he?

The dark voice inside him spoke up. It was necessary. Attachment makes me weak. I couldn't stray from my path.

Kylo bowed his head in shame. But Snoke made me do it. He was only using me. He was trying to break me.

“Kylo?” Rey squeezed his knee. “I know you didn't want to do it. And I felt your pain when you did – when I saw it happen.”

Kylo looked up in disbelief. How could she have felt anything when he had been so torn about it himself at the time.

“You couldn’t have known what I felt. What I still feel. It’s not that simple.”

“But I do.” Rey shifted her seating position to face him directly. “And you’re right – it’s not simple. I felt your pain – I feel your pain – as if it’s my own. We’re connected, Kylo.”

“Rey … I’m so sorry.”

“Don’t be sorry!” There was a fierce look in her eyes. “Please, I don't want you to feel this way – not for my sake, but for yours! I want to take your pain away. I see it in your eyes. Everyday. You’re exhausted. I know we can't discuss the war, but …I want to know, is it worth it?”

“That’s not a fair question. And it’s beside the point. It’s too late for me now.”
“You keep saying that,” Rey said sternly.

“I can’t go back, Rey. The only way is forward, and to do that I have to separate myself from my past.”

“But your past is part of who you are. And that part of you isn’t lost forever. I know you seem to think it is.”

_It is, Kylo thought. Ben Solo is dead._

He looked at Rey apprehensively. She really did care. He couldn’t understand it, but her honesty was blazing like the Light within her. She truly wanted to find the good in him – the Light in him. She believed in him. After everything – how?

Kylo sighed sadly. “Perhaps I’m not who you think I am. You seem to think I can be redeemed. But I’m a monster – you said so yourself once.”

“Your soul has been tortured. You’re not a true monster – just a product of what Snoke made you do – what Snoke did to you.”

“What Snoke made me do?”

Is this really what Rey thought? That he had zero control over himself – that he was just a by-product of some sick master’s grand scheme?

“You are not Kylo Ren – Snoke created Kylo Ren. Kylo Ren is the product of isolation, hate and suffering.”

Kylo’s instincts to defend his late master reared up inside him. “Snoke was like a father to me. He took me in and raised me – trained me.”

Rey shook her head. “Snoke warped your mind.”

Kylo buried his face in his hands. “You think I was just a puppet to Snoke? You talk about Snoke making me do these things – I was fully aware of what I was doing Rey – what I continue to do.”

The frustration was written all over Rey’s face. She was fighting hard to believe that there was good in him.

“Kylo Ren is just a shell around the real you – Ben Solo.” Her eyes were pleading. “Don’t forget who you really are. I’ve seen the good in you.”

“Rey, no! It’s not there! Not anymore!” Kylo rubbed his forehead hard, his head planted firmly in his hands, too ashamed and frustrated to look her in the eyes now. “I can’t go back. I’m broken. I cannot be fixed. I cannot change.”

“Oh, but you can!” Rey pleaded with him. “And you have changed!”

She reached out and lifted his face in her small soft hands and cupped his jaw.

“You have changed, Kylo – I’ve seen it. You’re not broken.”

Kylo brushed her hands away. He regretted it instantly. He was even more intensely lonely without her warm touch.

“Stop trying,” he whispered in defeat. He didn’t really mean it, but shutting out those closest to him
was his forte.

Rey leaned back, giving him space once again.

“Change doesn't mean you have to give up everything you have now. Turning to the Light doesn’t mean you will become weaker … if that’s what you’re worried about?”

“It’s not that….”

Kylo looked out over the water, the knot in his stomach heavier than it had ever been. Opening up to Rey was the hardest thing he had ever done – but he knew he had to do it. She deserved his honesty.

The words barely escaped his lips. “I’m afraid.”

A moment of silence fell between them. What must she think of him now? Vulnerable? Weak? He could hear her shallow breath beside him. He could feel her quivering Force signature, powerful but delicate and feminine – and Lighter than anything he’d ever known. So pure.

How could he every be worthy of her?

“You have nothing to be afraid of Kylo, I’m right here.”

Kylo said nothing. Had he already shared too much? Was it dangerous to confess more?

Rey reached out to him again, this time a hand on his shoulder. Her touch on his bare skin sizzled uncontrollably, sending tingles down to his fingers and toes – he’d never felt the Force this way before.

She rubbed her thumb over his shoulder. “Step back into the Light with me, Kylo. What are you afraid of?”

Kylo finally let go of his pride. “That I’ll realise everything I’ve done.”

Rey lowered her head. “I think you already realise that. You don’t need to give up the Dark side to know what you’ve done.” She squeezed his shoulder and spoke firmly. “You have a heart Kylo – why can't you see it?”

He stayed silent. He knew she was right.

“Let’s just sit for a while.” She gave his shoulder one last rub before letting him go. “Meditate with me?”

Kylo sighed.

“You showed me the Dark. Now let me show you the Light. I’m right here. Nothing’s going to happen.”

“Rey…”

“Please Kylo, for me. Nothing’s going to change – just let me share something with you.”

How could he say no now? She had specifically requested it, and he had already vowed in his mind to do anything for her.

Kylo nodded hesitantly and they shifted into a meditating position opposite each other on the sand.
“Close your eyes. Breathe.”

“I know how to meditate, Rey.”

“I know. But let me take the lead. Let go of the control on this one.”

Kylo nodded, shut his eyes and released all the air in his lungs in single a heavy sigh.

He felt her fingers wrap around his hands, clasping on. She was trying to feel the Force and energy within him. He wasn’t going to lie to himself – he had been exhausted for so long, in pain for so long. Would it be so wrong to let her in?

Kylo let his guard down, allowing her searching energy to flow into him.

Kylo shivered. It was like opening up the gateway to her soul. It was the strangest sensation – neither warm nor cool, sharp nor dull. He felt so whole being so connected with her. Just by holding her hands he felt her presence calm the raging storm inside him.

“The Light,” she whispered, “it’s always been there. Just let it in.”

Could he ever possibly meet her in the middle? His very essence was Darkness – he had travelled too long and too far down this path to turn back now. He’d ruined his shot at redemption when he killed his father. And even if he did turn back to the the Light, would could possibly be the outcome? By blood, he was family, but the Resistance would never take him back. More likely, he would be trialled for his actions, and lose his freedom. He would be trapped, worse than he was right now, trapped in this role of leadership.

He belonged to the Dark.

Rey’s soft voice carried through into his meditative state. “Stop fighting the pull to the Light. Just give in. Give in. It doesn’t mean everything you’ve accomplished will come to nothing. Nor does it mean it will take away or correct everything you’ve done. It’s just a state of being – and you deserve to let it in.”

I deserve to let it in. Do I?

Rey had told him he had come so far, and that she had seen him change. And certainly, he felt like a different man than what he had been before he met her. He used to be reckless and driven by hate. But now…. was it really too late to go back to the Light?

Kylo breathed in deep again. He was going to try – for Rey.

Meditation was something he had practiced as a young Jedi, but under Snoke’s guiding hand, it had always been different. Snoke had always guided his thoughts and curbed when he thought of his past or his family. But now, there was no inhibition. Rey might be guiding him through his meditation, but she placed no barriers on him – his mind was simply free to go where it chose.

She wasn’t pushing him into the Light. He had to do that himself.

He reached out, forgetting his attachments and his feelings. He reached out for the Light, any glimmer of it. He felt extremely vulnerbale opening himself up. But Snoke was no longer prying in his mind – his mind was free to wander now, where he could let it.

He was safe.
He felt free.

He’d shut himself off from the Light so long, he’d forgotten how to find it. But where could he find it?

The answer was simple - it was right in front of him.

Reaching out, he started to feel through the Force bond to Rey. She was illuminated, her very essence like a beam of radiant light, pulling him forward. Without any inhibition, he let it wash over him. It was like a weight being lifted off his shoulders – a weight he never was there. Feeling so connected to Rey – he could feel her being. Her gentle and kind demeanour. Her honesty. Her strength. He could feel…

It felt so foreign to him.

Was it…?

Love.

She loved him.

Another chasm opened up inside him. He had shut off any ideas of love when Snoke had taken him under his wing. He had never let himself fall victim to love after that. It had only caused trouble. It made him weak, Snoke had taught him.

He couldn't love. He shouldn't…

But he felt it. Something. Was that love? Is this why he felt the uncontrollable need to protect Rey? Why he felt so whole with her around?

He didn't know how to love. After everything he had done, surely it wasn’t something he was even capable of?

*The Light. It's calling to you. Just let it in*

Was that Rey’s voice or something else within him? His mind was turning over and over, swimming in a whirlpool of new thoughts, new concepts, new feelings. Yet strangely, a coolness and calmness was washing over him, bringing him closer and closer to…

*Just let it in.*

“Ben”.

Rey’s voice broke the silence and Kylo opened his eyes with a start.

Their hands were intertwined in his lap, and she was looking up into his eyes.

*Ben*, she had said. The name that used to make him curse. The man he tried to forget. Yet somehow, now, the name, said by her beautiful voice, sounded like music.

“What did you call me?” he whispered.

Rey smiled at him. “*Ben.*”

Kylo continued to gaze into her eyes. Something about hearing his old name shook him inside. He felt like he was seeing Rey for the first time again. The sun was low in the sky now, setting over the
meadow, and it created a halo of light around her silhouette. She was like … *an angel.*

He couldn't look away. And neither could she.

He spoke before he could stop himself. “You’re … so beautiful. I’ve never told you.”

Rey froze. He felt the breath catch in her chest.

“Rey…”

He could feel his heart hammering inside his chest. He was honestly surprised if Rey couldn’t hear it herself. No doubt she could probably feel it.

Kylo raised his hand, and slowly drew it up to Rey’s face, cupping her jaw.

And then he did something neither of them expected.

He kissed her.

It was nothing more than a slow touch of his lips on hers, but it felt like electricity. He relished in the feeling of her lips on his. They were so soft and supple, and warm. Her scent was intoxicating. And the taste of her was *divine.* Her skin was like silk under his hand. He could feel his hand start to shake from the excitement of the moment.

Rey broke the kiss, looking down suddenly, but she maintained their proximity. Her eyelashes battered downwards, and he could see every detail of her face. Freckles speckled her nose. Her lips were a soft blush pink.

Her hand reached up to brush the back of his, where it still lay on her jaw. He could hear her breathing.

She was trembling too.

“Rey?”

“Don't say anything. I --”

Slowly, she looked back up at him.

Kylo didn’t hesitate to lean in again. This time, he kissed her more firmly, more purposefully. He could feel her trembling at his touch. Carefully, he shifted up onto his knees and reached around her back with one of his arms, slowly lowering her to the soft sand below. Her body was weak beneath his, but she returned his kiss eagerly. Her was taken aback as she drew her hands up to his shoulders.

*She was kissing him back.*

She traced her fingertips over his muscles, his bare skin, and one hand grasped the hair at the nape of his neck.

He had never felt so alive. This woman. This angel. She was pressed up against the bare skin of his chest. Every part of him was quivering with excitement and electricity.

Kylo began to move his kisses to her cheek, then down to her jawline, right at the top her neck. The sound of her panting was intoxicating – it was driving him wild. He had to restrain himself from letting his lust get the better of him. In this moment she was so delicate and vulnerable. He didn't want to scare her. He didn't want to hurt her.
He wanted more. He loved her.

He loved her.

I love you, Rey.

No! Protect her!

Kylo was the one to break the kiss this time. With a gasp, and grunt of frustration, he leaned up suddenly and looked away. He brushed back his hair back with a hand, gazing out over the lake.

This had gone too far already.

Without looking down at her, he quickly stood up and brushed down his pants.

“We -- we should go. It’s getting dark,” he stuttered. He reached for the rest of his clothes on the shore, his hands trembling violently as he collected them. They had to leave. Now. He pulled his shirt over his head.

Rey looked up at him from where she lay on the sand, still shaking from their forbidden kiss.

“Ben.”

Kylo stopped in his tracks and breathed in the sound of her voice. It sounded like music. It was the most beautiful thing he had ever heard.

He took a deep breath. His heart was pounding. He couldn’t deal with the sudden onslaught of emotions. He felt overwhelmed with what had just happened. It wasn’t a feeling he was used to.

“I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have done that.” His voice was shaking. “I shouldn’t have let things go that far.” He threw his robe round his shoulders.

“Ben.” Her voice was insistent, like she was trying to snap him out of his misery.

Kylo fumbled with the clasp on his robe. Why was he shaking so bad?

He turned to face her. Rey stood up beside him, patting herself down. Her face was glowing. He couldn’t get over how radiant her beauty was.

“There’s that name again,” he said curiously.

“It’s your name,” she smiled.

Why was she smiling? Was she really okay with what just happened?

“It’s been a long time since someone called me that.”

They continued to stare at each other. Kylo didn’t know what to say.

Rey reached out and placed a hand on his arm. “It’s okay.”

He shivered under her touch. It’s okay? The kiss – the forbidden kiss – she was okay with that?

She looked so calm. How could she be so calm after what just happened? Kylo felt frozen in his footsteps under her gaze. Didn’t he just do something incredibly wrong? He felt weak at the knees. Excited yet terrified.
“You look so frightened,” Rey teased with a smile, giving his arm a playful squeeze.

“I----” Was she laughing at him? “I..... I didn't want to scare you.”

Rey raised her eyebrows.

Didn't she understand?

“Rey, I don't want to hurt you.”

Rey dropped her hand from where she held his arm, and laced her fingers between his. “I know.”

Kylo nodded silently. *She was holding his hand…*

He felt like he could lose himself in this moment all over again. He quickly shook his head, as if to shake the feeling from himself, and looked back out into the meadow, where their speeder lay just over the hill. “Let’s head back now, it's getting late.”

Rey smiled and nodded. “Let’s go home.”

And hand-in-hand, the pair walked silently back along the shore, basking in the new warmth that pulsated between them.
Forbidden Love

Chapter Notes

Warning: mature content ahead....

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Rey’s heart was exploding.

It felt so right. So. Right.

As they boarded the ship, ready for departure from Naboo, she barely noticed Botek’s cheeky grin watching them. Botek took the controls of the ship while the couple sat opposite each other in the cockpit, unable to take their eyes off each other.

Ben….it felt amazing to say his name. She could feel it – he was different now. It was like the lake had cleansed him, and he had finally opened his heart up to the Light again.

She wanted to sit closer to him – to touch him again.

Her mind was spinning, intoxicated from the memory of their kiss, and from when she had felt his bare-skinned muscular body on top of her.

She couldn’t take her eyes off him.

Ben.

***

The trip back to the Ben’s private quarters was a blur. Keeping up the Knight facade in Meena’s attire and mask as they walked through the Legacy… keeping her hands off him as they walked slowly – too slowly – back to where they could finally have some more privacy…

Rey was relieved to switch back out of Meena’s uniform. She showered quickly while she changed in the refresher, more in a desperate attempt to clear the manic fog in my mind than to get clean. She let the warm water gush down her body, feeling every drop on her skin.

He kissed me. We kissed. He’s Ben.

She longed to feel his touch again … to feel so intensely connected through the Force with him again. It was nothing she had ever known – such a sense of wholeness she never thought possible.

I love him.

Rey shut off the water, attempted to quickly towel-dry her hair, and changed into her clothes.

By now, the Knights had returned to their own quarters and it was just the pair of them alone again. Rey emerged from the refresher and found him sitting on the edge of his bed. He had just finished removing his boots and gloves, and unbuttoning the neck of his uniform.

His eyes locked onto Rey as soon as she stepped into sight. They were the gentle eyes of Ben Solo.
“Rey.”

“Ben.”

Ben’s face seemed to relax at the sound of his name. They both paused, eyes fixated on each other, both unsure of what more alone-time would bring. The chemistry between the two of them was intense – a knife could have cut through the sexual energy in the room.

“How are you feeling?” Ben asked. “Since we were able to make planetfall?”

Rey had been so preoccupied by the intense new connection between her and Ben that she had forgotten to check in with herself since they returned. Reconnecting with the Light side down on Naboo had invigorated her. Physically, she was completely healed. Mentally, her mind was clear. Even her connection with the Force felt stronger than it had, though of course diminished by being away from land.

“I feel … good.” Rey knew she didn't really have to explain it to Ben – they were so intimately connected through the Force now that they could understand each other without words.

Silence fell between them again. They were both avoiding the topic …

Rey went to join Ben on the bed but kept a good distance from him, sitting cross-legged on the silk sheets – she knew she couldn't trust herself to not reach out and hold him. Surely after what happened on the shore on Naboo, they should work things out slowly now.

Surely?

“You feel it too,” Ben said softly.

Rey nodded. She felt every ounce of herself quivering, craving his touch.

Ben leaned over to Rey and placed a gentle hand on her knee. The electricity flowed between them once again.

“You reintroduced me to the Light, and now it's like I can finally see things clearly…”

“I know,” she whispered.

Ben reached out and pushed Rey’s hair behind her ear. “You're so beautiful.” He brushed his fingers along her jawline.

Rey blushed intensely. He thought she was beautiful. Somehow that felt like the most magical thing in the world. She had never thought of herself that way before.

“I don't understand it,” he whispered, “I can't explain what this is… The Force was bringing us together all this time. I think we were meant to be together – we are meant to be together. I feel so whole.”

Rey smiled. “Me too.”

“But what a cruel thing to be on opposite sides of war.”

Rey held up a finger to his lips. “Shh,” she breathed. “Don't talk about it.”

She crawled up to him on the bed and leaned in for a kiss. There lips met so gently, so delicately.
When they broke the kiss, Rey lingered, not wanting to back away. They stayed close, noses resting side by side, forehead to forehead, indulging in the buzzing electricity between them. Rey noticed how heavy her breathing was. She felt the bursting warmth between her legs.

There was so much she wanted to say to him – how much she desperately loved him – but words were somehow inadequate in this moment.

“Ben…” she whispered.

Rey felt Ben’s instincts take over. It was like the Kylo within him – raw, hungry, passionate. Ben was Kylo, and Kylo was Ben. But it was no longer about sides and two different people. It was simply him, as a whole – no connection to the war or Dark or Light. They were simply whole together, separate from the rest of the Galaxy.

Nothing else seemed to matter now.

They could only see each other. Hear only each other. Feel only each other.

Ben pushed Rey back down onto the bed, pinning her hands down on either side of her head, and let his weight rest gently atop her. He kissed her hard, his mouth crushing down on hers, searching, feeling, exploring. The lack of control in this position drove Rey wild. She was restrained, yet safe. The only thing her body could do was feel everything he was doing to her.

A groan escaped her lips between Ben’s kisses. She felt her hips grind upwards towards his. Her body was starting to move in ways she had never known. He was like a drug to her, making her lose her mind – intoxicating her.

Ben released her arms, and she instinctively wrapped them around his neck and grabbing at his hair. As Ben’s kisses moved towards her neck, sending her into even more of a frenzy and making her gasp with excitement, her hands explored the back of his neck…his shoulders…his….

Too many clothes. Why was he in a shirt? It had to go. She longed to feel his warm soft skin.

As if he had read her mind, Kylo sat up, his weight still firmly on her hips and pulled his shirt over his head, exposing his perfectly sculpted figure and broad muscular chest and shoulders.

He dived back down to Rey, kissing her hungrily again. Rey clung to the skin of his back, her nails digging into his flesh as he ravaged her neck and with his onslaught of kisses and nips. She was practically moaning now.

Ben tucked his hands under her body and rolled them over, pulling Rey on top of him. Now she was in charge. Craving closer contact, she followed her instincts. She unbuttoned her top and threw it on the floor. She could see the hunger in his eyes. He bucked his hips and he tugged his pants off. Then grabbing her once again, he threw her back down on the bed, pressing his hips up against hers, growling.

“Oh my!” Rey felt the grind of his hardness up against her unspeakable area. Ben started kissing lower now – neck … collarbone … chest …

He reached her breast band, then looking back at her, he asked, “May I?”

“Yes!” Rey gasped, more in exclamation at the incredible feelings coursing through her body.

Ben unclasped it at the front, and Rey felt her breasts come into contact with the cool air. They were met instantly by his lips, and the other in his hand. “You’re so --- beautiful,” Ben gasped between
kisses. Rey threw back her head, wild with the intensity of the moment.

He lay back down on top of her, kissing her lips ferociously. One hand held her neck, his thumb delicately over her throat, and the other pinning her two hands above her head. It was like he was consuming her, wanting to mould into her – be one. And she felt it too – the burning desire to somehow be even closer with him.

“Rey, I need to….” Kylo stuttered through their kisses. “Rey…”

Rey wriggled underneath him, causing him to roll over to her side. She shimmied her pants and underwear off as fast as she could. Ben tore off his underwear too. **Finally, Rey thought as she let him dive back on top of her. Finally this is what I need.** She wrapped her legs around him. Her head was spinning out of control, feeling full skin contact with him. No words could describe it. She was simply intoxicated … drugged…. *in heaven.*

And then she felt it – his length at her entrance. Rey screamed as he thrust inside her – not a scream of pain, but a scream of pure ectasy. This was it. This was what everything had been working towards. She had no idea what they were doing – she was new to this – but nothing felt more right. Nothing felt more *amazing.*

Ben wrapped his arms around her, pulling her in tightly beneath her, and she wrapped her arms around his neck, tugging at his hair. He thrust into her, fast and hard, and with each stroke, she screamed out with pleasure. Ben groaned. He buried his face into her neck. The sweat from their bodies pooled together as the moved together, as one.

**In. Out. In. Out.**

“Rey,” Ben gasped. “*I love you.*”

And with that, waves of pleasure pulsated through Rey, sending her over the edge, over and over again. She screamed and dug her nails into his back, writhing beneath his body.

Seconds later, she felt Ben’s body react the same way. He moaned loudly – it was the most animal yet masculine thing she had ever heard – and she knew he felt the same as she did. Gods, she could *feel* his pleasure through their Force bond. She could feel how much he cared for her and loved her.

Ben was panting uncontrollably. He squeezed her tightly as his body’s convulsions slowly came to a stop. And then, with a huge sigh of exhaustion and wiping the sweat from his brow, he collapsed at her side.

“I love you, Rey,” he said again, this time more strongly.

Rey beamed uncontrollably and rolled into his open embrace, pressing her face into his warm chest. She breathed in his scent and wrapped her arm around his waist.

“I love you too.”

***

Morning broke and Rey woke up in Ben’s embrace. Her back was pressed up against his chest, his arm wrapped around her and his face resting on her hair. She heard the gentle rumble of his deep breaths and felt his warm breath on her neck.

Together, they felt like one – physically, and through the Force. Rey indulged in the moment. She had never known such a sense of peace.
Rey went to move but the weight of Ben’s arm held her in place. She shuffled onto her back and let her head rest on his lowest arm, outstretched under her neck.

“Ben,” she whispered softly.

Ben, still fast asleep, didn’t respond. Rey stroked the side of his face softly. How peaceful he looked – she wanted him to be like this always.

“Ben,” she whispered again. Ben stirred. As he opened his eyes and saw her resting in his embrace, he beamed widely. Rey had never seen anything so beautiful as his smile. Her fingers ran over his lips and into the crevices of his dimples. Her heart swelled.

“Good morning,” he whispered. Ben took her chin in his hand and tilted her face up. Their lips grazed momentarily and they both sighed with pure and simple joy.

“I love seeing you smile.” Rey stroked back his hair. She couldn't stop touching him – needing to be close to him.

“It’s been a long time since I’ve been this happy.”

“Did you sleep well?” Rey asked.

Ben nodded gently. “I still don’t understand it,” he whispered.

“What is it?”

“I think I’ve always known I’ve loved you, somehow … since the moment I first saw you.” Ben traced her chin delicately with his finger, gazing deep into her eyes. “How am I worthy of your love? No one has ever cared for me the way you do. You’ve believed in me. Even after everything I’ve done.” He paused, his face serious. “Why? Why me?”

“I feel whole with you – I need you, Ben.” She took Ben’s hand in her own. “I guess I see the good in you, even when you can’t. You’re not a bad person.”

A loud beeping sound interrupted the moment. A communication device was going off in the pocket of Ben’s uniform, thrown on the floor from last night.

Ben sighed and the smile sank off his face, replaced by impatience and irritation.

“I have to go.”

“No you don't” Rey snuggled into him closer. Her whole body and soul screamed to keep him by her side.

Ben kissed the top of her head then whispered into her hair. “I don't want to go. But I have a job to do.”

Rey’s heart sunk. Supreme Leader Ren.

As soon as you leave, this magic bubble will pop, Rey thought. Asking about – hell, even thinking about – what went down as Supreme Leader would only create a divide between them. What would she say to him anyway? What is the agenda today for the First Order? What new star system will suffer at the hand of the First Order’s tyranny today?

The conflict that would no doubt arise from such a conversation wasn’t worth it – she wanted to hold onto this precious new connection between them for as long as she could.
“Rey?” Ben broke her reverie and gently tugged himself away.

Rey gulped and held her tongue, loosening her grip around Ben. As he pulled away from her, he swept her hair behind her ear and looked at her knowingly.

He knew exactly what she was thinking – and just like her, he wanted to keep the façade of not knowing.

Ignorance is bliss, right? Rey thought.

Ben leaned in and kissed her cheek. “I’m going to re-arrange a few meetings so we can be together again today. I want to be with you.”

Warmth returned to Rey’s cheeks and she smiled up at him. “Thank you.”

Ben slid out of bed and started to dress. Rey couldn’t keep her eyes off his perfectly chiselled figure – he made her feel weak in the most marvellous way.

“I’ll have a droid send some breakfast up.” He leaned over her and kissed her lips softly. “I’ll be back soon.”

Rey sat up in bed, holding the sheets up to her bare chest. “I’ll be waiting.”

Ben placed his helmet over his head and walked out the door as Kylo Ren.

Rey’s body cried out in physical and emotional pain.

Come back.

Chapter End Notes

Since he’s overcome a bit of a hurdle, Kylo will henceforth be referred to as Ben :) There will continue to be conflict within him re Dark Kylo vs Light Ben, but for the sake of consistency, I’ll just call him Ben. (Don’t worry bad-boy lovers, then inner Kylo hasn’t been dissolved completely yet!)

Hope you enjoyed, and thank you for your patience on this one!
With much love,
ReyStarWalker xx
As Rey freshened up, dressed for the day, and enjoyed a hearty breakfast by herself, she found herself lost in her thoughts. She couldn’t shake the memory of last night – feeling so unified with Ben, like they were long-lost halves of the same whole. And how he had felt inside her – she had never known such an incredible feeling.

Perhaps she had been right to renounce the traditional practices of the Jedi. How could it possibly be so wrong to love someone when it felt this amazing? Such mutual love and caring could only be a gift … a strength… but then...

Wait.

Rey bit her lip as she kicked back into one of the cushioned armchairs in the study. Attachment is a path to the Dark side. She knew that already. And wasn’t that the path she was on right now, training with Ben? She did feel attached, but not out of control. Ben certainly seemed to think she was safe too. He had said himself that he wanted to protect her from the Dark side.

Still, everything had changed so much in the last week, and it was mildly unsettling – unsettling that she felt so comfortable here.

With the Resistance, she had served others and followed the path others expected of her … to be a leader, an icon of the Resistance … a traditional Jedi figure to inspire an uprising. But now she was finally following her own heart and forging her own path. For the first time, she felt a sense of true belonging. Sure, she had been welcomed by the Resistance, but there had always been something missing – she had blindly being trying to find her place there, but what if her place had been with Ben all along?

Rey’s mind wildly danced back and forth again. But Ben was still Kylo Ren – he was still Supreme Leader of the First Order.

It was so hard to see clearly when all she could see right now was Ben. He was the only thing she cared about right now. She was infatuated.

Could he still be the same man after reconnecting with the Light side of the Force? It didn’t mean he was “redeemed” and by no means had he been cleansed of the Dark side completely – Rey could sense his continued internal struggle, but at least now, it was met with some peace and was no longer chasing a path blindly for purely selfish reasons. She could see that with his power, he was trying to accomplish something … good.

A good Supreme Leader – was it possible? And did this mean her initial plan had come to fruition? To infiltrate from within and allow the First Order to become a force for good?

Rey grabbed another slice of bread and cheese from the lavish breakfast platter in front of her, and munched in silence.

This was never going to be simple.

***

Ben returned within an hour. Rey was sitting at his desk, making a second attempt at writing letters with his calligraphy set. Ben pulled up a chair beside her.
“The day is ours,” he said, laying his arm across the back of her chair.

Rey stayed silent but smiled at him gently. Ben traced his finger along her jawline and pushed the hair behind her ears. Rey’s neck tingled – she loved when he did that.

“What’s on your mind?”

Rey blushed and looked away. Had it been that obvious?

“I was just thinking -- about … this. Between us.”

“Let’s not overthink it. I just want to enjoy it.” Ben took her hand and kissed it tenderly.

Rey stroked her thumb over his hand and traced the thin white scar over his knuckles. “Do you remember when you cut your hand and I bandaged it?”

“Yes! Very clearly. Look--” Ben pulled out his desk drawer and pulled out the makeshift bandage Rey had put together for him.

“You kept it,” she whispered, and then she looked at Ben with a giggle. “Gross.”

“That was the first time anyone had made a gesture like that for me in a long long time. I will always treasure it. I struggled to understand it at first. I struggle to ….”

Ben’s voice faded away, apprehensive about sharing his feelings, but Rey knew immediately what he was referring to.

“Recognise love,” she said.

Ben’s head tilted to the side in confusion.

Rey sighed. “Botek told me,” she explained. “He said it would be difficult to get you to open up.”

“You talked about me with Botek? That sneaky do-gooder…” Ben scowled, but then looked at Rey with raised eyebrows. “You told him that you ….”

“That I love you. Yeah – he helped me see it actually.” Rey rested her chin on her knees, tucked into her chest. “But, I think I knew … back then, when you cut your hand. For the first time I realised I really cared for you. Or … even before then, although I tried to deny it.”

“Before then?”

“When we touched hands on Ahch-To I had a vision. I saw you turn to the Light. You came back with me to the Resistance. We were happy together. It felt like … I felt whole. I wanted to be with you … but I hated myself for feeling that way.”

“You hated yourself for it?” Ben’s voice was weak.

“Could you blame me after what happened on Crait? I felt so betrayed.”

Ben frowned but nodded in understanding. “I had a vision at that moment too. But it was different. I saw you join me. I was training you in the Dark side of the Force – I saw us together, like we are now. You wanted to be with me. You trusted me.” Ben’s eyes brightened.

“Well your vision seems to have been the correct one, given our current situation,” Rey smiled. “But did you believe the vision back then?”
“I … I think I wanted to. But I knew much you loathed me afterwards.”

Rey sighed. “We are in a sorry state aren't we.”

“I disagree.” Ben smiled at her and squeezed her hand. “Very much. Having you here by my side is the best thing that – ” He paused, almost embarrassed, “…that’s happened to me.”

Rey felt herself glowing, but Ben seemed more sombre. “I’m not worthy of your love. You’re too kind and good a creature to be with a monster like me.”

“I told you already, I don't see you that way.”

“It’s true though – you may have shown me the Light again, but the Darkness still storms inside me. I’m a bad person – I know what I’ve done.”

“Ben….” Rey’s voice trailed off. Could she ever convince him otherwise? “Come home with me, Ben. We can figure this out together.”

“You know I can’t do that. Besides, can’t we do it the other way around?” Ben pleaded.

“And keep me as your prisoner here?”

“No – not a prisoner! Why won’t you join me – we can rule the Galaxy together, set it on a righteous path? The Galaxy needs someone like you, Rey. Someone good, and strong.”

Rey’s heart sunk, and she sighed. “I don't want to rule the Galaxy, Ben.” She looked down sadly at her clasped hands in her lap. “I just want you.”

“You have me,” Ben whispered.

Rey sighed again. “We can't keep ignoring the fact that we’re on opposite sides of war here. We’re going to have to talk about it eventually.”

Ben turned away. “I’m afraid of what you’ll say,” he said softly.

“I’m afraid too. I don't want this – us – to change in any way.

Ben looked back at Rey hopefully. “Let’s forget it then – for at least a little while longer.”

Rey bit her lip “Okay.”

“Don't bite your lip like that…” Ben’s voice purred. “It turns me on.”

He held up his hand and brushed his thumb over her bottom lip. He leaned over and kissed her tenderly. Wild fire ignited inside Rey – she kissed him back confidently, craving more.

Suddenly, she pulled back – they shouldn't let themselves get carried away again. It wasn’t … she shouldn't let herself ….

There was no point denying it. She wanted him. All of him. And judging by the passion and hunger in his eyes, Ben wanted her too.

He stood up, pulling Rey up with him, locked in a deep kiss. Then very suddenly, he wrapped his arms around her waist, and lifted her onto the desk. In an instant, Ben wiped off the entire contents of the desk with brute strength and pushed Rey onto her back. He lay down on top her, kissing her hungrily. Rey wrapped her legs around him and clawed desperately at his chest for his shirt buttons.
And then they lost themselves again.

***

Rey lay next to Ben in his bed, propped up on her elbows and stroking his open hand with her fingers. They didn’t have to say anything, being together. They just knew. Rey gazed at Ben and Ben gazed at Rey, and the rest of the world faded from existence. They balanced each other perfectly – she could feel the trickle of uninhibited Darkness in herself, but also now the warm and glowing Light within Ben.

But it wasn’t just a spiritual connection – it was physical too. Rey marvelled at his body. His broad chest and muscular shoulders were somehow physically intoxicating to her.

For the first time, she had a close-up of his scars. There were many, but the greatest damage had been done by her, from the night on Starkiller Base. Rey followed the scar from his chest, up his neck to his face, where it had left a deep white line across his cheek and brow.

Rey stuck out her bottom lip. “I’m sorry about your face.”

Ben’s eyebrows shot up. “Wow, thanks.”

Rey rolled over onto her back as she clutched her belly, laughing. “Haha, oh no Ben, I meant the scar. The scar I gave you.”

Ben reached up and touched his face and traced the scar down to his jawline. “Oh … no it’s okay.”

“It’s okay? Ben, you’re too kind.”

“Me … kind?”

“Don’t underestimate yourself. I think you can be very kind.” Rey smiled. “Your face is very nice too.”

Ben’s eyes lit up, and he babbled for words. Rey pecked his cheek with a kiss.

“I’ll never take for granted the way you think of me, Rey. You must see something that no one else does – even me.”

“Would you say I bring out the best in you?”

Ben smiled widely. “I guess so.”

“So … you’ve never had anyone else care for you like this before?”

“No… unless you count Botek. He seems rather –”

“But not another woman?” Rey asked with wide eyes. Surely … surely as the Supreme Leader, or even as Snoke’s prized apprentice, he would have had women throwing themselves at him? He could have had his pick of any woman.

“I have no history,” Ben said sheepishly.

Rey’s heart’s quivered with nervous energy, “You mean you’ve never cared for anyone like this before?”

“Yes, that’s correct.” Ben blushed further. Rey must have left her mouth open, because Ben added,
“Is that really so surprising?”

Yes, maybe … Rey wasn’t sure what she had expected. “I don’t know. I guess I just feel really special knowing I’m … the only one.”

Ben stroked Rey’s face. “You’re the only woman I’ve ever cared about, Rey. No one has come even close. Besides, I’ve never thought about women in that way before. Perhaps it was the strict Jedi training, and then Snoke’s training after that – but I was never interested in, well…. you know … until I met you.”

“Really?” Rey smiled.

“But what about the Knights? Botek and Meena are a couple, aren’t they? Are there other female Knights?”

“You,” Ben chuckled.

Rey stuck her tongue out at him playfully.

Ben eyes drifted off into the room. “Actually, Aleina … she’s the last Knight who you haven’t met yet.”

She. Rey’s heart dropped instinctively and the jealousy took her by her surprise. Another woman close to Ben.

“Apparently she had feelings for me, or so the boys tell me. I never noticed. Or cared.”

Rey’s stomach churned and she fought to keep the jealousy monster inside her at bay. She knew Ben loved her and no other woman, but she couldn’t help it – her feelings were rampant against logic.

Ben prodded Rey’s cheek. “Hey, you have nothing to worry about. Tell me about you though. Any men I need to target?”

Rey laughed. “No.” But then she remembered. Her expression dropped and Ben picked up on it instantly.

“You mean yes?” he asked.

Rey knew what happened between her and Poe had meant nothing – nothing to her anyway. She cared for Poe like family. They were a perfect match on paper, but nothing could rival the connection she felt with Ben.

“Rey, when …. when we were first training your mind shields, I saw something.”

What? Rey’s heart galloped off again.

“I didn't mean to – but you did invite me in. I saw a man … he wasn’t wearing a shirt.

Rey’s stomach dropped through the flow. Kriff. He must have seen Poe in the crystal cave on Saphin. If that was the only thing Ben had seen though, then maybe it wasn’t so bad. He hadn't seen the kiss … he would have recognised Poe’s face in an instant.

“Was it the pilot?” Ben’s voice was a little gruffer.

Kriff, Rey swore in her head again.
“No. We’re just friends,” she blurted out. “I don’t know what you saw, but it meant nothing. Poe … likes me, but it’s not reciprocated.”

Her stomach knotted. What would he do if he knew about the kiss? Surely this wasn’t something she had to worry about though – she knew his temper was bad, but he wasn’t about to order a long-distance man hunt for Poe.

Rey attempted to divert the conversation. “It wouldn’t be right for me to be seen connected with anybody in that way – romantically, you know. I’m the last Jedi, after all. The Resistance movement seems to be founded on the idea that I’m some sort of wise and noble saviour.”

Ben raised his eyebrows. Rey slumped back onto her pillow. “I feel like their poster girl most of the time. I don’t think they realise how untrained I am – I’m not the saviour everyone is hoping for.”

“You underestimate yourself, Rey. You forget that the Jedi are long gone and the collective understanding of what they were is blurred and littered with hearsay. Rey, you set the standards now.” Ben’s eyes widened with excitement. “Luke is gone. Snoke is dead. Both our mentors have passed on, and the opportunity to forge something new presents itself to us – you, me, together, we are free to make our own rules. To forge a new order.”

“No, please stop Ben. I want to forget it all.” She ran her hand down his chest and rested it over his heart. “I just want you – nothing else, and no strings attached. I wish we could just forget the war and simply be together. But…”

Rey’s voice trailed off. It was hopeless – the more she stressed she wanted to forget, the more it highlighted that the ethical and political divide between them remained.

“But what?” Ben asked.

Rey sat up and pulled the sheets up to her chest to keep her modesty.

“We can’t forget – outside this room, our realities are still the same as they were before I came here.”

Ben drew himself up from where her lay and placed a hand on Rey’s knee. “We can forget it though. Create something new. We only need each other.”

“That doesn’t make them not exist – they’re still out there, my friends. You’re … hunting them.”

“That’s not true. With the Resistance silent, they’re not a threat and therefore no concern now. They were a target before because I wanted you.”

“But that doesn’t mean you aren’t still enemies … Ben, we are still enemies. And I’m still your prisoner.”

“No,” Ben said firmly. “I told you already - you’re not my prisoner.”

Rey raised her eyebrows. “Then you would let me leave at any point? Freely?”

Ben hesitated. He looked down into his lap and stroked her free hand. “I would. But … I hoped that you wouldn’t want to.”

“I don’t,” Rey sighed. “But…”

Ben took her hands. “What would keep you here, with me. What can I do?”

“How can I trust they’re safe? That my being here is really keeping them safe? That’s why I came.”
They sat in silence for a moment. She could feel him thinking as he watched her carefully, soaking up her energy and feeling her sincerity. It was turmoil inside him. He wanted her. He needed her – and he was going to do what it took to keep her with him.


Rey’s eyes widened. “You can promise that?”

“I can’t guarantee what might happen should we cross fire or they make the first move, but I can call off the hunt for good.”

“You can?”

“Yes. But will that be enough to have you stay?”

Rey shut her eyes in thought. Yes, it is, she thought. But for how long? Rey knew her heart was blinding her – Ben seemed to be the only one that mattered to her now. But what was he capable of when they weren’t together? He was Supreme Leader of the First Order – everything he had done. She had to stop him.

“I want to stay. I want to protect my family.” Rey paused. “I trust you.”

Ben’s eyes narrow. “Why am I not convinced by that? Do you really?”

She bit her lip – the words had felt forced, coming from her mouth. She knew it wasn’t the complete truth.

“I want to trust you. But I think as long as there’s secrecy about the war, can you blame me? Knowing what you’ve done … what you could be doing right now. Can I really trust you to keep your word on this?”

“I’ve done many bad things, but the intentions of my long-term plans are good. I want to be a good leader. I want order … balance. Peace.”

“You think what you’ve done is good?”

Ben frowned and his brows knitted together, clearly irritated by Rey’s words. “You still think I’m a monster? After everything we’ve been through now? Doesn’t that make you a hypocrite, being with me?”

Rey shook her head in frustration. “This is confusing for me too, Ben. I can't stand it anymore.” He threw Rey’s clothes toward her, indicating for her to get dressed.

“Ben?” she asked, slipping into her pants in a hurry.

“Come with me. I need to show you something.” He held out his hand. Rey took hold of it after she finished dressing and Ben pulled her towards the exit.
“Where are we going?”

“I’m taking you to the Operations Centre. You deserve to know what I’m doing.”

As they reached the doors, Ben squeezed her hand and laced his fingers into hers.

“I need to tell you everything.”
A young Ben Solo pushed through the thick forest on the Sanctuary Moon of Endor, his heavy cloak wrapped tightly around him, shielding him from the cool night breeze.

For this mission, he didn’t need guidance or a map. He knew exactly where he was headed – drawn forward by an invisible force and a sense of knowing that he had felt and nurtured for many years now. It was the pull of his ancestry. The pull of his grandfather.

Anakin Skywalker.

Darth Vader.

This legendary figure had been kept a secret from Ben his whole life. His mother and father never spoke of him, and Master Skywalker back at the Jedi temple would not allow a conversation about the last Sith Lord, despite Ben’s many attempts to ask about him. His legend was shrouded in mystery and misinformation, and Ben was consumed by the frustration of not knowing.

His grandfather … the father of Luke and Leia – both had been born bearing the Darkness of their father, but followed the path of the Light. They had rejected the Darkness - how had they ever expected to find balance?

Darth Vader had been the most powerful man in the Galaxy – he had ruled and instilled order. Whilst he had been painted as a tyrant by most, Ben knew there must be more to a man who was the Chosen One and the most powerful Jedi there had ever been – rumoured to be even more powerful than Luke.

But no one would tell him, and so his grandfather’s true nature remained a mystery. Until now.

Ben pushed on through the forest, sensing he was nearing the site. The trees were starting to thin as he approached an opening. The landscape was familiar now. He had seen it before in one of Luke’s dreams, when his old Master had dozed off by the campfire at the temple. Ben had seen the burning funeral pyre in Luke’s memories, accompanied not just by a sense of loss, but also by a sense of calm and resolution.

Would finally reaching the death place of his grandfather bring about some answers?

Ben ran forward as the burned and destroyed remains of a 30-year-old funeral pyre came into view. He fell to his knees in the thick forest litter in the centre of the clearing. He pushed apart the foliage at the foot of the pyre and uncovered it, like it had been calling to him the whole time.

It was the helmet of Darth Vader, twisted and burned, but very much intact and radiating the memory of his ancestry.

The voice in Ben’s head whispered softly as he gently caressed the distorted helmet.

_The reign of the Skywalker bloodline must be allowed to continue. You alone remain worthy of this task. Bring balance back to the Force, and order to the Galaxy, once again._

Ben shuddered at the voice of his new master.

_Yes, I will._
Almost two decades later, Ben Solo showed the relic of his grandfather to his one true love in the hope she could understand him.

“The Galaxy is in a state of chaos,” Ben explained, as he watched Rey peer down at the decrepit helmet. “There is no political unity. But with the First Order, it can be reigned into a state of peace.”

Rey looked up at him, confusion still accented across her face. “But the First Order … destroyed everything?”

“The First Order has become corrupted. When I took leadership, it was in a state of disarray, fuelled by arrogance and the will to dominate – not the original intentions of the regime. The vision was always to restore balance and order to the Galaxy. Under Snoke’s rule and Hux’s influence, it’s become totalitarian, hell bent on military domination and control.”

“And you don’t also believe in that?”

“Control is necessary to restore structure to a fractured Galactic political system. It begins that way – but once we have security, balance can begin.”

“You refer to a balance in the Force?”

“Both a balance of Light and Dark, but also in the political state of the Galaxy. This is why I have two teams – the First Order, and the Knights of Ren. Hux takes no interest in matters concerning the Force – he is more concerned with military domination.”

“And you are not?”

“Yes and no. Hux needs reigning in. We have the same means, but perhaps not the same end goal. It’s fortunate he is not the one in power.”

“It still sounds an awful lot like a dictatorship to me, Ben.”

“Sometimes that’s what it takes to restore stability. There’s no time for democracy – it would take years to pass new legislation that would achieve the same end goal.”

“But democracy is fair.”

“Ending the war swiftly is also fair.”

Rey nodded silently. This was going well – he had expected her to question him, but not to take things so easily, like a discussion. She was truly listening to him and trying to understand.

Rey tilted her head to the side. “Why then destroy the New Republic? Why not work with them?”

Ben took back Vader’s half-melted from Rey and returned it to its stand. “I wasn’t in power when that happened,” he said calmly, praying she would understand. “I never believed in wiping out the New Republic entirely. So much was sacrificed.”

“But would you really have done things differently?” Rey eyed him suspiciously. “Would you have found peace with the New Republic – formed an alliance?”

“It would have been a little more complicated. Given my history, a democratic political body would have me imprisoned for life.”

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“Not if you helped to create that democracy, Ben!”

“It would mean throwing away everything I’ve ever worked towards. Besides, that avenue is closed now. I can only look forward. It is my legacy to rule. I can't entrust that job to anyone else.”

“You are not your lineage, Ben. After all, what was it that you said about destroying the past and forging a new path?”

“That’s different. I’m the grandson of Anakin Skywalker, the last remaining of that bloodline. He was the greatest Jedi and Sith Lord every known – he was the Chosen One, meant to bring balance to the Force. It’s my duty to carry on his legacy. I’m the last one who can. Luke failed. And my mother was more interested in fighting order than working with it.”

“Master Skywalker didn't fail, he --”

“Luke may have trained a new generation of Jedi, but after all that, he saw no future for it. He wanted the Jedi to die out. In that way, we are the same – letting the past die and allowing a new order to rise – he gave up on being a leader and allowed himself to become a hermit. He’s shamed the Skywalker lineage – I’m the only one left to lead.”

Rey didn’t look convinced. “And you’re sure you are that leader?”

“You doubt me?”

“No – no ... it’s just … I thought Snoke groomed you for this. But he’s dead. You’re free! You don’t have to do this.”

“I told you already, it is my choice! Snoke’s death is exactly why I must stay! The power is in my hands now – I have the chance to redirect the First Order into what it ought to be.”

“But I still don’t understand what that involves. I’ve only seen warfare and domination. From where I stood with the Resistance, I only saw destruction.”

“How much in the last few months did you really see? Probably not enough for you to see the change. It is a slow process!”

“Process of what?”

Ben sighed loudly and walked around the small office in the Operations Centre, dragging his hand over the table as he circled around. Here we go, he thought. Just tell her.

“Creating a Galaxy that is united. A Galaxy that is safe. A place where slum planets like Jakku do not exist. Where slaves are illegal. Where everyone has a chance at an equal basic standard of living. This means sending aid to impoverished planets. It means uniting the rims of the Galaxy. It means gaining the allegiance of planetary leaders – whether by peaceful negotiation or by military force – it’s all necessary to achieve the overwhelmingly difficult, but not entirely impossible, feat of restoring peace and order to the Galaxy.”

Rey sat back in stunned silence. There – he said it all. He prayed it would be good enough for her. At the same time, Ben’s heart fluttered knowing that there was no going back now – Rey knew his moves now. He knew he could trust her, but should he have divulged it all? Could she just use this information against him? After all, she was still a Resistance sympathesier. Was he about to lose everything because of her?

No – she was worth the risk. The Light in his heart was blazing within him. It gave him strength. It
calmed his raging soul. She took away his pain just by being there. He wondered if she knew she had that effect on him.

Ben looked into her eyes, searching – what was she thinking? Say something, he thought desperately.

Rey was calm, but she looked sad, looking into his eyes and searching for something.

“You’re a good man. It is within you.”

Ben spied tears welling up in the corner of her eyes.

“Rey?”

“You are good, Ben!” She threw herself into his arms and grasped him tightly around the middle. “There’s still so much I have to understand, but – you’ve changed, I think I see that now.”

“I have changed.” Ben stroked her hair gently as she buried her face into his chest. “I had to. I’d do anything to have you by my side.”

All the meanwhile, Ben kept up the strong block in his mind, shielding Rey from his darkest secrets. She wouldn't understand – not that part.

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Ben paced through the corridors breathing heavily into his helmet. A brief meeting with Hux on the bridge left had him feeling anxious and he was desperate to return to Rey, back in his private suite.

There was no denying it – leadership was hard. Having to watch his back at every corner, be suspicious of every whisper… He could sense the unease amongst his subordinates and it made him uncomfortable. Very uncomfortable. The idea of coup or a mutiny was not one he could ignore.

Hux was the greatest threat. It would be easy to dispose of him, but after suspicions about his involvement with Snoke’s death, and then inviting in the one girl he blamed Snoke’s death on, he wasn’t about to risk losing the trust of their armed forces and supporters of the First Order by disposing of the General. No, he needed to keep Hux at his side, but at least one step firmly behind him.

When Snoke was alive, Hux and himself had received separate orders, but now with Ben leading, the tension was taut and ready to snap. At least he knew his Knights were loyal to him, and him alone. And honestly, he felt safer with them on board the Legacy, and not out on assignment. They were his henchmen – his eyes and ears on board. He only prayed they would remain that way. They were each powerful in their own ways – more powerful than any army. Betrayal could have devastating consequences.

It all balanced as if on the edge of a knife. His two worlds were colliding – Force sensitives and Progressives. He had to keep both in check if he was to succeed. Balance….

What would his mother do?

Ben flinched at the thought. He had trained himself so long to block her from his mind and see her only as an army general. But after Rey had opened the trickle of Light back into his heart, memories of his past had trickled through too.

Ben shook his head as memories of his father began to flood in.
The Light in his heart was growing slowly with each passing day. With it came clarity and reason, and the urge to do good. But simultaneously it had truly opened his heart and his mind to everything he had done – everything he had tried so long to suppress was now tearing him apart and tormenting him openly, not just in his dreams but in his waking hours too.

The reality of what he had done to get himself to this point was something he wanted to forget. It would eat away at his soul if he thought about it too much. But it was necessary. All those deaths … all the massacres he was responsible for … It had been for the greater good. And it had brought him to this point now, where he had always hoped – leader of the First Order, fit to rule the Galaxy and fulfilling his grandfather’s legacy.

Only Rey’s presence had the power to soothe him from the dark storm inside him. She was like a drug now – he depended on her. If Rey hadn't entered his life, where would he be now?

Ben pushed forward towards his private quarters, desperate for her embrace so he could forget it all once again.

He loathed himself - he shook all over, hoping desperately to somehow escape it all.

Hiding his tears and flushed face, Ben headed straight into the refresher. He hated himself for walking straight past Rey, sitting alone at his desk, but he was too ashamed to have her see him like this. Stripping quickly, he stepped under the streaming hot water, hoping it would somehow wash away his pain and his tears. He slid down the wall until he sat on the tiled floor, cradling his knees closely to his chest.

The massacres.

The broken families.

Jedi Killer.

The betrayal of his adopted father and mentor. His Master.

The pain of murdering his own blood – his father.

He couldn't take it back – any of it.

The Light was supposed to bring him peace, but instead it had brought him more pain.

There was a small knock at the door and Rey came in. Dressing down to just her underwear, she curled up next to Ben in the shower and rested her head gently on his shoulder. She didn’t have to say anything - she already knew. All she had to do was hold him as the water gushed down their backs.

With her, he was home.
It was an unspoken agreement that from that day forth, Rey would stay. They both needed each other in ways they were both still trying to fully understand. Rey allowed herself to finally become a student to Ben, and since he had showed her his true vision for the First Order and promised a ceasefire on the Resistance, she had the peace of mind to allow him to continue leading the First Order when they were apart.

They found themselves in a happy rhythm. Training in the morning. Feasting during the day. Rey learned to read and write in the afternoons. Ben would occasionally report in for duty, but he had mostly left Botek in charge of menial tasks.

In the evenings, they laughed and talked together. Rey was starting to see a new side of Ben – the relaxed, happy side. Seeing him smile was the most beautiful thing she now knew. She also came to find he had a surprisingly good sense of humour – it was dry and wicked. But at the same time, he was gentle and caring with her. Physically, they had agreed to take things slower – no more frantic love making. They knew they had time now. There was no hurry. They could simply enjoy sweet kisses and gentle caresses, and most importantly, each other’s company.

Rey had free reign of the ship now, undercover as a Knight. No one dared question the Knights – she could sense the fear every time she wandered the corridors. No one messed with the Knights of Ren. Of course there was no where of particular interest to go apart from the communal dining areas, activities room, gym… She was far too content in Ben’s private quarters. It felt like home – their home.

Ben was training Rey how to use both the Light and Dark sides of the Force and her power was growing exponentially. But she felt safe. Her new ability to mentally block kept her safe from even her own darkest thoughts.

In turn, Rey was helping Ben. She wasn’t sure if he would ever recover mentally and emotionally from what he had gone through, but at least she could be there for him. In some ways, he was still learning what love was.

Little over a month had passed – time moved swiftly. Rey and Ben were in the ship’s training facilities as usual in the morning.

Rey watched Ben in one corner of the gym, at the punching bags. She felt like a giddy teenage girl watching him – taut muscled arms and his chest-hugging singlet dripping in sweat. He always stripped down like this to train and Rey always found herself feasting on the mere sight of him.

Ben threw his towel around his neck and walked over to Rey’s corner, where she was practicing the lightsaber forms her had taught her the week before. It was just a metal pole for now as she didn't feel comfortable using Ben’s hissing red saber.

“You’re a natural.” Ben pointed out.

Rey smiled awkwardly, taking the compliment. Then she sighed. “A real lightsaber will certainly be a welcome change.”

Ben squeezed her in his arms and she breathed in the centre of his chest. It was delicious.

“We’ll figure something out for you. But in the meantime–” he held her at arm’s length so her could look right at her. “We should get you sparring.”
Ben took a few steps back and held his fists up in front of him playfully. “Care for a round?”

“It’s not really my thing –” Rey was cut off when Ben’s fist came hurtling towards her shoulder. Without a second to think, her forewarm swung up in front of her, knocking him out of the way.

Mischief twinkled in Ben’s eyes. “You’re fast.”

Rey grinned.

“Lesson one,” Ben’s deep voice echoed through the gym. “Be ready for anything.”

“Speak for yourself.” Rey grinned back at him.

Ben threw another punch her way, but Rey dodged. This time she attacked, but Ben swiftly turned and stepped out of her way.

Rey could tell he was going easy on her, but she stepped up to the challenge anyway. He was strong, but she was fast. Side-stepping, dodging, blocking – she threw up all her defences as Ben kept a relentless set of blows coming her way. When she could, she attempted to knock the back of his knees or strike his centre, but he was equally nimble in blocking her.

Rey began to tire – there was no beating him in a purely physical fight. She needed a weapon or ….

Ben was knocked back by Rey’s Force push, and she leaped on top of him, straddling his hips and pinning down his arms with her hands. She grinned madly. “I’ve got you now.”

Ben grinned back. “Come here, you.” He freed one of his arms and pulled her head down towards him, drawing her into a deep kiss. Rey let herself melt down onto his tight muscled body. She could feel the sweat and heat beneath her – it was intoxicating. Ben tugged at the hair at her neck.

Neither of them noticed the black-clad figure stride into the gym.

“That’s a good look.”

It was a sassy, sarcastic comment. Rey rolled off Ben in a hurry.

Ben propped himself up onto his elbows and wiped the sweaty hair from his brow, clearing his vision. Clearly the figure was no stranger to him.

“Oh,” he said gruffly. “Aleina.”

Rey stood up and took a step back from Ben. Evidently this was one of the Knights of Ren, the last she had to meet. Aleina … the woman who had once loved Ben, who he had never acknowledged. What was their relationship now?

“You’re late,” said Ben, joining Rey’s side, but maintaining a powerful stance over their guest.

Aleina was dressed like the other Knights – masked, in full black, boots, weapons, robe…. But judging by her slim figure and wide hips, Rey could tell Aleina was very clearly a woman.

Thick brown hair cascaded down her shoulders as she removed her helmet. Rey’s stomach dropped – she was stunning, and Rey couldn’t help but notice the fierce stare between the female Knight and her master. An intense stare like that had to mean something…

“Dogroda isn’t exactly a politically stable system. It took me a while to find a way out.” She glanced over at Rey then back at Ben. “This is the girl, I presume.”
“Aleina – this is Rey. Rey – Aleina.”

Aleina made no move to approach Rey or shake her hand – she stood there seemingly unimpressed. Not even a smile.

“I trust your ship is being looked after?”

Aleina nodded. “The others are here then too?”

“I’m sure they are eager to catch up. It’s been a while since we’ve all been together.”

Aleina removed her gloves and shoved them into her robe pocket. “Common quarters?”

Ben nodded and Aleina turned and left without another word and without any sort of expression.

Before Rey could say anything, Ben swung an arm around her shoulders. “Don’t mind her. She’s always like that. Come on, let’s clean up and join them.”

Rey raised her eyebrows. She felt decidedly uncomfortable.

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After showering and throwing on her now-usual loose black shirt and robe, Rey joined the party of Knights hand-in-hand with Ben. Apparently it been almost fours years since the Knights had all been together at the same time, and so with the final arrival of Aleina, Botek had arranged for them to enjoy an afternoon together on board.

The boys brought out an old bottle of Chandrillan wine and downed several glasses, even Ben. It was so wonderful to see him lively with others, even if he did keep an element of seriousness. Rey hung back with Meena, observing the close group of friends.

While everyone conversed happily, Rey mostly kept to herself and denying the wine – something she had never been fond of anyway. She did, however, find herself continually keeping Aleina within her view, noticing how often she looked over at Ben… She seemed cold and serious. But at the same time … so beautiful. She had long chestnut hair and the most elegant features. If she didn't always look so angry, she would have appeared like an angel. Rey prayed that Ben really didn't see anything in Aleina. Rey felt her hands grip the sides of her chair at the thought of the two as a pair.

Was that hurt and pain in Aleina’s eyes? There was no denying Ben had hurt her in the past. Could she be jealous of Rey? Would that be why she had been so cold earlier? She couldn't think it possible – jealous of Rey, scavenger nobody from Jakku … Alaeina seemed miles beyond Rey in all levels of beauty and sophistication.

Meena saw Rey glancing at Aleina.

“You have nothing to worry about there,” she whispered, and winked knowingly.

“Oh, I wasn’t—”

“She’s beautiful, but Kylo was never interested. It really hurt Aleina, you know, she was heart broken – I don't think she ever got over it. It was a stange situation … she was infatuated with him, but at the same time, terrified.”

“Terrified?”

“She was the outsider in our circle to start with – when the Jedi Temple was destroyed, she pleaded
to join, mostly to save her own life I think. But then I think she just wanted to be with him still.”

Rey shivered. She didn't like to think what Ben might have been like back then.

“He was cruel back then. So unforgiving.”

“Why did you follow him?”

“He had a vision. He had the gifts. He promised us knowledge and power.” She shrugged. “It was simple. Of course, he’s different now – since you. He’s calmer, more level-headed. But still tortured. I think he’s gone through too much to ever recover fully from that.” Meena smiled at Rey. “I’m glad he has you to take care of him. Botek and I have each other to help us through the dark times. And now Kylo has you – I’m glad.”

Botek flopped down onto the couch next to Meena and Rey, falling a little heavy with the effects of a few glasses of wine. “You two ladies having fun? Not talking about anything too serious I hope?”

“Guilty,” Meena confessed.

“What is it?” Botek smiled cheekily and nudged his partner.

She threw her arms around his neck and pecked his cheek sweetly. “Just talking about our love for each other.” She reached over and patted Rey on the knee. “I was telling Rey how much I like seeing her and Kylo together.

“I am a full supporter of you and own devlish man!” Botek rose his glass towards Rey.

Dagran spotted the gesture from his seat and trotted over with a look of glee on his face “What are we toasting?”.

Rey blushed.

Meena laughed. “What a special girl Rey is, and how lucky Kylo is to have her by his side.”

“You are a good match,” Dagran nodded thoughtfully, with a wide grin. “Both forces to be reckoned with.”

“Please,” begged Rey. “I’m nothing of the sort.”

“It is strange for one so powerful to be so beautiful.” Rey blushed harder under Dagran’s loud drunken chatter. “Can’t say the same for this one.” He chuckled to himself and nodded over at Ben.

“Oh no,” Rey said, jumping to Ben’s defence. “I think Ben is beautiful.”

Ben heard the commotion and smiled at Rey from where he sat. Dagran waltzed up to him. “Yeah, I mean look at these luscious locks.” He ran his fingers through Ben’s hair.

“Get off” Ben brushed him back. Rey laughed, and everyone laughed with her.

Rey couldn't help but feel fascinated by this strange group of people. Why had they followed him so loyally down the path he took them. Was it fear of what he would do to them if they didn't? Had all of them followed loyally?

They all seemed friendly enough, but at the same time, they were drawn to to the Dark, just as Ben was – what kind of pasts must they have had? And what kind of goals did they have? Was it really just a matter of learning and balancing the Force? Or was it power?
They just seemed like ordinary people, not powerful Force-users that should be feared. In ways, they reminded her of her own friends back at home. Botek reminded her of Poe, masculine and rugged, and Dagran, with all his youth and goofiness, reminded her of Finn. Meena was like Rose – gentle and caring female company.

The room full of laughter couldn't stop Rey’s feeling of loneliness. They had accepted her, yet she didn't truly feel like one of them.

Soan and Alaeina were more quiet than the others. They were certainly the broodier ones of the group. While they were perfectly civil, something about them made Rey feel incredibly uneasy. Could Ben feel it too?

Conversation slowly started to drift from adventurous tales of strange and fantastical planets, towards more serious matters. The conversation always seemed to turn abruptly when important details could have been revealed – Rey felt suspiciously that was not unintentional, meant to keep Knight secrets away from her.

Rey detached herself from her conversation with Meena and Botek, and went to sit with Ben, who seemed deep in conversation with Soan. He went silent as she arrived.

Soan raised an eyebrow at Rey, then back at Ben. “I’m still unsure what is protocol to share around our newest.”

“Rey can be trusted. You need not hold back around her.”

“Does Hux accept that the poster girl of the Resistance is truly converted?”

“Converted?” Rey said, but apparently fell on deaf ears. She saw Ben’s lips twist.

“Yes, I believe so,” he said. “Although I do sense some hesitation. It makes me uneasy.”

The others in the room were silent and started to listen in. Dagran sat with Soan.

“We can't allow a rift between us and the General and his army. We can't let Rey be a barrier to a confident allegiance.” Dagran said. It was the first time she had seen him so serious.

“Any information Rey can divulge about the Resistance will surely have Hux convinced?” suggested Alaeina.

Ben shook his head in Rey’s defence. “That is not information she needs to divulge nor would be valuable to Hux. I’ve convinced him that since we have Rey on our side, the Resistance is no longer a threat. She was the reason for their strength”

“Our side?” Rey called out, Ben’s voice echoing in her mind.

It was perhaps a little louder than what she had intended. All eyes in the room shot towards her.

Rey looked over at Ben for guidance. She should have just kept her mouth shut.

Soan slouched back in his chair. “I feel like that may be saying something,” he said dryly. He shot a dark look at Ben.

“You are still aligned with the Resistance?” Alaeina pressed.

Rey felt the brunette’s eyes burning into her. She felt cornered.
Her mind started racing. Of course she was aligned with the Resistance – they were her family. But under Ben’s guidance, she could understand his vision for the First Order. When it boiled down, they had the same end goal, just different means of getting there.

But was one path more virtuous than the other? Did she dare say “yes” to Aleina’s proposition?

It was a like a sudden flick of a switch in her mind. Looking back out at the Knights, instead of seeing a group of like-minded Force users and Ben’s friends, she saw them as a room full of killers. They took the short path to restoring order to the Galaxy – the Dark path, forged by power and suffering.

Ben, seeing her mind turning over, jumped to her defence.

“It’s not about sides. And remember that this circle of Knights is not one with the First Order. Rey is to be trusted – she is by my side, and therefore, by yours also.”

Soan flared up again. “So she cannot return to them then? If she chose to leave? She would reveal everything to them. How can we truly trust her until she denies her allegiance to them?”

Ben snapped. He threw himself out of his seat and raised himself above Soan. “Do not keep testing me, Soan!” he yelled.

The Knights shrunk back. Even Rey cowered at his sudden outburst. Soan, on the other hand, glowered but seemed unaffected.

Ben panted. “Do not forget I am the reason you are still here,” he growled.

Soan’s sour gaze darted back and forth between Ben’s furious eyes. He looked ready to explode. He stood up and faced Ben, almost nose-to-nose with his leader.

Rey could see it before it even happened. Soan had no more respect for the Master of the Knights of Ren. It was like a moment of foresight. He was going to grab Ben by the front of his robe. He was going to hurt him. He wanted to use the Force against his leader. She could see it all in his eyes and she felt it coming.

“Stop, both of you!” she stood up, trembling. Nervous energy raced through her like electricity.

Neither of the men backed down.

Soan raised his hand slowly towards Ben. “You—”

SMASH!

A sudden jolt of energy exploded from the centre of the room. The two angry men were thrown apart, onto the floor, and the crystal glasses on the table shattered with a deafening crack, sending wine splashing onto their uniforms and across the carpet.

Everyone in the room turned to look at Rey. The murky, heavy feeling of the Dark side crawled over her skin and slowly dissipated as she came back to her senses, leaving her in a cold sweat. She stood stunned, looking at what she had done, her fists trembling at her sides.

What had she done? She had let the Dark get the best of her... she had only wanted to protect Ben, but she hadn’t been able to control her power.

Soan glared at Rey as he attempted to brush the wine of his robe. “This girl is out of control,” he
muttered darkly.

His eyes pierced Rey with such hate. She felt the aura of Darkness around him.

She panicked. Her body went into auto-pilot.

She ran.

It was pure fear. For the first time since her public lashings, she felt unsafe, even with Ben near.

She ran, but there was nowhere to go. No escape.

She headed for Ben’s private quarters and locked herself in the study, curled up in the corner and buried her face in her arms.

A minute later she heard banging on the door.

“Rey, open up!”

It was Ben.

She couldn’t stop her heart racing.

“Everything’s alright. It’s just me. I promise.”

Reaching out with the Force, she unlocked the study door and Ben came flying in to embrace her.

He kissed her forehead. “You’re okay,” he sighed. “Rey I was so worried. I thought you might have had another episode.”

“The others?”

“Cleaning up. Soan is cooling off. You have nothing to worry about.”

“Nothing?” she breathed. “If I leave, they will hunt me. They don’t trust me.”

“Leave?”

“I am not a prisoner here – you told me that yourself.” She shook her head as Ben looked back at her in surprise. “Soan – you trust him?”

Ben buried his face in his hands. “Yes. Yes.” But he looked unsure. “He is only testing me.”

“Ben, can’t you see?” She remembered the fleeting vision she had of the disciple attacking his leader. “He wanted to –”

“His loyalty extends much further than you know. I saved his life once – he has a life debt to me. I made him what he is today. He has a temper just like me, but he would never turn against me.”

Rey wanted to believe him, but her own instincts screamed otherwise. She sighed – there was nothing she could do to make him understand what she had seen. She didn’t want to create a rift between two close friends.

She held onto Ben and let herself relax into his embrace.

Had she been lulled into a false sense of security, lost in Ben’s love? This afternoon had become a shocking reminder to her that she was still on the outside. And that the Dark side was dangerous.
She couldn't make him choose between her and his loyal Knights. They had, after all, been strongly linked with him for a decade longer.

And there was still the matter of sides. Was she really on Ben’s side? Did that make her the enemy of her friends?

How had she allowed herself to forget the past?
Born Of The Force

Rey floated through the dreamland corridors of the Resistance base on Saphin. She was hand in hand with Ben, smiling broadly and hopelessly in love. People ducked out of their way as they passed.

As Rey skipped along with Ben, she started to watch their faces. They weren’t stepping aside to let the happy couple pass – they were standing back out of fear. They were afraid of Ben. And afraid of her.

The corridor darkened and they passed more blurred faces, recoiling away from them. Rey pushed through the crowd, faster and faster, searching for a familiar face, but she found no one. The strangers hung their heads solemnly, whispering rumours of betrayal, death and disloyalty.

Rey threw herself at Ben, pounding her fists against his hard chest. “Where are they? You told me they were safe!” she cried.

Ben swirled out of the dreamscape before she could hear his answer, and she was left alone. Snow started to fall and she found herself in a dark icy forest. She heard the struggling cries of Finn and she ran towards him, pushing through the soft deep snow.

A dark figure struck Finn from behind, the red pulsating light from his lightsaber mixing with the blood red spattered across the white snow.

“Finn, NO!”

He fell to his side, gasping at the fatal wound across the length of his spine.

But it was too late. She had been too late – too late to save him.

The dark figure retreated into the shadows. She knew it was Ben, but she couldn't fight him. She couldn't even she wanted – she had no weapon. Her lightsaber had been destroyed, and she was left without a way to defend herself, or Finn.

Rey turned back to Finn’s limp figure, glittering with snowflakes in the cold forest. Rose knelt beside his body, weeping and wailing from despair.

“I’m so sorry!” Rey sobbed, but her pleas fell on deaf ears.

Raging inside, she leapt up and ran after Ben into the night, but she couldn't find him. She pulled her own robe closer around her, fighting off the cold.

The scene twisted and contorted yet again. She found herself striding through a long corridor, on board what appeared to be the Legacy. She was angry and out of control. She swept into an adjoining room. Masked and hood pulled low over her face, she felt hidden, anonymous … powerful.

There was a man strapped down to a rack. He was barely conscious, and only just starting to wake. His face was bruised and bloodied from previously torture, inflicted to extract some important information. She was irritated he had put up such a fight to defend it.

As she approached the man, she realised it was Poe.

Poe Dameron, the Resistance fighter pilot.

Her beloved Poe.
Rey tried to speak, but her body kept moving against her will. She rose an arm – not her own – and constricted Poe’s throat with the Force, choking him violently and leaving him gasping for breath.

Rey couldn’t stop herself. No, no, NO! But she wasn’t in a body that was her own. It was Ben’s – Kylo Ren’s.

This was no longer a nightmare. It was a memory.

Kylo released Poe. This time, he forced himself inside the pilot’s mind. The pilot stood no chance, despite his best effort to put up a defence – it only made it more painful. Ripping into someone’s mind was always an excruciating experience for the recipient. Poe yelled out in agony, but Kylo had no hesitations in continuing. He was merely a pawn in the grand scheme of finding the map to Skywalker – his life meant nothing to Kylo. His life was worthless.

Kylo saw inside his mind without any difficulty at all – he went straight to what he needed – the map. It lead him straight to ... a BB unit. The pilot had so much affection for the droid, it was almost nauseating.

Rey teared up watching the scene, and feeling Kylo’s ruthless and unforgiving punishment and Poe’s terror and pain. Her heart was breaking seeing Kylo so violent and Poe’s valiant attempt to protect his mission – he was willing to lay down his life to protect the Resistance and their noble cause.

Two strong-willed men, but one more infinitely powerful – undefeatable, even.

One valiant and loyal. One ruthless and cruel.

There was no regret or hesitation from Kylo. He was violent. He was a killer.

And that man was still Ben.

***

Rey sat up in bed and clutched her head in her hands, panting. She could feel the sweat on her body. Trying to slow her breathing, she felt the warm comfort of Ben’s hand on her lower back.

“You had a nightmare?”

Rey’s heart pounded.

She felt like she was seeing him through her old eyes again – as Kylo Ren. This man was Poe’s torturer and Finn’s near murderer. How could she be forgetting this? How could she so easily forgive the man that had hurt her own loved ones? Was it really possible to distinguish Kylo Ren from Ben Solo – how different were they really? Should they – could they – be considered two different people?

“I’m dreamed of home – I mean....” Rey wiped a single tear from her cheek and let her hair fall past her eyes, hiding from Ben. Was there any point in lying to him?

“Rey?” His voice was desperate – desperate to take away her pain.

Rey gasped for breath, fighting back tears. Her friends – her family – she had forgotten them. When she had left Finn on the battlefield on Jadan V, she had asked him to put blind faith in her. There was no way of them knowing where she was now, if she had succeeded, or if she was ever going to return. She had put all her faith and trust in Ben. It was on his word alone that she could know they were safe. And in the meantime, she had allowed herself to stay with Ben selfishly, exploring their
love and learning about the Force.

Was it all worth it?

“What am I doing here?” she whispered.

“Rey, what do you mean?” Ben sat up in bed and held her.

“I’ve been so caught up here that I’m forgetting them – my family.”

Rey felt Ben recoil. She felt terrible to admit it to him – she loved him now. She loved being with him. He himself was starting to feel like family. But she had let Poe … Finn … Rose … Leia … she had let them all drift from her thoughts. How could she forget them so easily? She had been onboard almost two months now. Were they even safe? Her stomach dropped – she really had no way of knowing. Could she trust Ben’s word?

Ben seemed confused. “You talk about the Resistance as your family. Why is that? They are not your blood.”

“Your family doesn't have to be blood – you and I can surely agree on that.”

Ben’s face sank, then Rey realised what he must have understood. His parents.

“No – no,” Rey stammered. “I meant the Knights of Ren. They are like your family, aren’t they?”

Ben looked away in thought.

Rey smiled reassuringly. “You trust them. They support you. You say they would die for you. That’s family.” Rey held onto him. “But Ben, at least you have real family too. Your mother…. she would welcome you with open arms.”

“Don't talk about her.” Ben snapped and turned away.

She should have felt sympathy but she couldn't. Must he be so stubborn? Rey pulled back.

“My family didn't even want me. They left me … possibly to die in the Jakku desert. I’ll never know – now that they're dead.”

Ben’s face went white and he froze. He opened his mouth as if to retaliate, but then shut it quickly and turned away again.

Rey read him instantly – he knew something he wasn’t telling her.

“Ben, what is it?” she said firmly.

“Your parents …” he whispered.

“What is it?”

“You have to forgive me –“

“You told me they were dead! Buried in a pauper’s grave on Jakku?”

“Rey, I lied!” he threw down his hands. “I’m sorry. In that moment, over Snoke’s severed body, …. I would have told you anything to have you by my side.”
“You lied to me? You made me feel worthless in that moment – you chose to tell me I came from nothing!”

“You did. But you don't understand – you misunderstood me”

It was like a knife in her chest.

“You were so desperate to know about your parents,” Ben continued desperately. “I only told you what I read from your own mind – that fear you had protected in your heart so long, that your parents were worthless drunks who sold you for money.”

Rey sat stunned, fuming, listening to him. Ben looked back at her like she was a frightened creature, desperate not to scare her away.

“I don't know who your parents are,” he reiterated. “I only saw what you saw – those people leaving you on Jakku. I don't know if they were really your parents any more than you do.”

“You lied to me,” Rey hissed. “This whole time I’ve believed what you told me!”

“Believed what you told yourself?” Ben panted. “Rey, I’m not sure those people were your parents. But….”

“What?” Rey tugged herself away from him.

“Forgive me…” Ben gulped. “I don't think you have parents.”

“Of course I have parents, Ben! Why would you even say that?”

“Think about it Rey. You have no recollection of them. Just the vision of being left alone by a departing junk ship. Traders who sold you. Do you remember their faces? For someone who spent so long waiting and hoping that they’d return, you'd surely at least remember what they looked like, or what their names were.”

Rey felt like she’d been slapped in the face. All her fears and trauma from her being abandoned as a child were resurfacing fast, but at the same time, it was the sudden realisation that what Ben was saying was true.

He was right. Now that she thought about it, she could never picture herself calling anyone mother or father. No faces came to mind. No familiar touch. The familiar loneliness from her past roared inside her. It hurt.

“How can I not have parents? I…..” Rey’s voice drifted off as she began to think.

“You told me about what you saw in the mirror on Ahch-To…” Ben prompted.

Rey sniffed back her tears. “I asked the mirror to show me my parents. I saw nothing – only myself.”

“I think the answer is as plain as what was shown to you. The reason you have no parents – I think you were born of the Force. It would explain why you’re such an anomalie. I think you were born of the Force – you were meant to balance the Force. Balance with me.”

“Ben stop! This is too much! I am nobody. Nobody! There is nothing special about me.”

“Rey, how can you be so blind?”

“You said I was from nothing.” Rey whispered. “In the throne room.”
“You came from nothing. I told you, but you misunderstood my words. You were a mystery to me! How could somebody from nowhere special, or born of no particularly special blood, be so truly strong and in tune with the Force? You are like a diamond, Rey – this strange magical creature I could never be worthy of.”

“But I am nobody.”

Ben persisted. He gripped her shoulders manically. “Not to me! I always knew you were special – right from the first moment I met you. Can’t you see? We were meant to be together. It makes sense. That’s why the Force keeps bringing us together. We balance each other. You are Light – born of the Force to balance the Dark in me. I am Dark – born of Skywalker blood.”

Rey couldn’t believe what she was hearing – Ben sounded manic. “You think I was created by the Force to balance you?”

“My grandfather was born from the Force – it’s possible! And he was the most powerful Jedi that ever lived. You too have that potential.”

Rey recoiled. That would explain why Ben had always been so desperate for her to join him. On Starkiller Base, the enraged Kylo Ren had demanded she join him, learn from him… He surely didn’t still see her that way – as a tool for more power?

“You….”

She couldn’t bring herself to ask.

Rey’s mind flitted back to her dream, and her family, far away. Had she been blind this whole time. Had she allowed herself to trust Ben too quickly – was this all a ruse to keep her here? Was he using her for power?

Ben held a finger under her chin and lifted her face to look up at him. He was beautiful, and she loved him like nothing else, but a seed of doubt was now planted in her mind. Did she dare trust him? Could she have misread everything?

Rey continued to look up into his deep brown eyes. His eyes oscillated between hers – searching, looking for something in her. Her trust … he knew he had lost some of it.

“Rey, I’m sorry. Unloading all of that on you in one go…”

“It’s okay…” she whispered.

Their noses were almost touching.

“Rey … Rey, my beautiful Rey.” He shut his eyes, breathing her in. “I love you.”

Ben rested his forehead on hers. Rey remained silent, looking down into her lap, her mind whipping around wildly. She threw up a mental wall, blocked her true feelings from Ben, and projected out mutual adoration and love.

She couldn’t let him feel her doubt.
Parents. Rey had always wanted them, but Ben’s theories were starting to make more and more sense. She had no memories of faces or names from her early childhood before she had become enslaved to Unkar Plutt on Jakku. And the cave on Ahch-To, a place filled with powerful Darkness, showed her only an image of herself. The Force itself had told her the truth – she was born from no one. How had she not realised it before?

Accepting the reality of her creation should have given her closure and comfort, but instead, it only made her feel more alone and confused. She was alone in the world – truly made from nothing. It proved she belonged nowhere. Even her life’s purpose had been thrown in her face – had she really been tasked with balancing the Force against Ben who would always lie in the Dark? If that were true, would redeeming him even be impossible? What did that mean for their relationship? They were star-crossed lovers, forever intertwined, but never safely united.

And what Ben had said about ruling together, using her potential – was he using her for his power? Was it all an act? The seed of doubt had started to grow in her mind, no matter how hard she tried to fight it.

She started to grow more suspicious of Ben – every time he left to meet with Hux and stayed quiet upon his return, or quickly changed the conversation when she asked too much. It was becoming more and more apparent that he only shared his visions, but what was happening right now was never discussed.

On top of everything, the nightmares had continued, and they were becoming more vivid and more terrifying. Every few nights now she would dream of Finn, Poe, Rose, Leia … everyone else close to her in the Resistance. They were all memories or hypotheticals, in which the line between Ben and Kylo Ren was blurred.

It was like the dreams were testing her – was her love for Ben worth it? Each was a reminder of her selfishness in choosing to say with Ben, the man who had decimated the Resistance and betrayed his own family.

Every morning, Rey would guard her nightmares, shielding her mind so Ben couldn't detect her fear and confusion. The secrecy was wearing her down – she was nauseous with guilt and exhausted from waking constantly through the night.

Three weeks passed since the first nightmare, and Rey woke yet again in a cold sweat.

She clutched at the silken bed sheets around her, searching for a warm body to grasp onto, but she was alone – Ben was already up for the day. Though the details of the nightmare were starting to slip away from her already, one very clear memory remained etched in her mind.

It had been different – she’d seen her family, her friends, either dead or betrayed, with pain inflicted by herself or Ben, but there was something new. Her stomach twisted painfully.

A child.

In the dream she had been holding a small boy. Was it hers? Her own child? Her and Ben’s? He was sick and in pain – physically and mentally, tormented between his parents. Rey had been shielding
him from … Ben? Tears welled up in Rey’s eyes as she remembered the dream. Ben, in his anger, had struck the child across the face. But the child also screamed out from the pain inside him – the Darkness that flowed through his blood. The Dark blood of Ben and Rey.

Why, a child?

Rey buried her face in her hands. Was this her future if she stayed with Ben? It was unsafe. It couldn't work, could it? Ben had been nothing but gentle with her, and if anything, he had been a true gentleman. But could it just be a façade, hiding the monster beneath? Had she been so naïve?

She hugged herself close, trying to soothe her nerves. She could feel the Darkness on the outskirts of her mind, waiting like a vulture – waiting for her mental barriers to break down enough so that her mind could become prey to the Dark side without her consent, as it had been before. Ben’s training had helped her prevent another episode so far, but with these nightmares and the doubt and fear creeping into her waking hours, she was slowly starting to lose control.

Rey couldn't shake the memory of the nightmare. That's all it was, she though, a nightmare. But it felt so real – it had to be real.

It could be real.

She might never know. All she knew was that she loved him – either irrationally or by some deeper connection, she wasn’t so sure.

Rey crawled out of bed and knocked on Ben’s study door. He was up early, preparing for a meeting. She heard him leap out of his chair, as if startled by her knock. He opened the door a crack and stepped into the bedroom, swiftly closing the study door behind him and blocking his work from view.

Sensing her unease, Ben held her close, kissing the top of her head.

“What is it?”

“Nothing,” Rey lied, mumbling into his chest.

“They are just dreams. Don’t forget that.”

“It doesn’t feel that way—”

Meep meep! Ben’s comlink shrilled loudly in his pocket. He dug around for it in his pocket and quickly silenced it with a pounding from his thumb.

He turned back to Rey, looking carefully into her eyes. “Rey, you can't let these nightmares get the best of you – it’s the Dark side toying with your emotions. You shouldn't allow yourself to become vulnerable to that.”

“I know, but…”

Ben’s comlink rang again. He growled and checked the device this time, before briskly shutting it off once more.

“Let’s keep talking about this when I’m back. I want to help you.” He shoved the comlink in his pocket. “I have to deal with a … situation.” He looked decidedly disgruntled. “Hux again.”

He kissed the top of her head once again and collected his robe from the wardrobe.
“What’s going on?”

“Nothing you need to worry about,” Ben said gently.

*Again with the secrecy,* Rey thought.

Without another word, he left Rey alone in his room and exited his quarters into the main ship.

Rey frowned and crossed her arms as he departed – his secrecy was becoming more and more obvious. Why couldn't he just tell her what he was doing? He had, after all, decided to be more open about his work.

As she turned to traipse back into bed, Rey noticed a glow coming from the study. She pushed open the door – a hologram was still on display, projected from Ben’s datapad. In his hurry to console her earlier, he must have forgotten to close it.

Rey approached slowly, trying to make out all the details. It was a combination of mechanical diagrams and words she still struggled to read. She pieced together some of the words with the brief knowledge Ben had been able to impart on her.

\[P – R - … \text{ Praxia } … \text{ She scanned a bit further. } \ W – \text{E } … \text{A } \ldots \text{ weapons...} \]

Rey squinted closer, focussing on the diagrams instead. Circuitry, mechanics, design…. this was a language she could speak and understand. She held her hand up to the hologram and zoomed in to the details of the structure. Its design was clear – it was a weapon. A large one.

But somehow the scale didn't seem right. It was too big to be any structure found on a ship. Surely she was reading this wrong. No … it much bigger than any ship.

It was a *planet*-sized structure.

Rey’s heart started to race. What was the dating on this?

Her eyes scanned rapidly over the diagrams and through the clusters of words and numbers surrounding it.

She found the date stamp. It was recent, and in progress.

The First Order logo was branded all over it. It wasn’t a review. It wasn’t a piece of history. This was a structure almost completed in the present day.

The First Order had created another superweapon.

Rey’s mind went into overdrive. Ben had talked to her about wanting to settle the war more diplomatically. He had said himself that he regretted the fall of the New Republic and the mass destruction of inhabited systems, lost to the Starkiller weapon. He was supposed to be going down a new path – he had promised her that. So why – *Gods* why – was there need for another superweapon?

This was no path to peace and stability. This could only mean death on a planetary scale. *Literally!*

Had he been lying to her?

Was this a mistake?

She trusted him.
Rey froze and took in a deep breath. Yes, she trusted him. She paced around the room. She had to put her faith in that – there had to be some logical explanation. She would just ask Ben.

Yes, she would just ask him.

She closed down the hologram and shut off the datapad. She wanted to bring it up in her own time, and she didn't want Ben to walk in with the hologram still open.

Attempting to calm her racing mind, Rey decided to head to the training facilities to let out her nerves. She headed back into the bedroom, reaching into the wardrobe to grab a change of clothes –

Ouch!

Rey yelped as she stubbed her toe hard – it was the locked metal safe at the back of the wardrobe. The safe that Ben had always seemed so defensive about.

Rey squatted down beside it and ran her hands over the lid. It buzzed with energy – something important lay inside. Something tragic but meaningful.

She closed her eyes and breathed in the energy, searching for answers. What could Ben possibly be so protective over? It was something Light … but at the same time something incredibly Dark …

Her eyes shot open as she heard the doors to the private suite open. He was back – too soon.

Ben called out from around the corner. “Rey – I’m back. I forgot –”

He turned the corner into the bedroom and saw Rey crouched over the safe.

“What are you doing?” he looked flustered, like he had rushed back.

Rey withdrew and stepped back from him. She pointed to the safe.

“What’s in there?”

“It’s – nothing.”

“What are you hiding?”

“Why must you know what’s in there?” Ben’s temper snapped and he grabbed the wardrobe door from Rey and slammed it shut. “You need to stop asking.”

“You’re keeping secrets from me.”

“It’s just an empty metal safe, nothing inside---”

Rey shook her head. He was so obviously lying – it was making her mad. All the emotions she had tried desperately to suppress just minutes ago suddenly came gushing back to the surface.

“The superweapon. I saw the graphics on your datapad. You left it unlocked.”

Ben’s face dropped.

“It’s true then – it’s a weapon. On a planetary scale.”

Ben looked back at her stunned, his mouth open. She knew she had caught him out now.

Rey started to tremble and her voice shook as she spoke. “You authorised it?”
He held up his hand defensively. “Rey – don’t misunderstand—”

“Then help me understand,” she demanded. “Because as far as I can tell, I’ve been blinded by everything and the First Order has not changed under your rule at all!”

“Rey, no!” he clutched her shoulders. “You haven’t been blinded – I’m hiding nothing.”

“Really?”

Ben growled under his breath. “Forget what’s in the chest. Let’s get back to … the weapon.” He sighed. “Yes, I authorised it.”

“You told me you were leading the First Order in a new direction – a more peaceful and diplomatic pathway?”

“It won’t necessarily be used – it’s a symbol of power.”

“A planet-sized weapon – just a symbol of power? Are you mad?”

“It’s also a huge technological feat!”

“Why did you never mention it?”

“Because … because you wouldn't have understood. You weren’t ready. I didn't want you to panic and ... lose trust in me.”

“Well that ship has sailed!” she said through gritted teeth. She tried to calm herself. “Ben…”

Ben’s head tilted, looking into her eyes, searching. “That’s not everything that’s upsetting you – there’s something else you’re not telling me.”

Rey looked away.

Ben squeezed her shoulders, perhaps a little too tightly. It snapped Rey back to attention.

“Was it another nightmare?” he said. “You need to tell me. I told you, I want to help.”

Visions of a tortured future flashed before her again and she quickly blocked it from her mind so Ben couldn't sense anything.

“I’ve been thinking…”

Ben’s eyes darted rapidly over her face, trying desperately to read and understand her.

Rey bit her lip and clenched her fists at her side. It had to be said.

“We can't be together anymore. I have to leave. You need to let me leave.”

Chapter End Notes

The pain train is gonna be so real - I think you can guess what's coming in the next chapter. Thank you for support as always - I love uploading chapters for you guys, and your comments always put a smile on my face. I do love a good Reylo chat :)
I'm currently doing my best not to watch the new TROS trailer - as much as I'm dying to consume as much content as possible, I kind of want to go into the movie knowing as little as possible, so it feels more exciting :D I wonder if I'll eventually cave! Social media will certainly be very difficult!

Wherever you are in the world, Reylo forever <3 and have a good one xx

ReyStarWalker
“We can't be together anymore. I have to leave. You need to let me leave.”

Rey forced the words out of her mouth. With each articulation, she felt like she was stabbing not just her own, but also Ben’s heart.

Silence fell between them. They stared at each other – Ben in disbelief, and Rey in fear and pain. He looked like he had stopped breathing. She saw his mind start to tick over, faster and faster.

*MEEP, MEEP, MEEP!*

Ben’s comlink beeped loudly, calling for his attention. He ignored it.

“You…” started Ben. “What do you mean, we can't be together?”

“I ---”

*MEEP, MEEP, MEEP!*

His comlink shrilled louder. It was enough to break him this time. He pulled it from his pocket and threw it across the room angrily, yelling out as he did so. It smashed against the back wall.

“What are you saying, Rey?” he snapped.

Kylo Ren flashed before her – she could see him in Ben’s eyes, with the breaking of his temper. She recoiled in fear as she once had, long ago when they were mere acquaintances.

“I want to leave.”

“You want to leave? I thought we were a team.” Kylo Ren dissolved, replaced by a pleading Ben, his eyes panicked and hurt.

Rey paused, forming the words in her mouth one more time. “Yes, I want to leave. We can't be together.” Her heart tore in two saying it.

“Why?”

“Why?” Rey said in disbelief. “We are enemies –”

“No, stop – you know that’s not true.”

Rey let her head fall into her hands and she collapsed onto the side of the bed.

“We’re still on opposite sides of the war, and I’m worried we’ll never get past it.”

“No…” Ben shook his head in disbelief, refusing to accept what he was hearing.

Rey looked up at him, pleading for it not to be true. “We are still *enemies.*”

“Rey, you know that’s not true. We’re not enemies.”

“But we *are* – as long as we continue to fight on different sides.”

“We’re on the *same side!*”
Ben was becoming increasingly frantic, seeing the doubt and hesitation in Rey. Rey couldn't be swayed though.

“But are we?” she said. “I think … all of this happened too fast – we got lost in it all. I thought I knew you … but Kylo Ren and Ben Solo – you’re not two different people. You’re still … the same.”

“Please don't say this. You know I would never hurt you. I’m different – I changed.”

“But you haven't changed – you stepped into the Light, but you haven't embraced it.”

“I was broken Rey, and you're helping to heal me. I need you. I’m on your side.”

“If that’s true, then come with me. I need to know my family are safe. Come with me, Ben.”

Ben huffed in disbelief. “That’s unfair.”

“You have to choose Ben – choose between me and the First Order. You can't have both.”

“I can’t – I can't leave my station … everything I’ve worked for –”

Rey dropped her hands in disgust and mock surprise. “Really? I saw the designs for the weapon. Are you really satisfied with this fascist dictatorship?”

“It’s called progressive. I’m trying to restore balance – as you may be aware, that's not an easy task.” He shuffled uncomfortably, trying to get through to her, and holding back his temper. “You should stay with me – you’ll have the power to affect change. The Galaxy needs you here.”

“You talk about us like we’re a team, but you hid all of this from me … because you thought I wouldn’t understand?”

Kylo paused and looked down into his lap. “I told you change was a slow process. There are still some things … going on… that you wouldn't agree with. In time they will change.”

“It doesn't matter what you say will happen – you’re still leading a regime that’s hurting people right now,” Rey whispered.

“It’s necessary.”

“It’s necessary?” Rey’s eyebrows shot up. “That’s all you can say?”

“What were you expecting?” Ben said bitterly. “Leader of the First Order, turning to the Light and leading a new Jedi Order?”

“No, of course not,” Rey cried. “But I was hoping to rekindle the Light in you somehow! You were once a Jedi in-training. Some of that is within you still.”

“The Jedi were never going to be the answer. Their age had to end.”

“At least they were peaceful!”

“Really? The Jedi orchestrated a coup against a democratically elected leader to impose their religious views on a secular republic. Is that how you would run the Galaxy? Doesn’t sound very peaceful to me.”

Rey shook her head. “Of course not. You’re taking it out of context.”
“We’ve talked about Light and Dark – and the balance between it all. Why must you still see the two as a dichotomy?

Rey was becoming increasingly frustrated. “I wanted to live that – the grey between the Light and Dark. But it’s starting seem more and more like an impossible existence.’”

“How would you have it then?”

“I wanted you to come to the Light. I wanted you to come home.”

“To save me, I suppose? The Light has only caused me pain so far.”

“In time you will heal.”

“I know that’s why you came here, you know – to turn me – take down the Supreme Leader from the inside. Is that the only reason you stayed, too?” He paced away from her, and spoke to the floor. “Did ever even care for me, or was it all a front to tempt me back to my mother?”

Rey’s mind whirled around uncontrollably. If she lied, it would make leaving a lot easier, but she couldn't bring herself to do it. She stayed silent.

“Why did you stay?” Ben snapped. “You told me you loved me. For who I am.”

“I did,” Rey whispered.

“You did?” Ben turned around to face her again, confusion across his face.

Rey gulped. “Ben …”

“Tell me what you told me that evening after planetfall on Naboo, when I told you I loved you – what did you say in response?”

Memories from that blissful day flashed before her. They were so uncontrollably drawn to each other – they had been consumed, forgetting the world around them. But the world around them had stayed the same. Loving each other wasn’t going to change anything.

Tears welled up in her eyes. “I can’t.”

“Do you love me?”

Rey’s lip trembled. “No,” she whispered, lying through her teeth.

Ben saw straight through her. “I know that’s not true.”

“Yes it is!” cried Rey.

“So you stayed just to manipulate me? And now you’re just going to leave? It all meant nothing to you?”

She looked away from him, blinking back the tears. “Yes,” she lied again.

He could have sworn loudly, but Ben’s voice came out quiet and defeated. “That’s a load of bull-shavit.”

“I wish it could be real.”
“It is—”

“As long as we’re on different sides of the war…”

Ben held her shoulders in his hands. “Please. Rey, please don’t leave me again. Please.”

He was begging her.

All she wanted to do was hold him and take his pain away. But she couldn’t – if she was going to tear herself away from him, she would have to throw away her own heart to see reason. Too long had she followed her heart blindly and gone against her better judgement, the consequences of which still remained unknown to her – the fate of her family, and the fate of the Galaxy.

She had to leave.

Rey sighed and brushed Ben away from her.

“I’m going to need a transport.”

Ben spun around and slammed his fists against the wardrobe, defeated. He knew he wasn’t going to convince her. She could see his jaw clench, fighting back the pain and the anger. For the first time in a long time, he had no control. No amount of leverage could change the situation, and he knew it.

Rey slipped on her robe and grabbed her Knight-disguise helmet. She kept her voice stoney and unemotional. “Prove to me that I’m not a prisoner. Let me go, Ben.”

All the meanwhile, he heart was shattering into a thousand pieces, and she could see the very same was happening to Ben.

Ben held his clenched fists at his side. “I don’t want you to leave. I love you. But if this is what I have to do to prove myself to you, then … you don’t leave me with much of a choice.”

Without turning to face her, he lowered his helmet over his head and walked out the door. Rey followed his lead, also donning her head gear to keep her identity indistinguishable from the other Knights.

Ben walked several steps ahead of her, not glancing back, and arms held stiffly at his side. This wasn’t his usually cool, confident, terrifying walk – he was in a pain. A lot of pain.

And she was doing that to him.

After a long few minutes of silence, they arrived at one of the private hangars on board. Rey recognised some of the Knight’s personal transports, odd in a sea of identical TIE-fighters and other small First Order crafts.

“Take one of the smaller transports – it’s less likely to attract attention.”

Rey raised an eyebrow.

“You should ditch it when you can – I can cloak the tracer, but should suspicion arise, there might still be ways for us to track you, and it’ll lead us to your base.”

“Noted. Thank you.”

“Come on, I’ll show you the navigational systems.”
The pair walked slowly up the boarding ramp, their separation drawing more imminent with each step. Rey tried desperately to contain herself.

“I’ll tell Hux I’ve sent you on assignment or other official Knight business – he knows he’s not allowed to pry in that department. He won’t be pleased seeing his prized prisoner walk freely. But hopefully he trusts me enough to believe that you’re still on my side.”

Ben leaned over the transport controls and started his work on disabling the tracer. Rey watched as he worked quickly and easily.

“No one thinks I joined the First Order though, right? I was always just a prisoner to them, wasn’t I?”

“Most crew seem aware that there has simply been another addition to the Knights of Ren. But yes, Rey of the Rebellion may well still be a prisoner to the outside world. Hux never trusted you enough to label you one of our own.”

“But when rumour spreads that I returned to the Resistance…”

Ben spoke quietly as he worked, not looking up at her. “I don’t know… I’ll probably have to label you as a traitor – the Resistance will become a target again.”

“But you must keep your promise – you can’t target the Resistance.”

“You know I can’t do that.” Ben finished his work with the tracer and stepped back from the controls. “If the Resistance gets caught in the cross fire, I have no choice. Everything changes now. Think of it the other way – you would never ask the Resistance to ceasefire on the First Order, would you.”

Rey gulped. This certainly was a messy situation they had gotten themselves into.

She turned and looked over the cockpit controls. The control system was instantaneously familiar to her – she was comfortable on any operating system. She could feel her fingers shaking out of her control as she traced them over the various buttons and levers.

Ben was watching her every move.

“Will I see you again?” he asked.

His face had gone stoney and he seemed to have stopped functioning normally. His voice was cold and hard, like the voice of Kylo Ren. Rey wondered if it was just a defence mechanism, trying to hold back his pain. He must have become good at these things when he’d been under the control of Snoke. It was a morbid thought.

“I don’t know, Ben.” Rey could feel the burn behind her eyes as she held back the inevitable tears.

He sighed. “What changed? Everything was so good. Was it the nightmares?”

She didn’t want to talk about it anymore – she knew she might change her mind. She stifled back a sob. “Yes,” she whispered. “I need to know they’re safe.”

“My grandfather had vivid dreams before he became Darth Vader. They drove him mad and pushed him to the Dark side for good, feeding off his desperation to save his wife. You can’t just believe in dreams, Rey. Sometimes they are just that – dreams. Don’t let it ruin what we have!”
“It wasn’t just the nightmares, Ben,” she said, exhausted.

“What then? Did I do something wrong?” He shook his head, trying to understand her. “Are you frightened of me?”

Rey frowned. “No – but I am frightened of what might happen if we stay together. And scared I wasn’t enough to save you.”

“I don't need saving.” Ben’s voice became stoney and bitter.

He was stubborn. Couldn't he just understand? Couldn't he just come home?

Silence fell, and the aura over them both buzzed with thick intensity.

“My home …” Rey whispered softly. “It’s on Saphin.”

Ben’s eyes bulged at the unexpected revelation. “You…”

“When you finally let the Light all the way in, come find me.”

“You shouldn't have told me that. I can’t –”

Rey couldn't take it any more. She swivelled around in the pilot chair and started the primary engine, the transport coming to life around her.

“Get out,” she snarled. It was forced, but necessary.

Ben stood there, his mouth twisting uncomfortably, hesitating.

Rey grabbed hold of the controls, ready for take off. “We can't prolong this anymore. Please leave so I can.” Her voice was forceful. She didn't want to leave – but she still had to.

Ben’s hand twitched at his side, where his lightsaber hung ready for action. The fear of losing Rey was awakening the primal monster within him – he was about to act on impulse, letting his temper control his decisions. She could see his mind racing at a million miles per hour trying to find some way to convince her to stay. He had lead her her to this escape transport, but perhaps he hadn't really thought she would go. Now he could see there was nothing left to be said or done. He knew it was a lost cause.

It was out of his control.

Ben grabbed his saber instinctively and directed it at Rey, but didn't ignite it. Anger boiled up inside him. His brows furrowed together and rage flashed through his eyes.

“I sacrificed everything for you,” he spat.

Rey recoiled. Kylo Ren had resurfaced.

He stepped toward her, a menacing look on his face. “I only ever loved you, Rey.”

“Get out, Ben,” she said stiffly, unafraid.

“I gave you everything. And now you’re just throwing it back at me.”

Rey stood up and held her hand out of at him. “This isn’t you.”
She felt the Darkness start to rise in her. It bubbled and gurgled inside her, like flames licking hungrily at the inside walls of her chest.

“You don't get to decide that,” Ben hissed.

Rey let the Force escape her, pushing Ben against the cockpit wall. She grabbed the front of his robes and slammed him into the wall again, a growl escaping her throat. “Get out.”

Ben’s eyes danced between hers, reading them intently – seeing himself in her.

“You may think you’re escaping the Dark side by running now, but you’re only taking it with you.”

Rey shoved him one more time and then released him. Her insides were ripping apart – she had threatened and hurt the one she supposedly loved. Had she become a monster just like him?

Ben brushed down his robe. Their eyes stayed locked for a moment more – a mixture of anger, fear, pain …loneliness – she could read it all in his eyes.

For a split second she wanted to hold him…take away his pain. She wanted to kiss him one more time, but –

Ben grabbed his helmet, threw it over his head and stormed back down the boarding ramp. And just like that, he was gone.

It felt like her heart had been ripped from her chest – actual physical pain. She gasped for breath, standing there, watching the inside of the empty transport.

After a moment, Rey returned to the pilot’s chair and readied the transport for launch.

Fighting back tears, she sent the craft flying through the hangar at top speed and out into the endless blackness.
It all happened so fast. Everything had been fine this morning, but with one final trigger, she had snapped. And now the false bubble surrounding her romance with Ben had been violently burst and the absurdity of everything was hitting her hard.

With so much racing around in her mind, she knew she had to focus – focus on ditching this transport as soon as possible so she didn't lead the first Order straight back to the Resistance base. Ben had cloaked the tracer, but she didn't want to take any chances. She knew Hux was always one step ahead with technology, and even though she trusted Ben’s knowledge, she suspected Hux may have the upper hand when it came to technical prowess.

But where would she go to dispose the current transport and acquire a new untraceable one? Having grown up isolated on Jakku, there were very few places she actually knew. Jakku, D’Qar, Ahch-To, Crait … Saphin. But also –

Takodana.

Maz Kanata.

If she offered refuge to travelling smugglers, then she would surely offer Rey protection and safe transport. On top of everything, Maz was a Force sensitive, and therefore a valuable ally in a world Rey still felt desperately alone in.

Maz’s castle had been destroyed, but there might still be a chance Maz resided somehow nearby. It was the only idea Rey had, so it was worth a try.

Rey set the navigational coordinates for the Tashtor sector in the Western Regions. Just to be safe, she would pilot manually to the lush green planet.

Stars tracked past the windows at lightening speed, but Rey was numb to the world around her.

Rey boots crunched over the gravel and ruins of Maz’s castle. It was still all gone, but Rey’s senses detected life and activity nearby. The area was still abuzz with energy even if it was somehow out of sight.

She spun around on the spot, taking in her surrounds. She hadn't seen the castle destroyed last time she was here because she had run into the forest like a coward just before the First Order had arrived. She had abandoned Han that day, and run away from the truths Maz had tried to show her. It had lead to her capture, later leading her friends into danger as they came to her rescue. She wished she could have taken it all back. She was a different person now.

Protecting her family was the most important thing right now. She had to let that drive her forward. If she let herself come to a stop, she would surely be swallowed by sadness.

*Push on*, she thought.

As Rey reached the heart of the ruined castle, laughing voices and music wafted up from beneath the ground. Rey picked up her pace, following the source of the sound.

Stepping over the ruins of a wall, Rey found it – an underground entrance. The very stairs she had
descended when she had found Luke’s lightsabre. Of course! The castle had underground networks. Perhaps they had been strong enough to withhold the previous attack, and were still fully functioning.

Rey pulled the hood of her robe low over her face and made her way down the steady sloping stairwell. The chatter and music growing louder.

It was just as she had remembered it. Buzzing music, clinking of glasses, and roudy chatter. A few of the underground chambers had been linked together to form a low-lit cantina, filled with all the usual sounds and smells. It wasn’t particularly crowded at this time of day, but given the nature of Maz’s affairs, Rey knew she couldn't trust anyone here. She prayed no one recognised her before she found Maz.

She didn't have to wait long.

“Jakku girl!”

Rey whipped around. The short humanoid woman walked up to her from behind the bar. She focused her large round glasses on Rey’s face and peered at her through the candle-lit darkness.

“Ah yes, I thought it was you. I could feel you from a mile away.”

Rey knelt down before the small woman. “Maz!”

Maz flapped her arms in front of her, bringing Rey back to her feet. “I’m glad to see you alive and kicking, child.” She gestured towards a small round table in the dark corner of the bar, away from everyone else. “Come, let’s talk.”

Rey followed quickly, and settled in at the dirty bar table next to Maz. Candle wax was layered over the table and sketchings had been scratched into the table with knives. There was a life and warmth to this place which felt unfamiliar but comforting to Rey – it was so different to the clinical environment she had just spent several months in.

“I heard news from the Resistance that you had been captured. I see that is no longer the case?”

“I ….” Rey thought of suggesting that she escaped the First Order, but she knew better than to lie to Maz. Better just to omit the information altogether. “I—”

Maz didn’t seem to need an answer anyway. She was too busy inspecting Rey through her large lenses. It was making Rey horribly uncomfortable. “There’s something different about you… Last time we met, the Force had only just awoken in you. Now look how you’ve blossomed.”

“I … thank you.” She blinked stupidly at Maz. This was not the conversation she was expecting.

“I sense the Force is strong with you. And something more… I see Darkness.”

Rey instinctively set up her mental blockade.

“You are mistaken, I’m sure.” Rey felt the sweat on her chest. Was it really warm down here?

Maz laughed, humoured by Rey’s obvious discomfort. “It’s not necessarily a bad thing, my dear.”

The barman, heavy of gowter and belly and scaled like a lizard, brought over a large jug of red ale and two glasses. “On the house,” said Maz, pouring herself a pint. “For you?”

The smell was much too strong for Rey, almost nauseating. She shook her head quickly. “I’m alright,
thank you.”

While Maz took a long swig of ale, Rey scrambled to pull herself together. She needed to get off the topic of the Force stat if she wanted to keep a low profile.

“This place – your castle – I thought it was destroyed,” she said.

“Yes, well … as much as they would like to, the First Order can’t destroy everything. It takes a great deal more for this community to cower and scatter. And this was always a fortress, impossible to raze completely.” She gazed around the room. “We had it rebuilt and refurbished if you will. It’s always been a neutral ground, and a safe place away from both sides of the war. In a world of turmoil and confusion, it only made sense to preserve it.”

“Are we safe here?”

“Safety is not something I can guarantee. And perhaps it’s a fruitless venture, searching for safety in these times.” Maz shook her head disapprovingly. “You are noble of heart, child, but still afraid.” She waved her finger at Rey. “You cannot run from everything.”

“I’m not afraid.”

“I’m not talking about the kind of fear faced in battle or in times of danger. The things you are afraid of – the thing you run from – is the truth.”

“Excuse … what?”

“When we first met, you wanted to run away from the truth that had presented itself to you: your connection to the Force. It frightened you. You wanted to cling to safety by returning to Jakku to wait for something that was never coming back.”

Rey’s memories flashed back to the moment she opened the chest to find Luke’s lightsaber, and she had instantly been awakened to the Force within her.

Maz tapped her finger down on the table. “You’re doing it again now. Running.”

“I’m running home, Maz.”

“Ah yes, but what are you running from? What truth did you leave behind onboard the First Order flagship?”

Rey eyed Maz carefully. She knew Maz was sensitive and experienced with the Force. Could she really read Rey that well, or was she just trying to trip her up and force a confession?

Maz blinked slowly at Rey. “You’re a runner Rey – don’t also be a liar. That is not the Jedi way.”

“I am no Jedi.”

“Ah, but you are. Skywalker’s lightsaber – it called to you.”

“The saber is broken. I wasn’t able to repair it.”

Maz sighed. “Anakin Skywalker would be rolling in his grave.”

“It really belonged to him then? I’ve been wondering – how did you come to possess it anyway?”

Maz slumped back in her chair. “It’s a long story.”
Rey nodded eagerly.

“Have you heard of the Knights of Ren?” Maz asked.

“Yes – I mean … I think so.” Rey caught herself.

“That is when Ben truly lost himself. Not before, when Snoke was whispering in his ear – it was when he finally gave in to the Dark and his reckless followers drove him further to the edge.”

Rey tried best to maintain her expression of surprise. From what she had learned by meeting the Knights, she knew the opposite was true. They were the ones wanting to reign him in!

Maz continued her story. “After Ben Solo burned down the Jedi temple, he and his Knights hunted for the last remaining Jedi relics, seeking to destroy them and wipe out the Jedi forever.”

“His grandfather’s lightsaber – he wouldn’t have wanted to destroy that though?” Rey asked.

“Of course not. He idolised the Sith Lord. The saber has last been in possession by Luke, lost on Bespin, when his hand had been severed off. Decades later, he tracked it down in some archives on Bespin.”

_Bespin_ … Rey thought. The name was familiar – one of the Knights had mentioned it.

“So how did the saber come into your possession?”

“I happened to be in Bespin at the same time when they made the raid. I was travelling with a group of smugglers and pirates,” Maz smiled slyly. “We were after goods of similar nature and value.”

“What happened?”

“We were caught in the crossfire. This was still early days now – he didn’t have that silly mask yet. I saw his face for the first time in years. I knew him as a young child, you see. He had grown tall and handsome, like his father, but his eyes….

Rey shivered. She knew exactly what Maz was referring to – the rage and pain in his eyes.

Maz shook her head sadly. “He was crazed, blinded by power, like he was drugged. But still … just teetering on the edge. There was anger and confusion in him, but no evil. He wasn’t completely lost! He saw me – just for a moment – and in that moment of recognition, something inside him made him hesitate. But it was just enough time – his hesitation cost him the life of one of his Knights, who he was unable to defend. They were struck down by a blaster.”

Maz continued. “The Knights were outnumbered, and I think Ren panicked. They fled, leaving the fallen Knight’s body behind. He was only young – must have been only thirteen or fourteen. And so six Knights became five.”

_So there had been six Knights after all…_ The Knights had hinted at a sixth, but Ben had always shut down that conversation. This is what he had been hiding… The young Knight on Bespin – what kind of man would he have been now? He was so young to have followed Ben blindly down the Dark path. Had Ben been devastated by his death?

“What became of the other Knights?” Rey asked.

“Fairly illusive figures … I think they must have dispersed not long after Ren was pinned down by Snoke’s iron rule. Nothing has been heard of them since. Probably lost amongst the war – either that
or their leader has kept them under close wraps.”

Rey nodded innocently, her mind reeling with memories of Botek and the others. Maz narrowed her eyes suspiciously. “You seem very interested in them.”

“Just….” Rey scrambled. “There might be other Force-sensitives out there.” Rey fiddled with her empty glass on the table. “And the lightsaber on Bespin?”

“Ren fled before he was able to retrieve it. The archives were practically destroyed in the crossfire, and I was the only one small enough to retrieve the weapon from the ruins. I kept it for my own personal collection, of course – it was much safer with me.” Maz took a long draw from her ale. “And then you came calling last year.”

“It is destroyed.” Rey sighed.

Maz raised her eyebrows and pointed a long arthritic finger at Rey. “Lightsabers don't just break – how did it happen?”

Rey hesitated. “He fought me for it,” she whispered. “Neither of us had the stronger call, and the fight over it severed it in half. The kyber crystal was split in two.”

Maz nodded her head slowly. “Interesting…”

“Interesting?”

“Balance. Equally balanced enemies. Very interesting…”

Rey suddenly felt very uncomfortable, like Maz was reading her without her permission. The small woman looked over Rey’s shoulder at the bar and nodded at the barman.

“Why are you here?” she said, turning back to Rey. “The barman says you arrived in a First Order transport.”

“I took it ---”

“Stolen?”

Rey hesitated. “Not exactly.”

“Doesn't change much anyway,” Maz waved her hand in indifference. “There’s all sorts of tracers on those things, stolen or authorised. You’ll need a new transport if you’re to fly back to the Resistance base untracked.”

“I hope this isn’t going to put you in danger. I think the tracer was cloaked before I set off, but I can't be certain. I had a look on the way here – it’s new technology I don’t understand.”

“The First Order has always been at the forefront of technological developments … Not to fear, I’m sure it’s nothing I can't handle. You on the other hand – it seems you have a lot of unresolved business.”

Rey blinked at Maz stupidly. This woman’s intuition was unparalleled. She couldn't possibly know about Ben and her – could she?

“I will help you return to the Resistance,” said Maz, “but I suggest you get your act together and your story straight before you return.”
“I don’t know what you mean,” Rey lied.

Maz slammed her glass down and drops of ale danced onto the table. “Yes, that’s the style!” she cried jovially. “Listen, Rey. You can try to play dumb with me, but I know what you have tried to do. Who you have tried to change.”

“What? You do…?”

“Failed, you have not. Listen,” she reached for Rey’s hands. “You have lit up a single star on the dark horizon – a single star in the night sky is enough to guide someone’s way. You have done enough for now.”

Rey gulped.

Maz returned to her ale, close to finishing her second round. “You were close, were you not? Leia’s son – you care for him.”

It wasn’t a question. Rey chose to leave it that way and stay silent, trying to maintain a stoney façade. The less Maz knew, the better it was for everyone.

“Ben Solo,” Maz smacked her lips together as she took the final swig from her drink. “It is not over yet.”

Maz was clearly hoping for more of a reaction from Rey, but she was starting to realise she wasn’t going to get one. She gave Rey a suspicious look and her eyes narrowed. She clambered at her lenses, focussing them further on Rey and leaning forward until she was almost standing in her chair. She tapped her lip thoughtfully as she gazed at Rey. Then, a mischievous smile lit up her face.

“Ah-hah!”

“What is it?” Rey asked apprehensively.

Maz retreated back into her chair. “Hmm, it is not for me to say. You you will know in good time, my child.” She slumped back smugly.

“What are you saying—”

“No!” Maz called out, almost beaming. She jumped off her chair with renewed vigour. “Come with me, we need to sort out your safe passage home. I’m going to forward a message through to the base, to let them know you’re on your way.”

“You have something I can fly?” Rey asked in disbelief, trotting after Maz as she headed towards the stairs.

“Yes – but I’m afraid it will be much less quality a vehicle than perhaps what you’re used to. I’m a collector of many things, but unfortunately modern transports, I am not.”

“Junkyard ships are my speciality. I only need something that flies.”

“Oh … I’ve got something that flies alright.” Maz laughed. “I think it’ll do.”

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