The End Is Where We Begin

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Summary

When Rey is found by Maz Kanata on Jakku and brought to Luke Skywalker's Praxeum at age 5, she realizes several things. Ben Solo is her favorite person in the Galaxy, The Force works in mysterious ways, She hates meditation, and no matter what she does - Ben will leave her eventually. As they age and fall in love, Snoke's whisperings grow louder in Ben's mind - until he is given his final task by the Supreme Leader - kill that which he loves the most. What happens when he fails in his task - and how will the Galaxy handle the aftermath?

Notes
Heathyr here. When I came to Kirsten – who writes the most BEAUTIFUL descriptions I have ever read – with the idea of co-writing a canonverse fic together, I never dreamed it would be so much fun, or that I would fall in love with a plot quite so much. I am sure you all will be able to discern which one of us is writing which chapter, because we do have different writing styles – yet I think we bring them together well. Kirsten is my Force Bonded Twin, and one of my favorite people in the Universe - and I value her friendship immensely. She has a true gift and is an asset to our fandom!
I hope you all enjoy our epic tale of Love, Loss and Bendemption.

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Kirsten here. When it comes to the Reylo fandom, I'm a baby. I didn't even know that the pairing of Kylo Ren and Rey had a name. I jumped in head first into the most amazing world and have met some really amazing people. I didn't know what to expect when I joined the the Writing Den. I thought that, sure, there'd be some great writing resources, read some cool fics, and maybe meet some more great people. I got that, and so much more. In the den (in House Thirst Order/Swolo, especially), I found a sisterhood like no other and made friends I am positive that I will have for life...one of those is my Force-bonded twin, Heathyr. When she approached me about combining our love of the canonverse (we are known as the Walking Wookieepedia) and our gifts of angst, it was an opprotunity I couldn't pass up. I already love this story more than I can possibly say, and writing it with you, Heathyr, makes me love it even more. SO. Without any further ado, grab your wine, grab your tissues...it's sure to be a bumpy ride on the way to that HEA...

xoxo KB

See the end of the work for more notes.
“I don’t want to go to Uncle Luke’s Praxeum, Mom!” Ben Solo stood in front of his mother, a scowl on his face and his too long hair hanging over his eyes. “Dad promised me we’d go to Theron for the Five Sabers next month!”
“I am not discussing this any further with you, Ben. You’re going to Uncle Luke’s Praxeum so he can help you control your urges and the power you have inside you. I can’t help you. Dad can’t help you. Uncle Luke is the only one who can!” Leia stood in front of her only child in their home on Chandrila, her arms crossed over her chest. She had known Ben would be upset at their news. Han was supposed to be home when she told Ben - but he was delayed on Ord Mantell for some reason - which left her alone to deliver the news to their angry nine-year-old son.

Ben’s eyes turned dark as he looked up at her. “You just want to get rid of me because I embarrass you in front of your Senator friends! I… I promise I won’t break anything else, Mom, please! I don’t want to go!”

“I’m sorry, Ben. Now, you need to get ready for bed. I have to take a phone call for the Senate.” Leia turned to head into her office, leaving Ben to start towards his bedroom, fury racing through his veins as the voice in his head whispered to him.

Shipping you off like trash. Don’t want you. You’re not important.

Ben slammed the door to his bedroom as hard as he could, ignoring the crashes from the other room as he let the Force flow through him, sending it outwards in waves.

If you want trash, I’ll give you trash! He thought, smiling through his tears as the voice continued to whisper in his ear.

Yes, my boy. Yes. I sense the power in you. You are destined to do great things, Ben Solo. You need a teacher.

Satisfied he had made his point, Ben fell onto his bed, clutching his datapad as he watched the latest podrace standings. His favorite racer was in the lead, and was favored to win the Five Sabers - and Ben was determined he was going to be there to see it one way or another.

As the Millenium Falcon dropped out of hyperspace over Yavin IV with a shudder, Ben found himself once again pleading, this time with his father.

“Daddy, please? You promised me we would go to Theron for the Five Sabers! How in the Force
are we going to do that if I am at some stupid school I don’t even want to be at? YOU PROMISED!” Ben stomped his feet, his eyes narrowing as his Uncle Chewbacca gave a low growl from the co-pilot’s seat.

Careful boy. Be nice to friend.

Ben turned his eyes to his Uncle, muttering “Shut up, furball,” before retreating back into his sleeping quarters and settling onto his bunk once more as he heard Chewbacca chuckle under his breath.

It’s not fair, Ben thought to himself. Mom couldn’t even come with us because she’s too busy. Too busy for me, her only child. All because she’s afraid and embarrassed by me. Dad is scared of me. That’s why he’s letting Mom do this. I’ll be with Uncle Luke and they’ll just forget about me.

Ben sighed and tried to concentrate on the podrace from the night before on his datapad, but the voice in his head was loud tonight. He had tried to explain to his parents what he heard and felt inside - but they never understood. They would never understand him - but the whispers did.

You want to feel like you belong. Wanted. I can help you become great, my child. I can help you make sense of things.

There it was again - the delicate brush of someone against his Force signature, the tiny voice in his brain, telling him everything he wished his parents could. To them, he was a nuisance. He never did anything right, and he always said the wrong thing to the wrong people, or asked for his mother’s attention at the wrong time.

The only time Ben felt right was when his Dad let him pilot the Falcon, or when he was writing his letters. Otherwise, he felt out of place, like an intruder no matter where he was.

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“No, Ben. You need to clear your thoughts! You, of all the students here, should be able to do that!” His Uncle Luke stood over him, and Ben could hear the other Padawans snickering behind him. Ben had thought his own Uncle might have gone easy on him, but in fact, Uncle Luke was quite the opposite. He was harder on Ben than any other student at the Praxeum.
“Yes, Master Skywalker,” Ben said, closing his eyes and trying the meditation exercises they had been taught to find their balance within the Force. All he found was unrest, though, the anger and darkness resting just underneath the surface. With a loud huff, Ben stood and stalked towards the door. “Kriff this, Uncle.”

_He doesn’t care, either. He only tolerates you, my child. He’s scared of your power, scared you will be stronger in the Force than he will ever be._

Ben wished the voice in his head would stop talking, sometimes. It made it hard for him to sleep, hard for him to focus during meditation. It was always whispering to him, telling him things. He tried to tell his Mom and Dad, but they didn’t listen. They _never_ listened.

Maybe someday he would find someone who would listen to him.

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**One Year Later**

The Ghtroc 720 slid out of hyperspace with a small shudder, the blue pearl of the planet Jakku shimmering before the large view screen. Maz Kanata watched as the *Stranger’s Fortune* grew closer to the desert planet before punching in the entry coordinates to bring her to the docks at Niima Outpost. She always hated dealing with the blobfish that was Unkar Plutt, but she had some goods he had requested. He, in turn, had promised her some kesium gas, as well as some bezorite and osmiridium for payment.

She hadn’t been to Jakku in at least fifty years - with good reason. There was nothing in Jakku for anyone. Most of the people who lived there didn’t even want to be there.

Something had drawn her to the desert planet in the Outer Rim, though, an awakening in the Force that she felt compelled to follow. She didn’t know who waited for her on Jakku - but she knew they were new to the ways of the Force, and that they would need her help.

It didn’t take her long to figure out who the Force was leading her to.
Rey didn’t remember her family anymore. They had left her behind, and every day their faces grew fuzzier and fuzzier until now she couldn’t remember them, or their voices. All she had was sand and this strange rumbling in her belly every day.

Unkar Plutt was not a nice man, and he made Rey climb into tiny spaces for old, rusty metal parts from huge starships that made her eyes go wide with wonder. It was hard to believe that people flew in them, all over the Galaxy, and Rey’s imagination always went crazy thinking about just what the rest of the Galaxy looked like.

She’d see it someday - maybe. After her family came back for her. They would all get into a shiny durasteel starship and leave Jakku and its sand far behind them as they flew to parts unknown.

Rey had come back to the Outpost, a smile on her face as she imagined all the portions Plutt would give her for retrieving the parts he had asked for. Instead, he narrowed his eyes while he considered his offer to her. “I will give you… one-quarter portion, Little Scavenger."

Rey’s smile faded, her stomach growling loudly as she stood on tiptoe, her little hand barely reaching the package containing her only meal for the day. She would have to find Mashra to beg her for scraps - even though Rey didn’t like to ask for help. Everyone on Jakku was struggling already.

From behind her, Rey heard a kindly voice ring out. “Unkar Plutt! Surely this poor, dear child deserves more than a quarter-portion for her hard work!”

A short woman stepped forward, parting the line of people waiting for their turn to barter their parts for portions. She had large, kind eyes, a pair of strange glasses set upon them, and Rey could hear the many bracelets on her wrist jingle as she approached Plutt’s stand.

“Maz Kanata! I’ve been expecting you!” The Crolute towered over Maz, yet she showed no hesitation in approaching him.

“Unkar Plutt! I assume that you needed something desperately, since you came to me. Let’s get to it!” Maz rounded the small stand, looking over at Rey and leaning down to whisper into her ear, “Stay put, dear child. I’d like to speak to you after I deal with the blobfish.” She put a cool palm against Rey’s cheek, smiling at her like no one ever had before.
Maz had dealt with many an unsavory being before, but Unkar Plutt always left her feeling dirty. As they haggled over prices and goods - even though they had already made a deal before Maz made the trip to Jakku, Maz reached out with the Force, feeling it flowing through everyone - especially the young girl she had spoken to earlier.

The child waited for her, as she had asked, her stomach almost as empty as her eyes would become if she stayed on this planet.

“The girl, the waif that you are trying to starve? She is coming with me. I need an extra hand at my Castle,” Maz said, standing at her full height. “If you ever want to do business with me or my associates again, Plutt, you will not fight me on this. Besides, you owe me a favor after that business on Rodia… or shall I go talk to them?”

Unkar Plutt gulped visibly, knowing better than to argue with the Pirate Queen. No one wanted a black mark from Maz Kanata against them - especially not if they ever needed anything acquired quietly.

“Fine. Take the girl - and consider my slate clean of favors owed to you.”

Maz smiled and nodded. “Have your boys come and gather your goods and load mine on the Fortune. I shall gather the girl and her things.”

Turning, Maz made her way back to where Rey waited, smiling at the girl as she approached. “Dear child, let’s talk, shall we? Would you like something to eat? I have many different things I think you would like onboard the Stranger’s Fortune, which is my ship. Follow me.”

Rey watched as the strange woman turned and headed to the small spaceport, following after a moment’s thought. She hadn’t had a decent meal in months, and her mouth was already watering at the thought. The woman - while strange looking - seemed kind enough, and Rey was a good judge of character, even at her young age.

As they stepped onto the Stranger’s Fortune, Rey’s eyes widened as she took in the light freighter. She wanted to wander through it, touching the durasteel walls and marvelling at its design, but before she could, Maz beckoned to her through a door leading to a corridor. “Come, child. I am sure you are near starving.”
Rey nodded, huge eyes trying not to stare at everything as she followed Maz to a small galley, watching as the woman retrieved food from the conservator, filling several plates full of various foods. Maz turned towards Rey, lifting her chin towards the table and chairs that sat in the galley. “Sit, child. Sit. Eat.”

Rey only waited a moment after Maz put the plates in front of her, grubby, too thin fingers shoveling the food into her mouth as quickly as she could chew and swallow. Maz set a tall glass of cold water in front of her, which Rey devoured in what seemed like one swallow, and she was amazed when Maz filled it again from a pitcher in the conservator.

Maz simply watched from a chair opposite Rey’s, knowing it was probably the first decent meal she had had in months - maybe even years. Plutt hadn’t told her much about the girl’s parents, just that a man had brought her to him, selling her for a pittance so he could disappear in a small freighter mere minutes later for parts unknown.

Finally, Rey was sated, her hazel eyes coming up to meet Maz’s as she wiped her mouth with the back of her hand. “Thank you for the food, Miss…” Rey said quietly as she started to slide out of her chair. “I should head back to the Outpost, though. Mister Plutt needs me to fetch more parts for him.”

“About that… dear child… what if I told you there was a place on a planet called Yavin IV where you would always have food, and also be taught how to use those special powers inside of you? I know you haven’t told anyone yet, and that they scare you, don’t they? You can tell me, I feel it too. I am no Jedi, child, but I know the Force.” Maz closed her eyes, a smile coming to her lips as she felt the ebb and flow of the Force moving through her. “It moves through and surrounds every living thing. Close your eyes… feel it. The light… it’s always been there, it will guide you. You simply need a teacher, and I know just the man.” Maz opened her eyes, looking at Rey, who had her eyes closed now as she had asked.

Rey had closed her eyes as Maz had instructed, and the thrumming that she had felt inside her became louder - like it always did when she concentrated really hard trying to wiggle into a tight space for a part, or like the time one of Plutt’s boys had dunked her in the happabore trough and made her mad. She saw the light Maz was talking about, like the sun filling every crack and hole everywhere, almost blinding her.

Opening her eyes, Rey took another step towards the exit. As enticing as the offer was, she had gotten good at waiting for her family to come back and get her - and they would, someday. She just had to be patient. “I, um, I can’t, Miss. I appreciate the offer, but I can’t leave. My family.” Rey straightened up now, her chin jutting out proudly as she exclaimed, “They’ll be back for me, and if I left they would never be able to find me.”
Maz nodded sadly for a moment, already anticipating the child’s thought process. Moving towards her, Maz held out her hand, her bracelets jangling cheerily together in the silence of the ship. “Dear child, I see your eyes; you already know the truth. Whomever you're waiting for here on Jakku, they're never coming back. The belonging you seek, dear Rey, is not behind you, it is ahead. Come with me to Master Skywalker’s Praxeum. You just may find what you are longing for there.”

“But, Miss-” Rey started to protest, before stopping as Maz cut her off.

“Maz. My name is Maz.”

“Maz… what if you’re not right? What if they do come back for me?” Rey’s eyes were scared, yet Maz saw excitement and curiosity within their depths, as well.

“I believe you have a friend who has been looking out for you? An Aqualish named Mashra?” Maz watched as Rey nodded in agreement before continuing. “I have left word with her. If your family comes back, she will let them know where you are, Rey. Only them. No one else shall ever know on Jakku but her.”

Rey took a moment to think before nodding. “Then, I would like to go with you, Miss Maz. Is… is this Master Skywalker nice?”

“He is, and very strong in the Force. He will teach you to use your abilities in the very best way. Now, do you need to gather any of your things, or shall we just leave, and perhaps buy you some new things along the way?”

“I…” Rey thought about it. She normally didn’t ask anyone for help, but in this case, she really didn’t have anything but the clothes she was wearing, along with an extra set that was even more threadbare than the ones she had on. “I could pay you back someday for whatever you buy for me. The clothes I have are my best ones - the other clothes the lady who runs the pleasure tent gave me, but they have holes in them.”

Maz smiled. “We have a deal then, dear. Now, let’s get you settled in, hmm? Unkar’s boys should be here any minute, and once they are done, we can leave.”

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Rey had never heard a sound like the one currently reaching her ears as she lay huddled in her bunk, her tiny hands clenched over her ears to try and keep the sound from reaching her eardrums. Light flashed through the tiny window in her room, and she felt a small tear trail down her face as she lay frozen, terrified that something horrible was coming to get them all.

As the next rumble reached her ears, Rey gave a small sob, tearing her covers off and sliding out of bed. As she ran out of the room she shared with several other Padawans, she had no idea where she was going as she ran blindly for somewhere where she might find someone to help her. Why wasn’t anyone else awake and preparing to fight?

She had only been at the Praxeum a week, celebrating her sixth birthday just three days ago, and as Rey tried to find her way through the hallways to some common area that looked familiar, she didn’t notice the lanky form that was approaching from an adjacent hallway until it was too late, her small, bony frame colliding with a taller, solid one.

Both of them started to tumble, landing in a heap on the cold stone floor. A pair of brown eyes found hers in the dark, and the boy stood, brushing himself off as he extended a hand towards her, a small smile coming to his lips.

“Don’t like storms? I can sit with you if you want. I’m Ben.”

Rey gave him a shy smile as she let him help her to her feet. “I’m Rey.”

“The girl I’ve heard so much about!” Ben grinned at her. “Wanna sneak into the kitchen for some aircakes? I know where Uncle Luke - I mean - Master Skywalker, keeps his secret stash!” Ben grabbed her hand. Rey felt the warmth from it seep into her, and all she could do was nod wordlessly and follow as he led her to the kitchen.

They sat in a storeroom, perched on chairs that were far too tall for Rey. She bounced her legs back and forth as she shoved aircakes in her mouth, and Ben was surprised she didn’t choke on them.

“These is so good,” Rey replied with a mouth full, and Ben laughed.

“Those are Corellian Air Cakes. That’s where my Dad is from!” Ben puffed out his chest proudly. “I want to be a pilot, just like him, and I will be someday, even if I am stuck here in this stupid Academy!” A flash of lightning lit up the room, followed by a loud crack of thunder, and Rey jumped in her seat, visibly shaking and her skin paling.
“W-What is that noise? Is… is it a monster?” She whispered quietly, looking at the window like a Rancor was about to come crashing through it.

Ben let out a giggle as another flash of lightning lit the room. “No, it’s a thunderstorm! We have them lots here - haven’t you ever seen one?”

“N-no. We… I’ve never seen it rain before. It doesn’t rain on Jakku.” Rey was still shaking, and Ben leaned over, his arm going around her shoulders.

His face screwed up adorably as he thought for a moment, trying to remember the star maps he was fond of memorizing. “That’s… in the Western Reaches in the Outer Rim, right? It doesn’t rain?” Ben looked at Rey, who just shrugged her shoulders.

“I don’t know where it is. All that’s there is sand, and it never rains. We have these sandstorms, though, the X’us’R’iia, but that sounds different than it does here. Here it sounds like a monster, and there it sounded like R’iia shrieking.” Rey explained to Ben, shifting a little closer to him.

“Well, I’ll protect you. I won’t let anything happen to you, Rey. I promise.” Ben nodded his head, his shaggy curls flopping into his eyes with the movement. “Would you be my friend? A lot of the kids here, they don’t like me. I get mad sometimes, but it’s different around you. I can tell that already. I don’t feel mad.”

Rey smiled at him, nodding her head vigorously. “I’ve never had a friend before, but I’ll be your friend, Ben! We can keep all the bad stuff away from each other. I promise.”

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Ben Solo was her best friend, and if anyone even looked at him funny, Rey would glare at them until they stopped. Sure, he had big ears and a long nose, and he got angry easy with everyone else - but he was different when he was with her.

Today was a bad day. Jandry Tull had laughed at Ben, picking on his ears, and when Rey had stalked over to her, she had laughed even harder, calling Rey his “little girlfriend.” Her laughter had faded into tears, though, when Rey had stomped her foot, using a touch of the Force to make it a little more painful.
“You take that back! Ben is my best friend, and he is the nicest person here! I like his ears, you mooofmilkier!” Rey’s small voice had risen, catching the attention of Master Skywalker, who had quickly intervened and separated the pair.

“Rey,” Luke said, kneeling down so he could look her in the eyes, “I know Jandry was being mean, but what have I taught you about using the Force so far?”

“Only use it for defense, never to attack. But, Master Luke, I was using it in defense! I was defending Ben!” Rey said, chewing on her bottom lip thoughtfully. “She said Ben had big ears, and that I was his girlfriend - but I’m not! I’m his best friend, and I like his ears! I had to defend him - we promised each other we always would!”

Luke let out a chuckle, shaking his head softly. “Sometimes, the Padawan has lessons to teach the Master. Rey, how do you feel when you are around Ben?” Luke smiled at her, kindly. She was one of his brightest students, and he could feel she would be strong in the Force. He also had felt something most interesting when she and Ben were together, like the two of them shared more than just friendship. He had never seen anything quite like it.

“Um… I feel like I belong with him. He’s my family! And I can always tell where he is, even when I don’t see him! Like right now, he’s in his room, and he’s concentrating on something! Am I in trouble, Master? Is Ben in trouble?” Rey’s eyes widened again, and Luke could sense fear within her.

“No, no. Neither of you are in trouble. However; using the Force as you did earlier will never serve you well, Rey. Do you understand that? I know you feel the light inside you, and the Force should never be used to harm another. Only for defense. Alright?” Luke stood, smiling down at Rey.

Rey straightened up, nodding at her Master. “Yes, Master Skywalker.”

“Good. Now, it’s almost meal time. Go get Ben, and I shall see you in the dining hall.” Luke watched as Rey ran off happily in the direction of his nephew’s room, a small smile on his lips as he thought about his observations of the two of them when they were together.

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“Rey… Rey, wake up!”
Rey groaned and opened one eye before lifting her head from her pillow. “Ben… I was sleeping!” She had never been able to sleep well on Jakku, but here at the Praxeum, sleeping was her second or third favorite thing - behind learning and food… and Ben Solo. Because Ben Solo was her absolute favorite thing in the Galaxy.

“C’mon. I found something cool! We gotta go before Uncle Luke does his rounds!”

Ben tugged at her hand insistently, and Rey let out a little groan again as she threw her legs out of bed and sat up. “I wanna sleep, Ben. This better be cool.”

“It is! Come on!”

Rey took Ben’s hand and followed him, just happy to see a smile on his face. She could tell he was happy and excited to be showing her something - like when he would show her the podraces on his datapad and talk about his favorites. As they walked, Ben kept her hand in his, reaching into his pocket and withdrawing an aircake, which he handed to her as they padded silently through the hallways of the Praxeum together.

Even though it was the middle of the night, the jungle surrounding the old Jedi Temple was vibrant and alive, the calls of birds and shuffling of different creatures through the thick foliage filling the thick night air.

Rey shoved the aircake in her mouth, and as they slipped further into the jungle, she asked Ben, “Where are we going?”

“Remember that day last week when you couldn’t find me because I kinda shut you out of the Force around me?” Ben didn’t know how else to explain it - but he and Rey could always know how the other was feeling, and where they were at any point in time.

Rey nodded, wide-eyed as she looked at Ben. She had been scared, because he had been so mad at Master Luke, and then he just disappeared. “Yeah. I was scared.”

Ben squeezed her hand gently. “Sorry. But, I ran into the jungle, and I found the coolest place ever, and I am only gonna show you because you’re my best friend, but I was thinking it could be like, our place. Only for the two of us to use.”
“Ohhhhhhhhh,” Rey said, drawing out the word. “It’ll be our best friend spot. Our secret spot.” She nodded, squeezing Ben’s hand in excitement now.

They walked a while more, and then Ben stopped, grinning at Rey. “Close your eyes. I want this to be a surprise!”

Rey didn’t hesitate, squeezing her eyes shut tightly and letting Ben guide her. After a few moments more, she heard him say softly, “You can open them now!”

Rey opened her eyes, her mouth an ‘o’ after letting a small gasp out at the sight before her. “Ben… they’re glowing! What are these?”

“I had to look them up on my datapad, but they are bioluminescent orchids. They only grow here on Yavin IV. Come on, let’s sit in the clearing! I brought more food!”

As they settled into the small clearing, sitting amongst the colorful glowing flowers, Rey didn’t think she’d ever been happier. She had a best friend and a home. She belonged somewhere now, and if her family came back to Jakku to find her, Mashra would tell them where she was. She would introduce them to Ben, and she was certain they would love him as much as she did!

“Lay on your back, and you can see all the stars! It’s so cool!” Ben exclaimed as he did just that, his already tall frame laying flat on his back as his dark eyes stared upwards. As he started pointing out constellations and heavenly bodies to her, Rey listened to him with rapt attention, soaking everything in. Ben was the smartest person she had ever met, and sometimes she even thought he was smarter than Master Luke.

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It was raining again, the lightning illuminating her room with every flash. Rey wasn’t scared of thunderstorms anymore. In fact, she had grown to love them - and the feel of raindrops on her face was still fascinating to her. As she woke from a peaceful sleep, though, she could feel a disturbance from within the Praxeum - coming from Ben. He was disturbed, and Rey could feel terror coming off his Force signature. With hurried steps, she left her room, gliding across the tiled floors until she stood before Ben’s door. With a simple wave of her hand, the door hissed open, and Rey stepped through silently, her eyes going to Ben’s bed. He was thrashing from side to side, sobbing and moaning. No nonono… stay out of my head. No… she does like me!
Rey quickly crossed the room, sliding under the covers and throwing her much smaller arms around Ben as she cuddled up to his back. He quieted, his breathing evening out finally, until they both fell asleep, neither one of them dreaming for the rest of the night.

A week later, Rey came back to her room after dinner to find a single petal from *their* orchids resting upon her pillow, with a piece of flimsiplast propped up in front of it. *To Ch’eo k’tusah. My flower. My best friend forever. Love, Ben.*
“Concentrate. Clear your mind. Reach out with your feelings.”

“I’m trying, Master.”

“I’m not so sure you are. Try again. Focus.”

Rey cast Master Skywalker a sidelong look that he met with a silent lift of his greying eyebrow, daring her to put a single toe out of line before turning away to slowly pace the confines of the small, stone chamber. She cheekily stuck her tongue out at her master’s back, to which he answered a dry, “I saw that.”

Another serving of this hot dish of angst we have lovingly prepared for you! This time, it's been seven years since those early days at the Praxeum.

We are loving all the love and feedback so far, thank you so much for all the kind words!

xoxo kb & hs
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small, stone chamber. She cheekily stuck her tongue out at her master’s back, to which he answered a dry, “I saw that.”

In the seven years since she’d been whisked away from the barren wasteland of Jakku by her second favorite person in the galaxy, Rey had been...a handful for her Jedi Master. Headstrong and rambunctious, Rey knew that she exhausted Master Luke some days, but was still fairly sure that she was his favorite student.

She knew that there was something inside of her, something that she didn’t truly understand, but was certain that it had helped to keep her alive all those years alone in the desert...surviving when no other five-year-old had any right to.

Coming to the Praxeum had been an adjustment for the practically feral little girl, near starved and easily spooked...one that became a little easier once she met the one person that made the ancient stone temple feel like home.

Rey took a deep, cleansing breath and centered herself in the warm tapestry of energy that the Force wove around her. Master Skywalker was right...mostly. She just found it difficult to focus through five mandatory meditation sessions when there were so many other things she wanted to do...and far more interesting lessons to take.

“I apologize that you don’t find my teachings very exciting, young padawan, but you’ll be thankful you had control over your emotions when you are older.”

“I don’t mind being emotional,” Rey muttered, lifting open a single eye to meet his cool, blue gaze before cramming it closed again with a sigh, “Fine. I’ll try again.”


“...the three core principles of the Jedi Order...I know...”

“If you know...then find what I have hidden.”

“You didn’t say there was going to be a test.”

“...more like a pop quiz. You, of all people, should be able to achieve this. You’re more powerful than you know, Rey. Now. Focus. Breathe.”

Rey squared her narrow shoulders, sat up straight, and placed her fingertips to the stone floor to try and better connect with the life force of the jungle moon as Master Skywalker pressed on.

“I have hidden something valuable in the jungle. It speaks to the Force, but is well hidden by the life in the jungle. Find it so that you may move on to the next lesson. Do not get distracted.”

“Yes Master,” Rey mumbled, reluctantly bringing her focus to the forefront of her mind so that she could be finished with her lessons for the day and move on to other, more interesting things.

The web of life that made up the endless tapestry of the Force furled out around her like a gleaming, glittering blanket. The jungle surrounding the ancient Massassi temple was teeming with life, and each piece of it had its own signature that Rey needed to sort through with her mind.

The meditation exercises had increased in difficulty over the years as Master Skywalker began to pay closer attention to Rey alone over other Padawan learners. When she was still a small child and new at the Praxeum, she had easily mastered tasks that were expected of students much older than her.
Rey had been eager to learn, eager to learn about this thing inside of her that had always been there. She wholeheartedly absorbed everything Master Skywalker had to teach her, excited to learn more...most of the time.

As she grew older, Rey found herself more easily distracted by the thoughts that buzzed around in her mind while she tried, and often failed, during her daily meditations. Because of this, Luke began to require more of her, when all she wanted to do was test other limits in different ways.

With her senses stretched out far past where she had ever gone, Rey furrowed her brow as she sorted through every Force signature in the surrounding jungle. She mentally moved around a climbing fern, touched up against a Massassi tree, and peeked past a collection of Glendale fungi, until she felt a pulsating energy flicker out in a steady wave.

She stretched her feelings out further, pushing harder as she reached out with the tips of her fingers to brush a wall of ferns out of the way, when a flicker of pain and blistering anger ricocheted through her mind’s eye.

Not one to be deterred, Rey stubbornly pressed on, mentally wading through the web of life that was woven around her, pushing ahead towards the energy source she had discovered. She stretched out again, reaching for that force again...when an image of his face flickered behind her eyes. She couldn’t help the smile that pulled at her lips at the sight of her favorite person in the galaxy, but suffered the consequences right away when the unique signature disappeared from her sight.

“Kriffing hell!” Rey exclaimed, slapping the stone floor beneath her in frustration.

“Hey, sacred temple, watch the language, young lady!”

“Sorry Master…” Rey mumbled sheepishly, “It was right there...and then it wasn’t. It just made me so mad.”

“That’s because you were distracted...just like I told you to be careful of,” her master held out an aging hand and pulled her up from her spot on the floor, “Be mindful of your emotions. Don’t be quick to anger.”

“I’ll try, Master…”

The Jedi master scrubbed his graying beard with his finger, looking down at Rey with a fond glint in his blue eyes.

“Go on, get out of here...be prepared that I will ask more of you tomorrow!”

Before he even finished his sentence, Rey was bounding out the door. She careened around a corner, nearly colliding with the stone wall and a wandering T3-series droid before hurtling herself up a series of stairs.

Further and further up she went, climbing past the dormitory levels, across ferrocrete reinforced floors and power converters as she climbed her way higher. Rey could feel the lifeforms inside the Great Temple fade further into the back of her mind as she climbed a narrow-runged ladder to a solitary, durasteel door on a stone platform...all except for one.

With her small hands, Rey pressed against the door, cringing at the sound of metal against stone before stepping out into the balmy, Yavin 4 sunshine. It was late in the day, and the great, red orb of Yavin Prime began to rise up on the distant horizon.

The gas giant cast a warm titian glow through the sky, blanketing the Praxeum in an otherworldly,
orange light. Rey closed her eyes against the wind that skirted around the corner of the temple where she emerged, letting it kiss her freckled skin and whip the stray strands of her chestnut hair around her face. At this height, Rey could see for miles, and the ancient jungle stretched out even further. The sounds of the wildlife filtered around her, carried up on the wings wind to dance around the temple where the legendary Massassi warriors had lived over five millennia before.

“Are you just going to stand there, or are we going to get to work?” a deep voice from behind her muttered dryly.

Rey whipped around to face it, and found Ben Solo leaning casually against the stone wall with one foot crossed over the other while he absentmindedly rolled something between his long fingers. Her heart skipped an excited beat as a beamingly wide smile broke out across her face.

“Are you kidding? I have been looking forward to this all day. Master Skywalker was trying to push me and I couldn’t concentrate...you kept getting in the way?”

“Me? What did I do?” the teenaged boy drawled with a grimace.

“Nothing...you were...I don’t know...you show up from time to time.”

“If it would help...I could put up a wall…”

“No, don’t do that...I couldn’t bear it if you weren’t there at all. I’ll keep trying...and I’ll get better at controlling it,” she murmured, her stomach twisting at the thought of not being able to feel him at all, even if it was by accident during a meditation session.

“That’s the spirit, kid. Speaking of, are you ready to work?” Ben pushed off from the stone wall with his shoulder and strode past her, giving a playful tug of her Padawan braid that stuck out below the trio of buns that dotted the back of her head.

Rey batted at his hand and reached up on her tiptoes to try and give him a playful shove as he sauntered past her. Ben turned and gave her the smallest smirk before tossing whatever object he’d been rolling around in his hands down to her.

“Normally I’d say finders keepers, but this feels more like you than it does me.”

Rey looked down at the small trinket he had given to her and instantly recognized the pulsating energy signature it emitted. She ran her thumb over the cool, crystal shard and looked up at him with a quizzical gaze.

“This was what Master Skywalker wanted me to find...how did you?”

Ben shrugged, “Kyber crystals are a funny thing...they normally call out to a Jedi’s heart that it’s naturally matched with...but I felt it call to me too, so I decided to beat you to the punch, just for fun.”

Rey curled her fingers around the stone and held it to her heart with a smile, “Does that mean that it thinks our hearts are connected or something?”

Ben scoffed, stepping away to walk along the narrow ledge to a wide-open platform on the pyramid.

“Hell if I know. If Luke said it’s yours, then it’s yours, kid. Now, come on, let’s get going before we lose the light.”

Rey trailed after him, her buns bouncing as she bounced on the balls of her feet, still impossibly
child-like in her movements, no matter how badly she wished she could act more grown up, like Ben. 
It frustrated her that he was growing up and moving on without her, and her heart ached when she thought of the day that he’d become a Jedi Knight and fly away from this place...leaving her behind like everyone else had.

She rounded the corner and resisted the urge to duck when Ben pulled something from his belt and tossed it to her. Catching it in her hand, Rey ignited the practice saber and lifted it over her head to parry the strike Ben brought down upon her.

“Good, you’ve improved since last week,” Ben grinned, swinging his blue blade around to strike again. Rey parried strike after strike, pushing forward against her opponent with a glint in her eye.

Feeling confident, Rey lifted the yellow blade over her head and swung it down hard. Rey expected to feel the crackling resistance of Ben’s saber against hers, but instead felt a tug around her ankle that swiped her feet out from under her.

“You’re gonna regret that, you mooamilker!” Rey groaned through the ache in her pride. Ben circled over the top of her, grinning down at her with a proffered hand.

“And to think, you didn’t want me to go easy on you anymore. If you want to learn to fight like us, you’re going to need to step up your game,” he flexed his long fingers and stretched his grip out to her expectantly. Rey slapped it out of the way with a pout and pulled herself to her feet on her own, giving the practice blade a turn with a flip of her wrist. Ben’s grin grew wider when Rey readied herself like a coiled snake - ready to strike at a moment’s notice, “I see you’ve been practicing the reverse grip I taught you. That’s good. Let’s see how well you do in action, kid.”

With a twirl of his own blue blade, Ben surged forward and was met with a furious defiance that no one would expect from a twelve-year-old girl.

Rey spun on her heel and brought her lightsaber down with a roar, pulling a delighted chuckle from Ben as he met her with a parry before swinging into a counterattack. This only spurred her on, and she pressed forward with attack after attack, speaking to him between each forceful swing.

“Stop...calling...me...kid!”

Like he had grown bored of catering to a little girl, Ben’s face melted away, and he pressed forward with an elegant swirl of his blade.

“You are a kid, Rey.”

“Am not! Take that back!” Rey lunged forward, but was met immediately by his counterattack.

“You are. You’re a kid. You may not look like a little girl, any more, but you act like one…”

Rey let out a yell and swung the blade down from high over her head, sure that she would singe his sleeve with the practice saber. One moment, she was rushing forward, eyes on Ben, eager to gain the advantage over him, and the next, her feet flipped out from under her. To her horror, her foot that should have found the firm stone of the ancient temple slipped over the edge, and with hazel eyes wide, Rey was sure she was going to fall.

Pressing her palms out towards her feet without thinking, Rey let her instinct take over as she trusted the connection she had to the Force hold her steady over the ledge. Her heart thumped wildly in her chest as a frisson of adrenaline shot through her veins like a blaster bolt. All of a sudden, it felt like all of her senses were alive more than ever before, and at the forefront of it all -
was Ben’s fear.

He lunged forward as quickly as she fell, his dark eyes wide as he reached for her. The tips of his fingers brushed hers for a moment before she came to a slow halt with only the sky between her and the vine covered jungle floor that surrounded the Great Temple.

Their eyes met for a split second, and Rey’s ears were honed in on the rapid sound of his breath, the beat of his frantic heart, and something else...a whisper of darkness that ate at his fear and threatened to turn it into something else entirely.

In a flurry of gangly limbs, Rey felt Ben’s long fingers clamp around her wrist and tug her to his narrow chest. She let herself stay there for a moment until his fear shrank away, slinking back into the darkness from whence it came before reaching out to pat his arm.

“I’m okay...I just slipped is all.”

Ben released her from the vice-like grip where they had landed on the stone and scooted backwards to press his back to the wall. Rey settled in beside him and tucked her knees to her chest. Balancing her elbows on top of them, she anxiously twirled a piece of baby hair around her finger.

They sat quietly for a moment, looking out over the sprawling jungle laid out before them with the spare pyramid peeking out from the emerald canopy. Rey fiddled with the hem of her sand-color obi, running the tip of her finger over the rough fabric. Ben pushed against her shoulder with his own, prompting her to look up from her boot to see a Corellian air cake held out in front of her.

With a sigh, Rey accepted the sweet and sheepishly took a bite, chewing slowly as the silence stretched between them. A lot of things had changed over the last seven years, but this one remained the same, a tradition that stuck around from the very first night when the sound of a thunderstorm drew her fearfully from her bed...and into Ben. Their friendship had been sealed that day and forevermore when they promised that they’d be there and defend the other...always.

“I would have caught you, you know,” Ben murmured from beside her. Rey picked at the aircake in her hands and put the bits of crumb into her mouth, not quite as hungry as she usually was while the heady dose of adrenaline still lingered.

“I know,” she whispered.

“I always will.”

“What?”


“No matter what,” Rey breathed into the wind, lifting her eyes to the fading light on the horizon. 

“I’m...I’m proud of you, though.”

“For catching myself?”

“Yeah.”

“Thanks, I guess. It needed to happen sometime. You won’t be here forever, Ben. I’m going to have to learn to take care of myself again when I’m alone.”
“...but you’re not alone, Ch’eo k’kusah.”

“Not yet, but I will be. You’ll leave. It’s only a matter of time before you’re taken from me and we won’t be together anymore. I know I’m just a little girl, but I know how these things work. You’ll leave and you’ll change,” Rey stuffed the rest of the aircake in her mouth before continuing with a full mouth, “Your accent needs work, the Chiss weren’t as nasal as you are, Solo.”

“Yeah, and you could use some practice with your handwriting. Maybe that’s what tomorrow’s lesson will be,” Ben retorted with a smile, grateful that their conversation had resumed its normal, playful tone.

“It better not be,” Rey reached up and punched his shoulder, darting to her feet to dash down the narrowing stone ledge back towards the door with a girlish giggle.

Ben wasn’t far behind her as she bolted through the door and down the stone stairway. He was taller, with a longer stride that made it easy for him to catch up quickly. Rey was a slippery little thing, though, ducking out of his reach with a giggle to bound down half a flight of stairs with a little help from the force.

“That’s cheating!” Ben called after her, unable to help the lopsided grin from spreading across his long face.

“You’d like to think so, wouldn’t you, Flyboy?”

With another loud laugh, Rey hurtled down another flight of stairs, her feet practically flying as she ran down step after step, until a pair of long arms coiled around her waist. Rey let out a squeal as Ben tossed her over his shoulder and proudly carried her the rest of the way down the stairs while she loudly, and persistently, complained the entire way.

“Put me down, laserbrain, or I swear, I...I…”

“You’ll what? Corrected my pronunciation again? I’ll have you know that I am fluent in Shyriiwook.”

“That’s only because you’re half Wookiee,” Rey reached up and thoroughly mussed Ben’s dark hair that he’d carefully combed to cover his gargantuan ears, “I mean, it would explain all this hair.”

“Do you ever stop talking?”

“Only if you’d ever stop being a pain in my neck.”

Ben rounded the corner into the dormitory section of the Praxuem and muttered a surly, “None of your business, now move,” at any student who stood in his way. They skittered like a flock of bloggins in the midday Jakku sun, letting the lumbering teenager by without any more fun, but plenty of looks.

Rey offered her wide-eyed fellow padawans an apologetic smile from her perch over Ben’s shoulder.

“You know, you’d be surprised just how...I was going to say popular, but that might be a little too optimistic...um...well-tolerated you’d be if you were a little nicer.”

“I doubt it,” Ben grumbled as he set off down another flight of stairs, “They’ve never done me the courtesy, so what’s the point now?”
“Maybe,” Rey pushed against him with her knees to arch her back and give a great tug to one of his ears, “Cover these with a hat and matters could improve.”

“That’s it,” Ben groused, “You asked for it.”

“Asked for what? Ben?”

The normally sullen teenager reached up with a mischievous grin and pinched at the sensitive spot right below her ribcage. Rey immediately seized against him and squealed, “Ben, no! Stop!”

He couldn’t help his own low laughter when, after trying to hold it in for too long, Rey burst into wild peals of laughter. For him, Rey’s lighthearted laugh acted like an embrace all its own, wrapping him up with her light and her joy from the inside out. She was still a little girl, no matter how old she thought she was, or wanted to be, and Ben was grateful to be able to keep her anchored in that easy lightness of childhood a little while longer.

Her laughter rolled around the stone stairway, vibrant as it echoed to the very top of the Praxeum, so infectious that Ben quickly felt the lingering darkness that constantly tugged at his heart shrink away, if only for a moment.

They burst out into the blessedly cool, night air - and directly into Master Skywalker. Ben haphazardly dropped Rey on her feet and cleared his throat loudly. Rey’s eyes were wide as she looked up at the Jedi Master who gave Ben a pointed look. To try and keep her out of trouble, Ben fished in his pockets and pulled out another air cake and flung it to her chest. She caught it easily and her gaze darted quickly from her Master, to Ben, to the sweet, and back again.

“Ben,” Rey mumbled quietly.

“Get out of here, Rey,” he barked softly.

Rey lifted her hazel eyes to Master Skywalker, who gave her a reassuring nod. She looked at Ben one more time before stuffing the air cake into her mouth and bounding away.

Ben’s gaze remained on the girl as she dashed into the open courtyard on the edge of the jungle, her trio of buns bouncing with her every step.

“Be careful, Ben,” Luke warned, “Rey is...she’s got something special. You both do, and she looks up to you. Needs you.”

“What’s your point, Uncle?” Ben muttered as he quickly built up the solid walls of his mental shields to keep the Jedi master from poking about and discovering something he shouldn’t. He wasn’t sure what his uncle would do if he knew the magnitude of the dark whispers that coiled in the back of his mind. Ben looked down at his mother’s twin, already grown past him at only seventeen, as he stepped up beside him and watched Rey interact with the students her own age.

“These lessons…”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Ben lied, keeping his eyes on the girl when Luke gave him an insinuating look.

“Just...make sure that you’re teaching her the right things,” Luke reached up and clapped his nephew on the shoulder, “Listen, there’s something I’ve been meaning to tell you…”
It was raining again. Ben sat at his desk, that was dimly illuminated by a glow lamp, as he fiddled with his lightsaber. A grumble of thunder overhead shook the stone beneath his feet, pulling a deep sigh from his lips as he tried hard to focus on the stone at the center.

He’d tried so many ways to keep his mind off of what Master Skywalker had told him, shutting Rey out while his mind churned it round and round, and the dark whispers coiled around every feeling of fear and apprehension he had.

He’s punishing you for teaching the girl. For becoming too close to her.

“He’s not.” Ben whispered into the darkened room as another murmur of thunder rolled across the jungle and washed against the stone edifice like a wave upon the shore.

You can’t deny it. He is afraid of you. Afraid of your power. He thinks that you’ll poison her and turn her against him.

“I wouldn’t. She wouldn’t. Rey is too good, she would never be seduced by the darkness,” he cried out to no one.

She is powerful, like you. Imagine what you could achieve together. Skywalker knows this, that’s why he is sending you away. To punish you. To separate you, like she was afraid would happen.

A bolt of lightning forked violently across the sky that was thick with rain, eerily illuminating the small room as Ben slammed his fist down upon the rickety desk.

“No!”

All at once, the poisonous whispers in his head skulked away, back to the darkest reaches of his troubled mind. Ben let out a sigh that mingled with the lingered thunder, but it wasn’t one of relief. He was a simmering tea kettle that forced some of the built up steam out. The darkness weighed heavy on his mind...always, and the voice was there in his quietest moments when his fears and doubts would scream the loudest. Every time, he would try to keep her out, try to keep her from worrying...she was only a kid, after all.

When they met, the two of them promised to defend one another, but Ben couldn’t bear the thought of Rey trying...and failing... to pull him back from the darkness that had eaten at him for his entire life. It was too much, and she was too light...and it was his duty to protect her, even if that meant sacrificing himself.

When the picture of her smiling face came into his mind, all wild hair and freckled skin, Ben opened the walls he built around his mind to keep her out to reach out and brush up against her signature.

She was there, sleeping, but there was something he didn’t expect.

Rey hadn’t been afraid of the storms for a long time, and slept like a baby most nights...except for the ones when he’d suffer from the voices in his head while he slept. They’d whisper words of venom in his ear, and Rey would come to him each time and pull him back to the light.

This time, Rey was the one who was afraid.

Ben pushed his hands against his desk and bolted to the door, opening it as quietly as he could to tiptoe out into the hall. The corridor was dimly lit but fairly easy for him to navigate after spending so many years at the Praxeum as he followed his feet around a corner and down a flight of stairs to where Rey’s room was.
As he approached, his heart lurched when he could hear Rey’s lilting voice from down the hall. Ben splayed his fingers out over the wooden panel and gently pushed the door in. Another flash of lightning illuminated her face, contorted with fresh tears while she cried.

_No, no, no, please don’t take him from me. I don’t want him to go, I don’t want to be alone again._

Ben tiptoed forward and reached out with his fingertips to brush a stray strand of her chestnut hair from her freckled face. Rey flinched at his touch, spouting more tears from her eyes.

_Please...please don’t go. I’ll be alone...I’m so alone…_

“Shh, Rey, wake up, Sweetheart…” Ben sank to his knees in front of her bed and brushed away her tears, “It’s okay, Ch’eo k’tusah. I’m here...you’re not alone.”

With a soft sob, Rey’s hazel eyes parted, and a flurry of instantaneous recognition passed over her fine features.

“Ben,” her voice broke, and another pearl-shaped tear slipped past her lashes as she threw her arms around him. Tightening his hold around her narrow, coltish frame, Ben pulled her to cradle her against his chest and whisper the affirmation that she wasn’t alone in her hair over and over. Rey cried incessantly into his chest, fisting the fabric of his tunic like a child until her sobs slowed and her heartbeat returned to normal.

“Better?” Ben gently asked as Rey slid away to sit next to him on the floor.

With a snuffle and a wipe of her nose, Rey nodded, “Better.”

“Do you want to talk about it?”

“Do you ever want to talk about yours?”

“...not especially.”

“Okay then…” Rey tucked her knees to her chest and laid her cheek on top of them with a forlorn pout, whispering out into the darkened room, “You left.”

“I’m right here,” Ben reached out and put a comforting hand on her shoulder. Rey lifted her tear-strewn face to meet his gaze and shook her head.

“No...in this...you were gone. I couldn’t find you...and when I did, you were different. I don’t know what I am going to do when you start to be sent away before the trials. You’ll change, I know it.”

Ben pulled his hand away and carded his long fingers through his hair, lingering on the place where his Padawan braid used to be with an anxious press of his lips.

“I...Rey…”

“What...what is it? What’s wrong?” Rey leaned forward, her hazel eyes wide and filled with fear.

“Master Skywalker...when I saw him earlier, he told me that I’m almost ready.”

“No,” Rey breathed, pulling herself to her feet, pacing the small space with her hands over her ears, “Don’t say it...if you don’t say it, it won’t be real…”

“It doesn’t work that way…”
She stopped dead in her tracks, her eyes alight with a devastated fury, “I knew it. I told you.”

“Rey…”

“When?”

“You’re really pushy for a twelve-year-old, you know that?”

“Almost thirteen… when?”

Ben sucked in a great gulp of hair, looking down at his feet before lifting his dark eyes to meet hers.

“Tomorrow.”

*

Ben stepped out into the early morning light, looking out of the line of jungle spread out before him, and the waiting T-6 shuttle that would be taking him on his first official mission as a Jedi. His heavy, woolen cloak fluttered in waves around him as a colder than usual wind twisted its way through the canopy and around the Great Pyramid.

He strode up to the waiting party, where Master Skywalker was waiting for him with the Jedi Knight he’d be accompanying to Subterrel.

“Ah, Ben, this is Daxon Kors, he’ll be assisting you with the last portion of your training to prepare you for the trials.”

“Young Master Solo, it’s a pleasure to meet you,” the man grinned at him with a proffered hand. Ben couldn’t help his surly attitude when he looked down Daxon’s hand and back to Luke.

“Where is she? I can’t find her…”

Luke looked from Ben to Daxon, who withdrew his hand and ran it alongside his cropped dark hair. Letting out an exasperated sigh, the Jedi Master turned his attention to his nephew.

“Did you look?”

“Yes, of course I did.”

“Did you… look?… you’ve never had trouble finding each other before…”

Ben pursed his lips and stared back at his uncle with a desperate look in his dark eyes, “I did…and… Luke, I can’t leave without saying goodbye. She’d be broken-hearted.”

Luke gave Ben a look and reached out to pat his nephew’s shoulder, “Where else would she go? She always had a knack for special hiding places… check in the kitchens and see if there’s air cakes that are missing.”

As soon as his uncle said it, Ben went bounding off towards the jungle, leaving the waiting shuttle behind as he thundered through the dense foliage. Flocks of birds fluttered away like a wisp of smoke while he tore his way through the wilderness just outside their home.

He skidded to a halt abruptly when he came to the bioluminescent orchid grove and saw her sitting in the center, alone. In the daylight, they looked like any normal flower, only more beautiful as their bright colors gleamed in the bright beams of warm sunlight that shone down upon them.
Ben stepped forward carefully, watching his footing to prevent the squashing of any of the blossoms as he made his way to her side. When he stood by her side, he reached out the toe of his brown boot and gave her a tiny nudge.

The girl lifted her tear-strewn face and dashed away more of the glittering droplets from her eyelashes with the back of her hand.

“You came,” Rey whispered with a snuffle.

“Of course I came...I looked for you…”

“I couldn’t...I don’t...I don’t want to say goodbye.”

Ben reached down with his hand and pulled her to her feet and into a fierce hug, pressing his nose in her hair as she started to cry all over again.

“Ch’eo k’ tusah, shh, it’ll be okay. I won’t be gone for long, I promise…”

Her narrow shoulders shook as he held her and traced comforting circles against her back. Rey fisted the fabric of his cloak and pulled herself away to look up at him, her hazel eyes red-rimmed and wide with her tears.

“Promise me you won’t change. Promise me that you will come back.”

The corners of his mouth pulled up into a crestfallen smile, feeling the lie in his mouth before he even said it.

“I will come back for you, Sweetheart. I promise.”

He embraced her once more, squeezing her until he’d nearly stolen her breath from her narrow body before reluctantly walking away, back towards the Praxeum and the fate that awaited him.

Rey stayed in the grove...their special place, laying on her back with her face turned towards the sun, unable to keep the tears from falling all over again as she watched the T-6 shuttle fly away into the upper atmosphere with a thunderous roar.
Ben Solo faces the hardest test of his young life - the Jedi Trials. He emerges a changed man, deeply scarred and with the darkness within him threatening to consume
him completely. When he returns to the Praxeum - can he live with the guilt of what the darkness is doing to Rey, as well?

Chapter Notes

MyJediLife here: I want to thank my Force Bonded Twinsie for being my writing partner, putting up with my Cauliflower Plans, and for not disowning me when I hounded her every day to write her half of the chapter. Patience is not my forte. :slight_smile: Also, I took liberties with the Trials - and I hope you all enjoy my take on them. So, gather your tissues and box wine, and I hope you enjoy. :slight_smile:

kaybohls here: I don't really have any words for how much I love this chapter, I hope that it will be worth the wait (it's also a good four-thousand words longer than I anticipated, but we have a lot of things to say and hearts to break, okay?? I am falling in love with this story more and more with each word I type, and having MJL and her Cauliflower plans the best kind of writing partner a girl could ask for! You might need a tissue or two for this chapter...but I'd advise you to stock up on the wine because, well, we're us. xoxoxo kb

Ben stood still as a stone, the rain and wind pummeling his cloaked figure as the storm raged over Malastare. His first test in the trials - the Trial of Skill, was culminating here, apparently. Ben had never cared for Malastare the few times he had been there in his early years before his parents had decided he was too much trouble for them…

Focus. There is no emotion, there is peace. There is no ignorance, there is knowledge. There is no passion, there is serenity. There is no chaos, there is harmony. There is no death, there is The Force.

Ben could hear the whisper in his head, a soft caress of the Force against his soul. He reached out for it, reached out to grab onto it for guidance, when another, much louder voice rang out in his mind.


Peace is a lie. There is only Passion. Through Passion, I gain Strength. Through Strength, I gain Power. Through Power, I gain Victory. Through Victory, my chains are Broken. The Force shall
You know it to be true, boy. The legendary blood that runs through your blood, you know it’s not of light. Feel it, young Solo… feel the Darkness. Embrace it. Let it guide you, and claim your power, like the ancient Dark Lords before you.

“No!” Ben cried out, breathing heavily as the storm still raged around him. His hair stuck to his forehead in clumps, his heart thudding in his chest as he surveyed the building he needed to ascend to the very top of. There, he knew, was the final step in his first test.

The dark, austere building had stood for centuries, once used as a headquarters for Republic forces during the Clone Wars. Ben was sure many a Galactic hero had strode on the same ground he now walked upon, and he stopped once he had reached the long since abandoned building, gazing up at it once more.

Don’t make the same mistakes I did. Don’t repeat the past...

A new voice came into his mind now, followed by a brief flash of a man, with a wavy mass of sandy blonde hair, standing in the same spot Ben currently occupied, an ignited lightsaber in his hand.

Blood of my blood… don’t let the Darkness claim you......

The visage disappeared, replaced by another voice, his favorite sound in the world.

Come back for me, Ben. You promised.

“I will, Ch’eo t’kusah. I will,” Ben whispered softly, closing his eyes and letting the Force guide him inside the building.

When he emerged four hours later - sore, bruised and bloodied, he had the satisfaction of knowing he was one step closer to going home to Rey, as he had promised.
Ben stood on the bridge of a Star Destroyer, gazing out the transparisteel viewport as the white and blue swirls of hyperspace danced before his eyes. He closed them, trying to find peace and balance within him, even when the icy fingers of terror clawed at his very heart and soul.

*Hard decisions you will make, if Jedi Knight you wish to be.*

The voice whispering to him in a strange-sounding dialect was ancient, Ben could tell, and he would be smart to listen to its wisdom. He sighed, huffing in a deep breath as he tried to fall into the Force more, trying desperately to seek direction from the energy that connected every living thing in the Galaxy.

Another voice spoke to him.

*Seek the light, and the shadows will stay in place.*

Feeling a steely resolve, Ben opened his eyes.

…. To see a ship in front of him, a ship he knew almost as well as the *Millenium Falcon*. How many hours had he spent watching his father and Uncle Chewie retrofitting the *Mirrorbright* with more weapons than was ever supposed to be needed on a diplomatic vessel?

The *Mirrorbright* was clearly about to start its descent into an atmosphere he was more than familiar with, as well. The blue-green swirls of his home planet called to him, singing an ancient song in his blood of familiarity, comfort, and *home*.

*My little Starfighter. You’re so strong, so grown now. You know what you must do. I’ll always be with you - no one is ever really gone.*

“Mother?” Ben whispered, stepping closer to the viewport and reaching out with one hand, as if he could pull the vessel to him to shield it from whatever was about to happen.

His Uncle’s voice came to him now, as gritty as the sands of his home planet of Tatooine.
The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few.

“Give the order, Solo.”

The modulated voice came from just over his shoulder, and Ben turned to see a masked figure, about the same height and build as he.

“Give the order to fire the laser cannons at the ship, and the Chandrilans will be spared today. We have a weapon that can make that pretty little planet nothing more than dust. Give the order. Do it.”

Ben opened his mouth, closing it again as he looked at the *Mirrorbright* one last time before whispering, “Fire all cannons against the transport ship. Leave nothing behind but dust.”

As the laser cannons fired, obliterating the *Mirrorbright*, Ben fell to his knees, his hands covering his eyes as he wept.

….

The dreams and whispers had gotten worse after the first two trials, and Ben found himself awake most nights, pacing the corridor outside his room on the transport ship that was taking him to his next destination. He knew the Master assigned to him for his trials was well aware of his struggles, but probably didn’t have a clue how to handle it.

*Noone understands, do they, young Solo? Noone understands the darkness you feel, the power resting inside you. But I do, my boy. I understand. Embrace the darkness. Use it to pass your silly trials, so we can burn it all down, and you can claim your rightful place in history.*

“No,” Ben whispered. “No…” He clutched at his head, trying to make the whispers go away, as if his hands alone could shield the words.

He knew what would help him, knew the one person who could make the darkness fade away with her light alone. But Rey wasn’t anywhere near him, even though he wished she was. He thought
about his best friend a lot, her voice in his head serving as an anchor when the darkness threatened.

Come back for me, Ben. You promised.

He let the ghost of a smile drift onto his lips as he settled back into his bunk. “Ch’ah tsucarah, Ch’eo t’kusah. Ch’ah tsucarah.” He whispered the words in his mind, in his soul, as they were coming from his mouth.

I promise, my flower. I promise.

Twon Ketee shone like a black and green marble through the viewport, and Ben sighed as he listened to his Master explain his next trial, giving him little information to work with. As they found a piece of solid ground to land on, the Master handed him a breath mask. “Air’s toxic. Good luck, kid.”

Ben glared at the man for a moment, the word ‘kid’ grating on his nerves. How many times had his father used that word when speaking with him?

Han Solo sees you as a worthless child. A chain keeping him tied to one place. He never wanted you, my boy.

Shut up, Ben thought as he adhered the mask to his face and stepped off the ship and into the oppressive heat of the jungle.

Rathstars never hunt alone , Ben thought to himself a standard hour later, and he used his lightsaber to slice through the dense foliage. I remember Dad talking about them when I was younger, Ben huffed a breath, slightly winded from the processed oxygen he was receiving through the breath mask.

The first rathtar burst through the foliage a half standard hour later, roaring as its gaping maw, filled with razor-sharp teeth intended for only one thing - devouring its prey - rolled towards him. The large tentacles whipped through the air towards him. Ben leapt effortlessly into the tree above him, watching as the rathtar stopped, confused about where its prey had gone.

They have lousy vision , Ben realized, letting a smirk come to his lips now. This should be easy. Ben was about to make a move when the branch snapped under his weight, and he found himself hurtling towards the jungle floor. Flipping head over feet, he reached out to the Force to help him, curling it around him like a protective bubble as he landed, his lightsaber twirling as he extended
one hand, using the Force to hold the creature in place.

Approaching it, he felt the Force thrumming around him, like a second heartbeat in time with his. The creature roared as Ben sliced off one tentacle, and then another, and as he set to work dismantling it appendage by appendage, he waited for the inevitable other-shoe to fall.

And fall it did. Ben noticed the unnatural movement of the foliage to his right, and as he thrust his saber through the first Rathtar’s body, watching it fall to the jungle floor with a wet sound, the second made its appearance, crashing out of the leaves and vines with a roar. Ben turned, reaching out with the Force to send the creature flying backwards, and as he stalked towards it, he failed to notice the third Rathtar approaching from behind.

Like true predators, they were hunting their hunter, trying to turn the tables in their favor.

With Ben preoccupied, their plan worked, and the tables did, indeed, turn.

Ben thrust out with his lightsaber, slicing through three of the Rathtar’s tentacles, gathering the Force around him as he spun and chopped through flesh and bone, and when the third Rathtar bit into his arm and shoulder, he cried out in pain and fury, watching as his lightsaber fell from his hand, skittering across the floor of the jungle away from him.

Flinging his other hand upwards, Ben used the Force to grab at the first large object he could find - in this case, a large branch lying on the jungle floor, flinging it at the head of the Rathtar that was currently gnawing on his flesh. In his next heartbeat, he called his lightsaber to him, igniting it once more and sending it flying towards the second Rathtar, who was roaring in pain and trying to find purchase with missing appendages to move towards him.

The saber sliced through the Rathtar’s head, slicing it in two. He watched in awe as the two pieces fell to the ground, his head swimming from blood loss. Everything was fading so quickly, and as his lightsaber came back to him with a twitch of his hand, Ben somehow managed to thrust it into the body of the remaining Rathtar, the creature collapsing partially on top of him as his vision faded to black.

*Come back to me, Ben. You promised.*

“Ch’ah tsucarah, Ch’eo t’kusah. Ch’ah tsucarah.” Ben whispered once more before he passed out.
Ben’s shoulder and arm still ached, even after several weeks of bacta patches and one night in a bacta tank once they had found an inhabited planet with a large medical facility.

They wouldn’t need him to be in top physical shape for the next trial, it seemed.

As they landed on Chandrila, Ben cocked an eyebrow at the Master accompanying him. “Bringing me home, Master?” He asked, wryly. It was true, his life had started here, and he considered Chandrila his homeworld - but his life had also fallen apart here.

_Ah yes, tossed away like garbage. They want you to remember, young Solo. They want you to remember how your parents feared you. Feared the power within you. They feared you - so they sent you away to an old man with an outdated hubris. All that legendary Skywalker blood running through your veins, and they think Luke Skywalker can train you? They are pathetic. But you... you are not, my boy. Let the Darkness guide you. Tap the power within you. Take your family’s legacy back._

Ben put his hands to his temples, grinding his palms into them to try and grind out the whispers.

_Ben, you know you promised. I know you can do this. For me._

Rey’s voice caressed his mind, like a balm to soothe his wounds. Nodding slightly, Ben pulled his hands from his temples and looked at the Master Jedi before him.

“I’m ready.”

Ben had always had trouble with meditation. The dark always called to him, and the whispers grew to a shout inside his brain. It was hard to ignore them, hard to find balance when the dark had such a strong pull for him.

He fell into the Force easily this time.

It wrapped around him, caressed him like the blanket his mother had wrapped around him when he
was sick as a young boy. She had held him for hours, bringing him his favorite soup and watching all his favorite holoshows with him. It was warm, tender.

It was back when she had loved him. When he had meant something to her. Before he had started to frighten her with his power. Back when the light had been inside him, shining brightly as the sun. The world had been filled with possibility. With hope.

The darkness approached him now, delicate wisps of smoke that pushed the light away, whispering promises to his soul that Ben mustn’t - shouldn’t - believe.

The Force started thrumming, matching his heartbeat in an instant as he felt the power growing within him. And then he saw it, a glimpse of something, parting the shadows, beckoning to him.

_We’re waiting for you, my boy. Come fulfill your legacy... your destiny..._

The Force thrummed stronger now, filling every broken piece of his soul with energy, licking at the sharp edges of his soul and searing them closed, making all the doubt and fear melt away like the sun on Jakku.


Ben felt it all, calling to him like a siren, promising him every last thing he had ever longed for. Beckoning to him like a dark beacon.

The voice again, ringing out in his head.

_You have too much of your Father’s heart in you, Young Solo. Perhaps I was wrong to choose you. Maybe you don’t want the power I am offering you. But... there is someone else I could call, too, someone who is just as powerful as you. Yes... I see it now... Young Rey, she has the darkness within her as well..._
“No,” Ben whispered, his voice tiny as the Force hummed and danced around him, around every living thing. “You won’t take her. Take me instead.”

Ah yes, young Rey. How noble of you to offer yourself. Embrace the dark, boy. Fulfill your destiny.

Ben tried to claw his way out of the darkness that smothered him, tried to find the light he knew surrounded it. He knew it was there, knew she was there. Waiting for him.

Her voice drifted to him on the tendrils of the Force, barely able to be heard over the thrum of the darkness inside him.

“Ch'ah am sah csah, Ben. Vacosetahn ch'at ch'ah. Vacosetahn vamci. Ch'ah csarcican't vatt'ah vah.”

The Cheunh translated easily in his brain, and Ben scrambled towards Rey’s voice. “I am here, Ben. Come to me. Come home. I will help you.”

“I know you will, Ch’eo k’tusah. I know you will. I’ll come back for you, sweetheart. I promise.”

Ben tried to follow the light, the tiny tendrils of the sun he felt when he heard Rey’s voice, but the darkness was stronger, swallowing every tendril until it consumed it completely.

The masked man with the red lightsaber. Standing in the rain, other masked figures standing behind him.


Ben could feel the power now, filling his veins like quicksilver. If he wanted to, he could destroy this whole building with one sweep of his hand. He could call his lightsaber to him, and with one flick of his wrist, send it careening through the flesh and sinew of the Jedi Master with him. He could rule them all, and then they would finally see who Ben Solo truly was. Powerful, like the other men in his family line were.

He would be a scared, misunderstood boy no more. He’d be a man. He’d see the fear in people’s
eyes when he talked to them, and they would follow his orders - or face the consequences. He could kill with a gesture, could make planets bow before him in supplication.

He. Ben Solo. The difficult boy. The one everyone thought was strange. Ugly. Surly. Mean.

Ben knew what people said about him. He heard the whispers as he moved through the corridors of the Praxium. Only one person had ever looked at him like he wasn’t a monster, and she was the one person who would defend him no matter what.

*Your love for her is a weakness, my boy. You know she’ll betray you one day, don’t you? She’s older now, and all the other boys at the Praxium - well, you’ve seen the way they look at her - haven’t you? Why would she choose *you* over them? Yes, your love for her must be snuffed out to claim your power.*

“Shut up,” Ben whispered. “Shut up. You know nothing.”

The Force exploded with a blast of energy, and Ben moaned out loud as waves of pain shredded through him, and then more visions came to him in rapid succession.

*A man with a deformed face, sitting on a throne. Rey, suspended in the air, screaming as if she was being torn apart. A young boy with hazel eyes and raven hair, clutching a stuffed Nexu in his chubby fingers. The masked man, with his lightsaber engaged, standing over a crumpled body, more masked figures, one of them firing a blaster into bodies on the ground.*


*Death.*


*Come to me, boy. Complete your training when I tell you to. I’ll keep her safe.*

Tears fell down Ben’s face, wetting the collar of his shirt - but he didn’t notice - so deep in his meditative trance was he. His body started twitching, his head shaking back and forth, and as the
Master charged with watching over him started to take a step forward, Ben relaxed, all the tension leaving his body.

_You won’t let the dark take you away from me, Ben. I know you won’t. Please, Ben… fight._ **Fight!**

*For me, for us… please. Feel my light - think about our clearing... our orchids. See how they shine in the dark? That’s me, Ben. That’s me. I’m shining for you, lighting your path home. Back to me. Please, Ben, please. Fight the darkness. Come home to me.*

“I promise, for you, Ch’eo k’tusah. For you. I won’t let the dark win.”

The visions faded away, and Ben let himself step into the light, basking in it for a moment before he opened his eyes to look at the Master standing before him.

“I know what I have to do, Master. I hope I have the strength to do it.”

….

Ben stood in the lower levels of Coruscant, the streets teeming with all manners of scum and villainy. He had been dropped here by the Master, with his only instructions being *Find that which speaks the truth to your soul.*

Looking around, Ben found an alley to duck into, and as he quieted his mind and reached for the Force, skimming across literally thousands of life forces - some Force sensitive, some not - he waited for the familiar pull of something, *anything*, that would tell him in which direction to go.

There it was, a tug on a single strand of the Force, urging him to come closer. It had something to show him, something he needed to know.

Ben opened his eyes, keeping a tight grasp on the silvery strand in his mind as he followed it through the streets of Coruscant until he was standing at a dilapidated looking ziggurat in the outskirts of Galactic City.

*If answers you seek, then enter you must.*
The building itself was a labyrinth of corridors, and Ben felt himself reaching out to touch the walls often, finding comfort there, as if the building could tell him secrets. He felt that this building should mean something to him, as if he had a string tying him to it.

Still, he followed the silver string through the Force, listening to the ancient voices of those who came before him in his mind.

He stopped outside a door, taking a deep breath and reaching out with the Force, brushing his mind against the lock and smiling as the door slid open with a hiss. He looked up, screams echoing through his mind as he watched a battle raging before him.

A speeder crashed through the wall, crushing several Padawans before a man jumped out, a man with a mask covering his face partially. He ignited a lightsaber, cleaving many apart before he looked straight at Ben, started towards him with firm purpose.

“No! This isn’t real!” Ben cried out, closing his eyes once more and letting the Force swirl around him.

“Anakin, You’re breaking my heart! You’re going down a path I can’t follow.” A beautiful woman, begging and pleading with someone, tears running down her face as she stood outside a sleek silver ship, which Ben realized as the chromium plated Nubian starships that belonged to the monarchy of The Naboo.

“Luke. Leia.” The same woman’s voice, weak. Infants crying, one after the other.

“I’ll take the girl to Alderaan. My wife and I have wanted to adopt a baby girl. She’ll be well-loved.” A tall, astute looking man - which Ben recognized as his mother’s adoptive father from holophotos and statues which were erected in his honor. Bail Organa had been a well-respected politician.

A whisper of a man’s voice. “Anakin is the father, isn’t he? I’m so sorry.”

The Force swirled and hummed through him, and then it stopped.

Ben opened his eyes to see a small, glowing object in the center of the room.
As he approached, he saw it was a Holocron. The palm-sized object thrummed gently in his hand, the blue light within pulsing with every beat of his heart.

He was meant to see whatever knowledge lie within it. Settling himself onto the dusty, uneven tiled floor, Ben closed his eyes and let himself sink into the Force once more.

A voice whispered to him once more - and it was one Ben had heard before - an ancient voice with a strange dialect.

*If into the security recordings you go... only pain will you find.*

A man with sandy hair and pained, dark eyes striding into the very building he was in now, a squadron of Stormtroopers following him. A young boy, a Padawan, his eyes trusting as he looked at the man. *“There’s too many of them, Master Skywalker! What should we do?”*

The man ignited his lightsaber, making easy work of the younglings - and everyone else he encountered within the Temple.

A raspy voice floated through the Force now, and Ben could sense the glee as it sneered. *“Execute Order 66.”*

*Darth Vader, swinging his lightsaber against... his Uncle Luke?*

*Luke was angry, yelling, “I’ll never join you!” at the most feared figure in the Galaxy at the time.*

*Vader’s modulated voice answered, “If only you knew the power of the Dark Side. Obi-Wan never told you what happened to your father.”*

*Luke, still angry, still screaming, “He told me enough! He told me you killed him!”*

*A moment in time passes, almost freezing in the Force before Vader answered his Uncle. “No, I am your father.”*
His Uncle appeared to be shocked, as he answered, “No. No! That’s not true! That’s impossible!”

Vader’s voice again, almost tender now as it answered, “Search your feelings; you know it to be true!”

His Uncle Luke screaming ended the vision momentarily, before a new vision formed.

It was his Uncle once more, standing next to a funeral pyre as fireworks burst in the sky. Vader’s body was burning as his Uncle watched over it almost tenderly.

Another voice, whispering tenderly, “Don’t make the same mistakes I did…. Grandson.”

Ben’s eyes snapped open as the holocron went dark, his anger starting to build inside him as he realized that everyone he loved and respected had been lying to him his entire life.

He was Darth Vader’s grandson.

…

Ben’s anger still boiled deep inside him, long after he emerged from the dilapidated remains of the massive ziggurat from his final trial - finally a Jedi Knight.

The victory of reaching this long-awaited milestone in his studies felt soured somehow. Tarnished by the twisted realization that his entire life had been a vicious lie. The truth that he was the blood of the galaxy’s most notorious Sith Lord, the right-hand man and brutal enforcer of Emperor Palpatine himself, felt like an impossible weight that he wore on his soul, threatening to drag him further and further into the darkness with each passing day.

Not even his promise to Rey, his Ch’eo k’ tusah, could quell the black tar that tugged at the flickering light inside him - like it used to.

I promise, for you, Ch’eo k’tusah. For you. I won’t let the dark win.
Though he could still feel her and her comforting presence in the back of his mind, the immeasurable weight of what he carried made his words feel hollow. She lingered in the back of his mind through it all, through all of the trials that, at times, seemed impossible. Through the simulation with the Mirrorbright, the rathtars that had nearly killed him, even the flashes of images all seemed manageable, something he could fight back against with her help. Now, with the truth hanging over his head, it all seemed insurmountable.

Suddenly, things made more terrifying sense than they ever had before. Things about him. Why his parents feared him. Why others stayed away. Why Han and Leia sent him to the Praxeum in the first place. Their fear. The fear of what he was, and what he could become.

So they lied. The kept the truth from him in an effort to, what? Keep him from becoming the next Darth Vader? They’d been foolish to think that the secret wouldn’t come out eventually, that he wouldn’t find out what he was.

They were afraid of you embracing your power, my boy. Who you are meant to be. More powerful than they could ever imagine.

Ben’s heart lurched when he sat back in his bunk of the T-6 shuttle, carding his long fingers anxiously through his hair when his mind went to Rey - as it so often did. What if she found out? He surely couldn’t tell her, there was no way she would ever look at him the same way if she knew the dark truth of who he really was. What he really was.

Ben nestled his head against the sleep mat beneath him, wishing that he could have at least one night of restful sleep for once in his life as he stared up at the ceiling in the relative darkness. The nightmares plagued him night after night, twisting him up inside the darkness and those poisonous whispers that relentlessly called to him at all hours of the day.

There were moments of peaceful sleep, but they were few and far between...and only when he was back home at the Praxeum...back home with her. Where, since they had been children, they’d been there for each other - to protect and defend one another - even from bad dreams.

He could feel her now, just a glimmer in the back of his mind, ever present like a handprint on his heart.

Ben reached out and grasped the silver hilt of his lightsaber, lifting it above his head and into the dim light of his bunk. The chromium caught the muted rays, catching it just enough to send a shard
of light ricocheting back at him.

Even from a hundred parsecs away, Ben could feel her. She was a sliver in the back of his mind, coming forward at his moments of need, and ever-present every time he flicked his lightsaber to life.

He could still remember the day when he had returned from the planet that was sacred to the Jedi for its kyber, Ilum, where he’d tirelessly searched for the heart of the lightsaber he was to construct. After hours combing through caves and rocky ledges, Ben felt further away from becoming a Jedi Knight than he ever had before.

When he departed from the shuttle as soon as the ship made planetfall back on Yavin IV, Ben shouldered through a gaggle of other students that had gathered to welcome their party home and made straight into the jungle.

He didn’t have to wait long for a sixteen-year-old Rey to tumble through the thick brambles and vines behind him, breathless from how quickly she’d bounded after him.

“Y-you didn’t find it...did you?”

“Go away, Rey,” Ben grumbled, turning his back to her as he pressed on through the dense foliage. He let out a frustrated growl when he turned around and saw her getting closer with each long stride he took. With a long hop, he stepped into the orchid grove and let out a sharp yell when a stick pelted him in the back of the head, “What in the…”

The surly young man spun around, clenching his jaw as he cradled the now sore spot in his hair, and looked down at the sprightly teenager who glared up at him.

“I’m trying to talk to you, you nerfherder.”

“I don’t want to talk right now…”

“I get that...but for once, would you shut up and listen to me?”
Ben drew in a sharp breath to snap back at the frustratingly relentless girl, but held it in with a firm press of his lips when she cocked her head imploringly at him.

“*What I was trying to say was.* I know why you didn’t find it on Ilum,” Rey pressed on, stepping around Ben’s side as she reached into her pocket.

“Why’s that, oh wise Padawan?” he muttered dryly.

“Cause it wasn’t there. Your kyber is here.”

Ben’s brows crinkled in disbelief as he let out a skeptical laugh.

“Yeah, I’m so sure.”

“I’m serious!” Rey scowled up at him as she stepped forward and tugged his hand towards her, slapping something into his palm with a frown.

Ben unwrapped his fingers from around the object and looked down to run his finger over the smooth stone she’d put there.

“This is your kyber. Master Skywalker gave it to you ages ago….”

“…but you’re the one who found it, remember?”

“That doesn’t make it mine…it doesn’t feel like me…” he looked down at the shard of kyber with a sigh as he centered himself in the bright beams of energy that emitted from it, “…it feels like you.”

“It isn’t.”

“How do you know?” Ben curled his fingers around the stone and pressed it into his palm, opening his mind to let the feeling of her Force signature pulse through him.
"I meditated on it."

"You hate meditation, Rey."

"That’s...true...but it’s not the point."

"What is the point, Ch’eo k’tusah?"

Rey’s face melted when Ben murmured the precious nickname he’d started calling her when they were still children. The words weren’t said often enough as they got older, and Ben’s heart ached when he thought how little he called her by the name now. She stepped forward and wound her arms around his waist and gave him a firm squeeze as she murmured into the rough-spun linen of his tunic.

"The point is...this is yours. Take it...take it so that, when you leave me...you have a part of me with you to remind you to come home."

Laying in his bunk in the T-6 shuttle, Ben rolled the hilt of his lightsaber in his hands, breathing out a heavy sigh when he could feel the tendrils of Rey’s energy emanate from the kyber inside. The delicate beams of the song that felt impossibly attuned to both him and her wound around him and filled him up from the inside out.

Ben wanted to think he could have made it through the trials on his own...but he was convinced that without Rey’s voice in the back of his mind, he may have drowned in the darkness and never made it home to her as he’d promised.

Come back for me, Ben. You promised.

The strongest stars had hearts of kyber, and Ben held hers in his hand. It was a constant reminder of what was at stake if he was to fail...to fail and fall into the bottomless pit that threatened to draw him further down with each passing day. Rey was like a life raft that he clung to as the poisonous whispers raked their twisted, black claws into his soul.

Ben barely flinched as the old shuttle lurched and gave a great shudder, and he knew that they’d come out of lightspeed. He sighed and reached up to scrub his fingers through his hair as he sent a heavy sigh into the climate-controlled air of the cabin.
With a stretch of his neck, Ben sat up in the bunk and bent down to pull his tall, black boots on over his trousers. He could feel the shuttle bank beneath his feet and the durasteel around him tremble as they broke into the atmosphere of Yavin IV.

He stood, instinctually calling upon the Force to help him keep his balance as he reached for his heavy cloak and slung it over his back. Never one to linger any longer than he had to with Daxon, Ben strode through the main cabin and waited impatiently at the door for the older Jedi knight to set the shuttle down at the Praxeum. With a gentle wiggle, Ben felt the ship connect with the stone outside, and squared his shoulders and punched the release for the door.

With a sheet of billowing vapor, Ben stepped out of the ship, squaring his shoulders as he strode forward and away from the hanger bay. After all, he was a Jedi knight, now, and would be used as some sort of example to the other students at the temple.

The low hum of a group of lightsabers was carried on the wind and to Ben’s ear, and as he strode across the worn, ancient stone, he couldn’t help but smile when he saw the group of older padawans crowded around a pair of students engaged in a playful sparring match.

There, at the center of it all, as she was in so many other ways, was Rey.

As he drew closer, Ben tilted his head to the side as he watched her move. Every single movement was made with deliberate precision, and he couldn’t help the swell of pride in his chest when he saw her exceptional reverse-grip of her dual-wielding technique - something Ben, himself, had taught her. She had only been thirteen when he had suggested that she had enough skill and focus to add another saber into her training.

Ben had seen her excel at nearly everything she put her mind to since she’d arrived at Luke’s Praxeum, and lightsaber combat had been no exception. He was proud to see that the lessons they’d practiced when she was still a little girl were paying off in the best way.

Her fellow padawans cheered her on as she effortlessly pushed the boy she sparred against further back with each swing. Ben was thrilled to see the tiniest snarl and the ferocity she fought with, never letting her opponent get the upper hand.

With a wide grin, Rey stepped away from her breathless opponent when they shouted their surrender of “Solah.” Her smile was positively radiant in her victory as she held out her arms with her chin high towards the other students, meeting their eyes one by one in a silent challenge to see
who else would step up and face her.

Ben crossed his arms over his chest when one of the boys stepped forward with a cocky smirk and gave Rey a slow once over with his icy-blue eyes.

“I’ve been wanting to cross sabers with you for a long time…”

The young Jedi knight instantly bristled at the teenager’s arrogant attitude towards Rey, and his stomach soured at the way the boy looked at her. She was a little girl, still innocent - all freckle-faced and green, with hardly a care in the world except for Ben and how many air cakes they could sneak from the kitchens like they did when he was still a kid along with her…right?

Ben watched as Rey sank back, coiling herself up like a snake in the desert, preparing to strike at any moment as the boy stepped forward and flipped his blade to life with a hum. The other padawan - the boy who had looked at her like she was a meal - tossed his thick, blonde ponytail over his shoulder and narrowed his dark brows, tossing a wink to Rey with a spin of the hilt in his hands.

“Show me what you’ve got, scavenger girl…”

Without a second thought, Rey sprung into action, spinning on her heels to bring her sabers down from different directions. At first, the boy lost his balance trying to parry her attack, but pressed forward with a smile, pushing her further back with a series of thrusts and parries of his own.

Their combat was fluid and easy, like they had been doing the dance with each other for some time, sending the ancient stone around them awash with flashes of blue and green. Rey moved like she was dancing, elegant and sure with a focused ferocity that was unrivaled by her partner.

The boy gloated with each point he took from her, smiling widely as they circled each other slowly like loth-cats on the grassy plains of Lothal in the Outer Rim. As time wore on, Ben swore that they were flirting more than sparring, and his stomach soured unexpectedly at the thought.

With every stray glance she made back at him, every hint of a smile, and every lingering touch, the muscles in Ben’s jaw twitched as he curled his fingers into his palm.

She was his classmate, his closest friend...and just a little girl.
...but as Ben watched their match carry on, he started to notice...things. Things that he was sure weren’t there when he’d seen her last just a few months prior.

The way her lips parted ever so slightly when she drew in a slow breath to focus her mind.

The way the thin fabric of her tunic hugged the lithe curve of her waist Ben was sure wasn’t there before.

How her silken, chestnut hair swung down the curve of her spine in the unique braid that mimicked her trio of buns from when she was a little girl.

The subtle sheen of sweat that kissed every inch of her golden, freckled skin, and caught the rays of fading light with every movement she made.

Ben swallowed the burning lump in his throat as he watched her roll across the boy’s back with a lithesome leap, landing sure-footed on the stone with a Cheshire Cat smile.

No, she wasn’t that little girl anymore. She’d blossomed into...something else...something beautiful like the orchids in their grove. It happened so quickly, it made Ben’s head spin with the confounding wash of feelings he couldn’t begin to process.

Rey slowly stepped back from the boy, giving her sabers a slow spin with a flick of her wrist, coiling like a spring before her next attack.

In the split second before Rey pounced, Ben swore she saw her gaze flicker to him.

His breath caught raggedly in his throat as she bounded forward, reaching out with her right hand to bring an attack down to singe the boy on the shoulder before swooping between his knees, springing onto his back with a smile and a flickering blue blade at his throat.

“Say it…” she purred, sending a bewildering shiver down Ben’s spine as he watched her coquettishly display her power over her opponent, “Go on, Antares, say it.”
The boy’s face melted into a smile as he reached up and wound his fingers around the wrist that
held one of her dual lightsabers to his throat, pulling her down just enough that Ben saw her
confident smirk flicker as the boy dragged his square jaw along her ear.

“Solah.”

She released the blonde boy with a triumphant smile, disengaged her lightsabers with a flick of her
thumbs and a hiss, and instantly turned her attention towards the young Jedi knight.

“Ben!”

He froze in place, squaring his shoulders as she bounded towards him with an effervescent smile,
throwing her arms open wide as she leaped into his unsuspecting embrace.

“Stars! When did you get back? It’s been ages!” she breathed into his shoulder, feet dangling from
the stony terrain as Ben held her steadfastly in his grasp, his heart thundering away in his chest
when he gave her the softest squeeze before gently setting her down.

“Just now,” Ben cleared his throat and anxiously scrubbed the back of his neck while he avoided
her joyful gaze.

“Did you do it?”

“...I did.”

“Ben!” Rey exclaimed, lifting her fists to beat excitedly on his chest, “You did?! You’re...you’re a
Jedi knight now...” she breathed, letting her fingers linger against his tunic in a way that left Ben
practically reeling.

“I’m still me, Ch’eo k’tusah....”

“Yeah, but... you’re a knight. ” Her smile faltered for a moment, and her hazel gaze drifted to her
feet for a moment before bringing it back to him, “You’ll be gone more, now.”
“...but I always come home, don’t I?”

Rey let out a sigh and gave him a distant smile, “...for now.”

A quiet moment of silence stretched between them, with Ben looking down at her with the soured knot in his stomach growing tighter and tighter all the time, and Rey chewing on the inside of her bottom lips before she pressed on.

“So...how’d it go?”

“It...uh…” Ben’s thoughts instantaneously shifted back to the perilous dangers he had faced during his trials, both mentally and physically....and how the sound of her voice pulled him from the darkest corners...except for the one he couldn’t seem to silence.

Don’t tell her, my boy. She would never understand. Say it and it will finally prove to you everything I’ve told you thus far. It is only a matter of time before they all turn their backs on you and you’ll join me. It is only a matter of time before you’re right where you belong.

Ben closed his eyes against the poisonous whispers that clawed at him at every turn. His mind flickered to the holo he’d watched in the dilapidated remains of what he was sure was the Jedi Temple on Coruscant, when he’d found out the despicable truth that had been kept from him his entire life. The truth about who he was...what he was.

The voice was right. He couldn’t tell her. She’d never understand, and the way she looked at him at that moment - filled to the brim with pride - would surely turn to one of fear and disgust.

Before their bond would give him away, Ben built a wall in his mind, closing off what had truly happened during his trials...and the murmurs of darkness that leached into his soul, tearing away pieces of his light more and more with each passing day.

“...easier than I expected,” Ben lied, crossing his arms confidently over his chest with a flash of the signature Solo smirk.

Rey took a step back and gave him a questionable stare with a lift of her eyebrows. He could feel
her stretch out her feelings through the Force and brush up against his mind for a split second. Part of him wanted to be proud that she’d grown so strong in her abilities, but the rest of him built the mental wall inside higher and stronger to keep her out.

“The trials were easy?” Rey speculated, her tone laced with doubt.

“I mean...easy is a subjective word. Take it for what you will, Rey, but they weren’t as bad as I thought they’d be. Even you’d be able to pass them.”

A boyish giggle erupted from the nervous knot in his chest, letting an easing wash of comfort come over him as Rey balled her fist and punched him square in the arm.

That’s right. Lie to her. Lie to her, boy. No matter what you do, she will still turn her back on you. Your love for her is misplaced. Misguided. It won’t be long until you finally see.

“Rey, come on!” the voice of one of the other padawans called out to her from across the open courtyard, that sat in the shadow of The Great Temple. She whipped her gaze around with a wave at her friends, and Ben felt a surge of relief at the welcome distraction.

Bringing her eyes back to Ben, Rey wrapped her fingers around his wrist and gave him a firm tug.

“Come on, Solo. Let’s fight like we used to.”

Nothing is like it used to be...it won’t ever be again.

“Rey...I don’t know if I should…” Ben grumbled as he trudged reluctantly behind her.

“What, are you too good to spar with me now that you’re a big, grownup Jedi Knight? Come oooon. Just for a little while. I promise I’ll go easy on you,” she looked at him from over her shoulder, her space splitting into something Ben was sure was most certainly not a flirtatious grin.

Ben swallowed the lump in his throat and let out a heavy sigh as they approached the group and were met with a series of hoots and hollers...for Rey, certainly not for him.
“I brought us a real-life knight to come and spar with us for a little while. Go easy on him, he’s only just barely survived the trials, and I’m sure he’s just exhausted,” Rey teased, bumping his elbow with her own and a playful smirk.

“Who’s first?” Ben drawled as he looked across the awed and slightly terrified faces of the padawans that surrounded them until his eyes came back to Rey.

“You think that I’m going to let someone else have a go at you first? Fat chance, Solo. Let’s do this.”

Ben chuckled and shook his head as Rey tugged her sabers from her belt, and with a twist of her wrists, turned them into one double-ended blade. She crouched back on her heels with a devilish grin, giving the joined hilt an effortless spin in her palm as she engaged the bright blue beams.

Not to be outdone, the Skywalker descendant reached to his belt and tugged his own lightsaber into his palm, giving his shoulders a great shrug to send his heavy, woolen cloak fluttering to the ground at his feet as he thumbed his weapon to life.

He couldn’t keep the smile from creeping up behind the serious guise he normally wore, face-to-face with the person who was more important to him than anything else in the entire galaxy, doing one of the things they knew best…

Ben gave his blue lightsaber a slow spin in the palm of his hand as he brought himself to the ready, and waited for her to make the first move.

Rey was quicker than he remembered, striking with a well-honed fervor that was filled to the brim with her excitement to move, her passion to feel the powerful weapon in her hands, and her joy at having him home. Ben met her strike with a parry of his own, swinging the blade in an effortless twist from one side of his body to the other when she darted the other side of her dual-blade to his other side. He pressed forward with a powerful lunge, swinging the thrumming weapon over his head again and again, but Rey wasn’t one to give up under brute strength alone.

He sidestepped a fierce attack on Rey’s part, reaching out to spin around her and letting his fingers linger on her waist as he moved around her.

With a spin of her blades, the hum of the plasma reverberated into the balmy air around them as
she darted out of his reach, turned on her heel, and singed the curve of his shoulder with the tip of her lightsaber.

“Say it, Solo. I’ve got you,” Rey beamed, her cheeks awash with a subtle pink glow as her chest steadily rose and fell as she caught her breath, “Say Solah.”

“I don’t give up that easy,” Ben murmured, his voice low from the thrill of sparring with her again after so long away, “How about we give it another go, and I won’t be so easy on you this time?”

“Easy on me? ” Rey scoffed, pulling her blue blade away from where she held him, and separating the joined hilts from one piece to two, “You want more? Fine. Come and get it.”

Ben let out a deep chuckle as he slowly spun his lightsaber, readying himself for her next slew of attacks, when a honeyed voice spoke out against the hush of the padawans that circled them.

“I’d like to have a go.”

Rey and Ben turned to face the student as he walked forward, and the Jedi knight instantly bristled at the sight of him. It was the same boy who had his hands all over Rey only a few moments prior. He was cocky as could be with his long, blonde hair, twisted into a series of intricate braids that were bundled into a thick ponytail that hung down his back. The square of his perfect fucking jaw, the angle of his sharp, black brows, and the gleam of his icy blue eyes instantly incensed Ben to the deepest part of him for reasons that he didn’t understand...not yet.

He moved his gaze to Rey, who was smiling shyly at the infernal boy with a bite of her lip and a soft laugh as she disengaged her sabers and threw up her palms.

“Fine, Antares Lacer, if a quick death before Master Skywalker lets you get a single parsec within the trials is what you want, then I won’t stop you. Do your worst, Ben.”

Ben deflated a little as she sauntered away and tucked herself between a couple of other students, crossing her arms with a smug smile.

“This isn’t what I came here for, Rey….” he grumbled at her before turning back to the eager young pup who was looking for a fight, and if he wanted one so badly, Ben was more than happy to give it to him.
The arrogant teenager flipped his braids over his shoulder and ignited his green lightsaber with a sneer.

“I’ve always wanted to see what was so great about the Skywalker heir. Personally, I think it’s all talk, but I’m eager to see what makes you lot all so special.”

“Antares!” Rey warned from behind Ben, but he held out a palm to quiet her.

“If I were you, kid, I’d be more worried about the Solo part of me,” Ben mused, inviting the darkness deep inside him to come and play...just this once...just a taste to teach this brat a lesson.

“Who said I was worried?” Lacer scoffed, lifting his blade to the ready position.

Without a second thought, Ben let the instincts of his training take over, powerfully striding forward to bring a series of ruthless strikes down upon the teenager over, and over, and over again, until the blonde moron slid out from beneath his saber.

Ben turned on his heel, ignoring the hushed whispers that surrounded them while he kept his eye on his target. The darkness licked at his soul, and Ben welcomed the surge of power it fed into him. The control. His rage. The unwarranted jealousy he felt. It spurred him on like an old friend, whispering sweet things as he pressed on, delivering blow after blow.

Antares didn’t give up easily. He was smaller and faster than Ben...a slippery little fucker who seemed to run away from Ben’s attacks than standing against them.

Ben held his blade evenly, perfect and undaunted as he held it aloft along the horizon, staring down his opponent with a sneer when the whispers curled up from deep in his mind.

Yes. Feel it. Feel your power. Can you finally see what awaits you, my boy? Teach him a lesson for underestimating you. For laying hands on the girl.

“No,” Ben muttered to himself, lowering his gaze and his blade for a split second as he tried to reel in the wild flames of his darkness.
“No?” the infuriatingly arrogant teenager scoffed, twirling his green blade with a taunting smile, “Are you giving up already, Solo? I’ve barely begun to stretch my legs,” The braided boy made a series of tightly compressed attacks, coming one after the other while Ben was distracted by the voice in his head, “Did you like what you see? I saw you watching her,” Antares taunted Ben with his words as he launched another series of more acrobatic attacks. The Jedi knight blocked them, stumbling back while the haughty padawan went on a mental counter-offensive, “What, you’ve only just noticed how incredible she is? How beautiful she is? It’s too bad that she’s blind to you...her friend. Why would she want you when she has someone like me?”

He’s right. More proof that your love for her is foolishly misplaced. She’ll never return your affections the way you’d wish her to. Imagine what she’ll think of you when she knows the truth. Gone will be the smiles. Gone will be her devotion to you. She is bound to abandon and lie to you, like all the rest of them.

Ben closed his eyes to the voice, silently pleading for it to leave him be, just for a moment.

You won’t silence me today, boy. Now, finish him before he makes a fool of you.

A suddenly, searing pain ricocheted down his arm, and Ben hissed as he opened his eyes and saw the smoking singe in his tunic, and the burn beneath it that would surely scar.

The pain instantly fed into his rage, and in turn, his darkness. The black ropes that were anchored to his soul were delighted by the turn of events, coiling ever-tighter as Ben’s anger simmered. He sucked in a slow breath through his nose and slowly turned his burning gaze to the presumptuous teenager, watching with a cold zing of delight when the boy’s ego deflated under the knight’s eye.

Ben gave his lightsaber a slow spin and pressed forward, bringing the hum of his blade down upon him with a renewed ferocity. With each swing, the edges of his vision darkened. He welcomed the feeling of it, the intoxicating power that thrummed through him, curling delightfully down to the tips of his fingers with each brutal swing.

He pushed him further and further back, fascinated by the fear that lingered in the boy’s eyes as Ben continued to unleash his fury upon him. Antares stumbled, his eyes growing wide as Ben threw his body weight forward and impacted the padawan’s face with his fist.

The knight wrapped himself up in the darkness like an old friend, slowly prowling around the young man who laid fearfully at his feet like a loth-wolf stalking its prey, as the poisonous whispers curled in the back of his mind.
With a snarl, Ben watched the already bleeding Antares flinch as the knight gave a great swing of his blade over his head, preparing for the final blow. He brought the saber down with a swift ruthlessness, but was instantly met with the sizzle and hum of Rey’s dual blades.

Her hazel eyes were wide with fear as she pushed back against the thrum of his lightsaber.

“What are you doing, Ben?” Rey cried, her strength wavering beneath him as her breath came in quivering waves.

Ben blinked down at her, releasing a slow breath as the darkness receded, and he was left with shame. He gave her a blank look, his gaze shifting to the padawan he befelled as Rey reached down to help him to his feet.

Antares gave the young knight a look of fearful revulsion as he dusted off his tunic and smeared the blood from his mouth with the back of his hand, murmuring to the other students as they all walked away towards the Great Temple.

The charged silence stretched between Ben and Rey, alone in the shadow of the Praxeum, in the remnants of what he’d done…

Rey stepped forward, disengaging her blades with a hiss before clipping them back to her belt. Her brows knitted together as she chewed on her lip, and Ben could tell she was angry with him.

“What is happening to you?”

Ben turned away, leaning down to collect the crumpled heap of his cloak from the worn stone floor, averting his gaze as she stepped closer. He could feel her brush up against his mind, spurring him to build the wall higher, stronger...anything to keep her from finding out the truth.

“It’s nothing.”
“Are you serious?” Rey fumed, crossing her slender arms over her chest as she glared up at him, “Is that what we’re doing now? Keeping secrets? Keeping each other out? What happened to always being there for each other?”

“Things change. People grow up.” Ben shrugged, shifting his gaze to look over the canopy of the surrounding jungle, desperate to look anywhere but at her.

“No,” Rey shook her head, tugging at her bottom lip to try and quell the swell of tears that brimmed on her eyelashes. Ben made the mistake of meeting her eyes, causing the sting of his shame to burn him more fiercely, “It’s not that at all. It’s…it’s happening. I can feel it.”

“There’s nothing to feel. I’m still the same me.”

“No.”

“Ch’eo k’tusah…” Ben reached out for her, but drew his hand away with a grimace when Rey flinched at his proffered touch.

“Don’t,” she warned, stepping away with hurt brimming in her eyes, “I know I’m only a student. I’m no Jedi knight,” her voice trembled with venom Ben had never heard from her before, “…but I know a thing or two, Ben Solo. I know you. You aren’t that boy anymore, and it doesn’t have anything to do with growing up. Just… please. Please don’t go this way. Don’t leave me here alone.”

They stared at each other for a beat, stuck in the fraught unease that stretched in the silence between them. Ben twitched his head, closing his eyes to the darkness that curled up in the edges of his mind, even now, even in front of her. When he slowly opened them again, his shame had contorted into something else, something more sinister.

Look at her. She’s already showing her true feelings about you. Look at her disgust. Look at her fear. I told you she wouldn’t understand, and she is not worthy of you.

“I told you, it’s nothing. I’m still me, and if you don’t want to believe that, then fine. I’m better off on my own, anyways.”

Ben could tell that his words hurt her. He could see it in her face and the way her stubborn fury and
disappointment faltered, quickly replaced by a frisson of heartache. He wanted to stop. He wanted to apologize, take her in his arms and tell her everything, tell her how he really felt, tell her the truth of what he was...but the venomous whispers were relentless in their pursuit of his light, and he couldn’t bear to include her, to tarnish all the good she had within her.

With a sneering growl, Ben turned on his heel, leaving her behind - alone, just as she so feared - and stormed back to the Praxeum.

*

It was raining again.

Rey stared up at the ceiling from the soft confines of her narrow bunk near the top of the Great Temple, breathing in a stuttering breath as she tried to let the sound of the downpour outside drown out the storm that was raging within her.

It wasn’t long after she tearfully watched Ben storm away from her that an actual storm rolled in across the horizon, bringing dark clouds that stretched across the sky, billowing out from the west over the top of the Praxeum and everyone inside it.

A boom rolled across the sprawling jungle, reminding them all of the brooding cloud layer had promised upon its arrival that afternoon.

She’d stood there for a few moments, welcoming the punishing sting of the raindrops as they pelted her skin, anchoring her to the present and what had happened.

It could have been prevented, she thought to herself, swimming in guilt as she remembered Ben’s reluctance to come and play, to relive the days when they’d been only children - practicing their forms on the highest ledge of the temple, out of sight from their Master.

She should have known that Antares would have baited him, he was a cocky bastard who had held onto some sort of grudge over Ben since he’d hit puberty and focused his attention on Rey - when all of her attention went to Ben.

Rey should have known that it would turn abruptly sour from the moment she flung her arms around him. She should have known something more sinister was happening when she could feel
that his mental walls were built so thickly, that he wouldn’t budge even the slightest for her.

She couldn't even begin to imagine what the trials had been like for Ben - they were different for every Jedi, but something told her that they had been a special kind of hell for her friend.

The feeling she’d had that they’d one day be separated always lingered in the back of her mind, and every time he left, it got harder and harder to say goodbye. He always returned, honoring his promise that he’d made to her when she was still a little girl, but only part of it.

Rey could feel it - the change in him.

After every mission, after every stretch of time they were apart, he’d return - but with a fraction of his self chipped away by something that Rey couldn’t explain, no matter how much she tried.

In the back of her mind, she knew it all came back to that fear. That fear that one day, he’d be gone - and she’d be alone all over again.

Rey knew it was probably a bad idea to let Antares spar with Ben...and it was evident almost right away - filling her with a quiver of fear as she watched Ben’s face darken and something take over him completely as he pushed against the padawan with blow after punishing blow.

Her breath caught in her throat when Ben’s fist connected with Antares’ face, sending him to the ground in a flurry of golden braids and blood. Rey knew then that something was terribly wrong - and she was the only one who could stop him before it was too late.

Maybe it already was.

Rey wanted to be angry with him, to let the ice his hurtful words covered her in linger in her heart, but the more she thought about it, the more her heart ached out of sadness. Ben was hurting...and something was responsible for it.

She wound a ribbon of her chestnut hair between her fingers, absentmindedly braiding it down to the end as her thoughts flickered through the catalog of happy memories, hoping and praying that they would be allowed more time.
A flash of lightning flickered through the small window, carrying with it a deafening crack of thunder that followed swiftly behind. The storm was brewing, in more ways than one, and Rey could feel it coming from Ben.

His nightmares were a regular occurrence since they were children, but this one seemed worse, somehow.

A shiver ricocheted down her arms, taking a blanket of goosebumps traveling down her arms as she felt his mental walls come crumbling down, and suddenly - she felt it all.

Rathtars slicing through the foliage with their flailing tentacles, slicing his skin down to the bone as his thoughts faded away, leaving only the picture of her face swirling in her mind.

*Come back to me, Ben. You promised*

The way the darkness licked at his light, leeching it away as Ben struggled to fight against it, fight against the pain and the fear - and the sounds of venomous whispers in the night. Her voice calling to him through the fray, like a beacon in the night as she murmured for Ben:

"*Ch'ah am sah csah, Ben. Vacosetahn ch'at ch'ah. Vacosetahn vamci. Ch'ah csarcican't vatt'ah vah.*"

*I am here, Ben. Come to me. Come home. I will help you.*"

A stuttering gasp was pulled forcefully from her lips when she blinked and the image of a masked man, cloaked in black with a crackling, red lightsaber flickered into her mind, and Ben’s mind was flooded with so many things.


Rey forcefully pushed the dark thoughts from her mind and sat up abruptly from her bed, padding across the stone floor to the quiet corridor outside her room.

She could hear him as she tiptoed up the stairs, sighing in the all too familiar feeling of her
creeping through the hallways of the Praxeum’s dormitories to get to him. His voice echoed out and made her heart ache when he murmured her name over and over again.

“No, you won’t take her. Take me instead.”

With her fingers splayed out against the wood, Rey pushed the door open and slipped inside before anyone would see, locking the metal latch before turning to face him.

Ben, curled onto his side with his eyes crammed shut with a grimace, let out a low groan as he mumbled her name in his sleep.

Without a second thought, Rey strode forward to do what she’d done a hundred times before - honor their promise to always be there for one another, and comfort him when he needed her to soothe the growing darkness in his heart.

Rey gathered the thin fabric of her shift with her fingers and pulled the material to her hips as she gingerly climbed in beside him. She tucked herself against his chest, something she’d never done before, and let the tips of her fingers linger on the softspun weave of his tunic and feel the frantic beating of his heart.

She centered herself in their connection and let the feeling of warmth and togetherness the two of them created as they were united as one being in the delicate thrum of the Force. Rey held onto their connected thread and sent every ounce of comfort and love she could manage.

Ben let out a long sigh as the tension evaporated under her touch, circling his arms around her to pull her tighter to his broad chest.

A sad smile flickered across Rey’s features when her mind wandered back to the things she’d seen, and the horrors he’d experienced during the trials. She fist the fabric of his tunic and snuggled herself closer to him, praying to whatever Gods would listen to have mercy on them and allow them more time.

They weren’t finished. They’d barely just begun. It was only their beginning, and Rey wasn’t ready for it to end.
Don't Let It Be The Last Time

Chapter Summary

The darkness is building inside Ben the more he is away from Rey. When he returns from a mission, can he ever say enough to make her see how he truly feels?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Ben woke slowly, blinking sleepily as the feeling of a lithe, curvy body pressed up against him, their warmth and light blanketing him in feelings of comfort and rightness. The Force was thrumming around them both, almost humming happily as Rey slept away, facing him with her body pressed against his chest, and one hand splayed out on his chest.

His heart started to beat faster as he watched her sleeping in his arms, and he tried not to let his emotions overcome him as he took in every feature of her beautiful face.

Because she was just that. Beautiful and fierce and proud.

When had his feelings switched from those of a best friend to something much more? Ben thought back to watching her spar with the other padawans, and how the sight of Antares Lacer blatantly flirting with her made him feel.

The darkness flared within him, taking his breath for a moment as it washed over him. Ben threw up a mental shield, not wanting Rey to feel a drop of darkness coming from him. She was the light, and darkness could not - would not - take her as long as he was breathing.

The voice was cackling in his head. *Love her all you want, my boy. She’ll never love you back. She’ll see the darkness inside you. She already has - hasn’t she, young Solo? Doesn’t the beautiful, young Rey deserve someone bathed in light, instead of you - a monster hiding in the shadows - not yet ready to face his destiny?*

“Stop it,” Ben whispered, and Rey stirred in his arms, opening her eyes and smiling at him for a moment before murmuring, “Go back to sleep, Ben. You’re safe.” Her eyes closed, and her breathing evened out once more, leaving Ben to his quiet musings as he watched her sleep in his arms.

His feelings were no longer that of a doting friend, no, Ben was in love with Rey. When had the switch occurred? When had she gone from his best friend, the one person in the Galaxy who understood him, to being the only girl he wanted to kiss?

And he did want to kiss her, Ben realized. He wanted to kiss her, and hold her, and, if the growing thickness in his sleep pants was any indication - do more than that with her. Ben tried to control his racing heart as he brought up one long-fingered hand to brush a delicate strand of her chestnut hair off her forehead, and she smiled in her sleep, shifting slightly so she was even closer to him.
He was so gone for her. She was his beacon in the darkness, his solitary red supergiant star in the darkness of deep space, his precious Ch’eo k’tusah. He would always come when she called, always keep her safe and protected from everything.

Even himself.

Of course, you need to protect her from yourself, boy. She’s afraid of you, deep inside. Search her feelings, and you’ll see. You’ll see she is afraid of you and your power. Distance yourself from the distraction she provides, my boy. Seek power in the darkness. I know you feel it, feel the power thrumming through you, around you. You’re a conduit of the dark.

Ben could feel it, feel the darkness seeping into his soul with each passing day. Being on Yavin IV, with Rey, it helped. Her light seemed to dispel the darkness, keeping it at bay, but Ben worried that with each mission he was sent on the darkness would work its way in deeper.

Rey was the light. She was his home, no matter where he was in the Galaxy. He just had to remember that, even when the voice in his brain was screaming its vitriol at him, trying to convince him that he was powerful, that his destiny rested in the darkness instead of the light.

You're a fool, boy. I can feel the darkness within you, just as you can.

“No,” Ben said quietly, causing Rey to stir in his arms again, this time her eyes opened wide when she realized where she was.

“Ben, are vah na? Ben, are you okay? Her voice drifted to him in the stillness of his room, his eyes meeting hers as he gave her a small smile.

“I’m fine, Ch’eo k’tusah. Just thinking about things. How are you?” Ben murmured softly, letting a deep sigh drift from between his lips as he looked at her.

Rey frowned at him before shaking her head. “No, you’re not. You feel different. You’re keeping me out, and I don’t like it. What’s wrong, Ben? Your nightmare last night…” Rey shuddered as she remembered the darkness she felt surging through Ben, the feelings that had been thrumming through the Force that brought her to his room. *It was different. Darker, I think. There was so much pain, Ben. It scared me, and the way you were thrashing around and yelling… I saw these creatures and a man in a mask. His lightsaber was red. Ben, please promise me you’ll always come back to me? You scared me yesterday, between what happened with Antares and then your
nightmare. You will, won’t you? Come back to me?” Rey shuddered again, burrowing her face into Ben’s chest as she let another shudder course through her body. “I can feel it getting closer. The darkness. It wants you, Ben. It wants to rip us apart.”

Ben tried to stay calm, to still his rapidly increasing heartbeat, all so that Rey wouldn’t worry about him. She had her own things to worry about - her own set of trials would come soon enough, and Ben knew they would be just as difficult as his had been. Facing your own darkness left an indelible mark on your soul, one that would always be with you. Somehow, Ben knew Rey would come out of it okay, the darkness wasn’t reaching for her like it was for him.

“It won’t get us, Ch’eo k’tusah. I will always come back to you. I promise.”

…

“I just got back, Master,” Ben replied sardonically as he stood next to his Uncle, watching as a room of young Padawans worked with their practice remotes. “Surely the Trandoshans can handle this on their own?” Ben eyed Luke before looking over the practice room once more. “Jendya’s form is wrong. His back leg needs to come forward,” he remarked, resisting rolling his eyes as Daxon Kors went to the child, fixing the very issue Ben had noticed.

“Being a Jedi Knight means we must be ready to go on a moment’s notice, Ben. You know the history between the Trandoshans and the Wookiees as well as I do. If a hint of this is true, and the Trandoshans entered Kashyykkian territory, we could have a full out war on our hands.” Luke gave Ben a stern look before continuing nonchalantly, “Rey is coming into her own, isn’t she? She can take on five of her classmates and still come out on top. I see she’s using that grip you taught her to full advantage.”

“Yes,” Ben mumbled, color coming to his cheeks and ears, and he ran a hand through his hair to make sure his ears were covered. The last thing he needed was his Uncle teasing him.

Luke just hummed in agreement. “She came to you last night again, didn’t she? You had another bad dream?”

Ben gulped before answering his Uncle curtly, “Yes.”

_He wants you away from her, my boy. He wants to keep you away from your precious flower so he can use her power to his own devices. You being gone only benefits him. He is tossing you aside,_
“I can sense the bond between you and Rey growing stronger, Ben. I fear she has grown too attached to you, and that fear can lead to poor decision making, amongst other issues. I allowed you to train her when she was younger, and it paid off. Just be mindful of your feelings. Am I clear on this?” Luke eyes his nephew once more, feeling a sense of unease in the Force surrounding his newest Jedi Knight.

“Crystal,” Ben said wryly. “Am I excused? I have things to prepare for my mission tomorrow.”

“Yes.” As Ben turned to leave, Luke spoke once more. “Ben?”

Ben half-turned, his eyes meeting his Uncle’s. “Yes, Master?”

“May the Force be with you.”

Ben turned and strode away, rolling his eyes when he was certain no one else would see.

“I saw that,” a voice said from behind a tree in front of him, and Rey stepped out, a Jogan fruit in hand as she smiled at him. “Let me guess, he said ‘May the Force be with you’ in that tone of his that you detest, right?” Rey leaned against the bark of the tree, taking a bite of the fruit as she watched him.

Ben watched, transfixed, as a dribble of juice dripped down her chin, and he longed to use his mouth to suck at the delicacy, disappointed as Rey reached up with a finger to wipe it off. His gaze moved up to her eyes, their hazel depths sparkling for him.

“Yeah. I, um…” Ben rubbed his neck, his eyes drifting to the ground at her feet.

“You’re leaving again. On a mission.” Rey took another bite from the fruit, savoring the sweet juiciness on her tongue as she watched Ben. She knew all his tells by now. He was upset, and nervous - even with keeping her blocked out of his head - she knew his emotions.

“Yes. In the morning.” Ben ran a hand through his hair, looking back up at her. “C-can we go to
the clearing and just… talk and look at the sky? I feel… unsettled.”

Just then, several of Rey’s classmates burst through the doors of the Great Temple, waving to get Rey’s attention as they called her name. Rey smiled, waving back at them excitedly. Ben tried not to notice that all but one of them were male, yet he felt the ugly tendrils of jealous start to coil low in his gut, like a serpent ready to rise and strike at a precise moment.

“I can’t. I promised Vash and Jevan I would work on their forms with them, and try to teach them the grip I use - the one you taught me?” Rey’s voice grew more excited now as she gestured at the group of teens gathered on the steps waiting for her. “I’m not sure I can modify it for their style, since I use dual wield and all, but I said I would try.”

“I get it. I guess I’ll see you around sometime.” Ben started to stride away towards the path that would take him to their clearing. “Have a good time.” Red hot anger started to bloom inside him, causing the serpent to raise its head and come to life, writhing and coiling with every step he took. The Force thrummed and boiled inside him, and as he reached the clearing the voice came to him once more.

*She’d rather be with those boys than you. She’s abandoning you, my boy. Ah yes, I can feel the anger boiling inside you. Use it, child, use it to your advantage. Great power can be found when you use the darkness.*

Ben tried not to picture her touching the other boys, showing them how to adjust their grips on the hilts of their lightsabers by putting her small, warm hands over theirs. He knew how their eyes would light up when she did so, how they would smile and flirt with her.

Ben stood, igniting his lightsaber with a flick of his wrist before heaving it outwards, using the Force to propel it forward through wood, leaves, and whatever small forest animals happened to be in the way of his fury.

*Yes, yes, the voice whispered. Your anger fuels the darkness. I can sense the power growing in the Force, and within you. You’re almost ready to come to me, almost ready to fulfill your destiny…*

*To finish what your Grandfather started.*

Ben reached out, calling his lightsaber back to him and extinguishing it before throwing his head back and letting out a roar of fury, the forest quieting at the sudden noise, pausing for some time before resuming its normal cacophony of sounds.
Ben went to his knees in the middle of their clearing, sobbing as he tried to damper the anger threatening to overcome him as he thought about Rey deciding to spend time with others instead of him.

....

Rey knew Ben was angry, knew he was upset as she tried to concentrate on showing her friends a new style of holding their lightsabers. She wanted to run to him, of course, to surround herself with their orchids and just bask in the familiarity of Ben, the person who had gone from her best friend and protector to so much more now.

Her love for Ben Solo terrified her.

Finally, when it was almost time for the evening meal, Rey sent her friends off before turning and running down the familiar path to their place - the clearing that was so special to them. Even when Ben wasn’t here on Yavin IV, Rey would come to their place often - to think, to remember, or to worry about Ben.

As soon as she neared the clearing, she started to see the devastation. Several trees had been sheared in half, toppling over on others, and when she stepped into the clearing, she saw Ben on his knees in the middle of him, breathing heavily as he tried to control the sobs leaving his throat.

“Ben? BEN!” Rey ran towards him, falling to her knees beside him and wrapping her arms around his neck. “W-what’s wrong? Why are you crying?”

Ben didn’t answer her, instead, he closed his eyes, his chest heaving and his hands fisting into the grass underneath him. Finally, when the tears had subsided, he said, “Which one of them do you like the most? Vash or Jevan? I mean, you had to help them, instead of spending time with me - so which one will it be, Rey? Vash or Jevan?” His voice was icy, and Rey stood, pulling her arms away from him as she did so.

“What are you talking about, Ben? They are my friends! I mean - I’m allowed to have those, right? Since the one person that gets me - the only person that gets me - is off galavanting around the Galaxy all the time! For someone who is always promising he’ll come back for me, you certainly don’t like the feeling of waiting for someone to come back to you, do you?” Rey glared at Ben, her arms crossed over her chest as she looked at him.
“You kiss them, Rey? Did you press your lips to them? Hmm? I saw the way you were flirting with Antares before I took him down. So, which one is it? Which one will you choose while I’m gone?” Ben practically spat at her, letting his anger rise once more, the delicate tendrils of the darkness creeping into his Force signature.

“No. I’m not doing this with you, Ben. Come see me when you’re not letting it cloud your judgement.” Rey turned, walking towards the path that would lead back to the Temple.

“If you leave, then I am leaving as soon as I get back to the Temple. I’m not sticking around here to watch you flirt with them. I’d rather be as far away as I can from you. The other side of the Galaxy in fact.” Ben took a step towards her, his eyes flashing. “If you step out of this clearing, Rey, I’ll know. I’ll know I mean nothing to you, and I’ll wish I had never picked you up off the floor that night. Then I wouldn’t… I wouldn’t love you like I do. I wouldn’t have fallen in love with you!”

Ben watched as Rey turned and looked at him, and he knew his words hurt her more than anything that had ever been said to her. Tears pooled in her eyes, and she looked like her heart was breaking inside her chest.

“Then I guess the darkness wins, Solo, because you know me better than that. You know what you mean to me, and you know what we mean to each other. The darkness is starting to take over… starting to steal my Ben and replace him with… whatever you are. And even if you do wish you hadn’t picked me up… I’ll always be glad you did. This is a hell of a way to tell a girl you love her, you kriiffing nerfherder. Be safe, Ben.”

With that, Rey turned and headed down the path to the Temple, and Ben was once more left with the darkness writhing inside him. As the sky turned to an inky darkness, he boarded the T6 transport shuttle, punching in the coordinated to Trandosha into the navicomp and settling into the pilot’s seat as the shuttle jumped into hyperspace - putting parsecs between he and the only person in the Galaxy he wanted to be with.

*

It was raining again.

A bolt of lightning forked across the black sky, shining brilliantly into Rey’s dark quarters of the Praxeum, reminding her all over again that she wasn’t asleep and blissfully unaware of her feelings...and of his absence.
She had been angry and hurt when she’d left the clearing, but kept her chin held high and her tears at bay for almost the entire day.

Then, as she heard the thunderous roar of the T6 transport shuttle as it soared off-world with him inside, the dam finally broke and Rey’s tears fell free.

Their presence fueled her anger. Her anger at him. Her anger at herself for letting her emotions get the best of her when she’d been taught every day in her life as a Jedi padawan that she needed to control them...not embrace them.

*There is no emotion, there is peace. There is no passion, there is serenity.*

Serenity.

Something Rey strived to achieve, but only truly found it when they were together. He brought her peace in her darkest moments, and brought harmony in the times she needed the most.

She couldn’t help but feel sometimes, no, all the time, that she had the same effect on him, but now she knew it for sure.

He loved her.

There was a part of her that had always known. Maybe. Gods, she didn’t know.

They’d always been there for each other. Always. But now...now there was something happening to him. Rey could feel it. She felt him hide it from her. She saw it in terrifying moments outside of the Praxeum. First with Antares, then again in the jungle when he’d torn it to shreds.

Her heart ached when she thought about what he was going through, and wished that she could help him...that he’d let her help him. The fact that he shut her out and refused to let her try angered her even more.
Ben Solo was rash. Hot headed. Annoyingly protective. Impossibly bossy.

And he loved her.

Rey rolled over, tangled up in the rough, spun muslin of her bedclothes, and tucked her fingers against her mouth as she tearfully heard his words echo through her mind all over again.

Each time she relived the memory, the pain in his face, the anguish in his eyes, and the way he bared his teeth at her nearly became too much to bear.

*I’ll wish I had never picked you up off the floor that night. Then I wouldn’t… I wouldn’t love you like I do. I wouldn’t have fallen in love with you!*

He loved her. Or, wished he never had.

A soft sob tumbled from her lips, to mingle with a rumble of thunder that echoed out somewhere over the canopy of the jungle, and Rey curled herself into her blankets, wishing that she could have the old Ben back. Not the twisted version of him that was getting further and further from the boy she knew as each day passed by.

She’d never thought of him other than her best friend. She didn’t have time to, not with all the lessons with Master Skywalker, and then the secret lessons she’d had with Ben since...since forever.

It hadn’t crossed her mind the entire time they’d been busy growing up together, learning and sparring, sneaking aircakes from the pantry, and coming to each other’s aid in the middle of the night to soothe the bad dreams away.

Did...did she love him too? She was only seventeen...she couldn’t have any idea what love would even feel like, let alone what it would mean to her.

Rey rolled to her back and ran her fingers through her hair, pulling them down to graze across her temples as she went through her mental catalog that was labeled in bright letters: BEN SOLO.
If she really thought about it, he’d changed in other ways, not just in the way the dark twisted at his heart and his mind.

While his teenagedom hadn’t exactly been kind to him, making him all gangly limbs and big ears without anything else to balance out his height, Ben’s hair had grown long once he’d shed his Padawan braid. His shoulders grew broader, and the confidence he’d gained in his appearance showed in the way he held himself square, almost proud of his height and the strength he’d gained as a Jedi Knight.

His hard work didn’t go unnoticed by other girls at the Praxeum, Rey knew that much now. She’d brushed off the sour feeling in her stomach, too focused on his returning home to think about the way the other students whispered about the way he walked, and the way his chest had filled out his tunic more than it ever had before. Is that what jealous was? Is that the feeling he had experienced when she was speaking with other boys?

Ben was her friend. Her best friend. Nothing more...right?

Sure, she knew what it felt like to be pressed up against him, but it was never more than something that provided them with an easy comfort that was attuned to them through their bond. Except, Rey thought as her eyes fluttered closed with a bite of her bottom lip, it suddenly meant so much more.

That very morning felt like something of a switch flipped inside her. The day before, she was merely a girl, and the moment she stepped across the threshold into his quarters, like she’d done more times than she could count, she was something else entirely.

Rey couldn’t quite describe the feeling of being tucked up against his unexplainably broad chest, feeling safer than she’d even been...ever.

Her fingers ached to feel the beating of his heart beneath them again, but as the memory of his touch echoed in her mind, so did his words. They brought a fresh wave of her bitter disappointment at how their last meeting had gone.

Kriff, what if something happened to him while he was gone, and they’d never have the chance to make it right?

Rey was mad as hell at the way he’d acted like such a dumb moonjockey. She wasn’t quite sure that she was ready to forgive him, but she prayed to whatever gods that would listen to bring some
part of him home so that they could try.

In her heart of hearts, and the waking nightmares she suffered whenever Ben wasn’t around, Rey knew that, for whatever reason, their time was a limited, precious thing. They didn’t have the luxury to fight when there was so much at risk.

As she rolled into her pillow with a soft sob, hugging the mass to her chest as a poor imitation of Ben, Rey closed her eyes as the thunder rang out again, drowning out her cries as she wished for more time.

*

Ch’eo k’itusah

Ben Solo let out a heavy sigh as the T-6 shuttle lurched out of the mesmerizing blue-white lines of hyperspace, and the red-orange gas giant Yavin Prime came into view. He’d barely been back in the system, and already he felt the darkness begin to recede little by little. It didn’t take much thought to realize what had the blessed effect on him. Ben knew it was her, tucked in the shadow of the mammoth world on one of its moons.

It had been weeks since he’d abruptly confessed his true feelings to Rey...his best friend...his everything. He’d messed it up so badly, Ben was sure that she would probably never want to speak to him again. He wished he could do something to take it all back, to have some sort of do-over where he wasn’t such a kriffing nerfherder.

*My child, it wouldn’t matter. The girl would never want a failure like you. You make everything you touch rot from the inside out. Thrown aside by your parents, your Uncle, and her.*

“Shut up!” Ben crammed his eyes shut and growled against the quiet hum and beeps in the cockpit.

“Excuse me?” the Jedi knight Daxon Kors lifted an incredulous eyebrow as he turned in his seat to glare at the younger knight, “What are you on, Solo?”

“Sorry,” Ben muttered, settling back in his seat with a grimace, “I...bad dream.”
“Maybe you need a little less Zillo Beast slaying and a little more sleep for you...you look terrible.”

“Thanks,” Ben mumbled dryly, scrubbing his hands over his long face before reaching up to comb back his dark hair with his fingers. He knew that the darkness was starting to take a toll on him, more than ever before. Sleep never came easy, especially when he was away from the Praxeum, where Rey’s close proximity helped to keep the venomous whispers at bay.

His heart thundered in his chest as Daxon brought the small shuttle around the gas giant and began to make planetfall on Yavin IV, letting out a shaky breath as he felt her signature become inescapably clear.

Ben couldn’t wait any longer once the Praxuem came into view and Daxon slowly brought the ship around to land in the hanger, striding darkly to the small, passenger compartment and pressing the release on the door before the ship had even touched the ground.

He hopped down to the vine-covered, stone landing pad and shirked the heavy cloak from his broad shoulders as he strode towards the Great Temple.

Ben’s mood grew darker and a little bleaker as he tried in vain to find her. Winding his way through the labyrinth of corridors, he checked her room in the dormitory first, shouldering past a series of wide-eyed padawan learners - who either watched in awe as a practiced Jedi knight thundered through their common space, or darted away like a mouse. He let out a frustrated growl when he pushed open her door and found only an empty bunk and a basket full of junked parts that he was sure Rey insisted that she’d repurpose into something...someday.

He followed the thread of her light, thinking of where else she might be. She was there, somewhere...he just had to figure out where.

“This would be so much easier if Master Skywalker would allow the older students a commlink…” he muttered to himself as he heaved his body down to the lower levels to check for her in the library. Rey was nowhere to be found amongst the databanks that stored away millennia of knowledge of the Jedi and their history. He even checked in the meditation chambers to see, if by a pure, twisted chance, that he would find her there.

Ben should have known that, no matter how badly he had left things between the two of them, that Rey wouldn’t be caught dead in a meditation chamber by choice. He turned on his heel and made his way down another stone corridor and bounded up flight after flight of stairs until he burst out into the dimming light of day on the topmost corner of the ancient Massassai temple.
He looked out over the sprawling jungle, closing his eyes against the subtle breeze that shifted his hair around his ears and sent his head spinning as he centered himself in the tapestry of light and life that the Force weaved around him - and suddenly, she was there.

Ben let out a soft huff of air when he realized exactly where she was, releasing his cloak into the wind as he turned on his heel and thundered back down to the main level.

His long feet pounded against the aging stone as he sprung in surprisingly graceful steps towards the edge of the jungle, throwing himself into the thick of it. The thick undergrowth and brambles tugged at his dark tunic, but Ben couldn’t be bothered as he tore his way through ferns and vines alike.

Ben slowed his pace in the rapidly fading light of day when the ethereal blue glow began to seep through the layers of dark green ferns, and he knew he had found her.

He took a moment to slowly steady his breathing, quietly stepping across the moss-covered ground as he lifted his hand to silently push a wide frond out of the way.

There she was, shining like the stars themselves with her brilliantly bright light that was the only thing that could drown the whispers out. The darker the night, the brighter the stars, so dazzling that not even a cloud could diffuse their glow. Perhaps that’s why he loved her as much as he did - she was the light to his darkness, coming to him in the night when darkness clouded everything around him.

Rey laid in the center of the orchid grove… their place, lifting her hands in a slow dance above her like she was reaching out to brush her fingertips against the blanket of stars as they rose in the sky. He couldn’t help but linger on the edge, tucked away in the darkness of the treeline as he watched her lay peacefully, surrounded by the luminescent orchids they called their own.

“It’s a wonder you ever make it back here alive with how loudly you breathe, Solo,” Rey muttered dryly from the center of the cluster of vibrant, luminous blossoms. She pulled herself to sit as he stepped into the eerie, blue light, placing her elbows on her knees expectantly while she waited for him to speak.

“My dad would insist that it’s a Solo thing…but you’d probably say that it’s more like dumb luck,” he shrugged nonchalantly, reaching up to nervously fiddle with his hair.
“That’s because that part is true. When’d you get back?”

“Just a little while ago.”

“Mm, I thought that might be you.”

“You...you couldn’t tell? I felt you right away...like a beacon,” he murmured quietly into the jungle’s evening song.

“I tried not to,” Rey’s gaze shifted down to the blossoms surrounding her, reaching out to trail the tip of her finger around a solitary petal.

“Why?” Ben pressed, taking a heavy step towards her.

“You know why,” she whispered, her voice breaking as she turned her face away from him.

“Rey...I messed up...that’s...that’s not how I wanted that to go.”

“Is that another Solo thing? Throwing out declarations of love whenever you feel like it?” she exclaimed, throwing her hands up into the air, “You probably didn’t even mean it...I know I’d never be lucky enough to have that. It always gets taken away eventually…” Rey pulled herself to her knees and cradled her arms with her hands as she dashed away a single tear with the back of her hand.

“What..you think it’s luck?”

“Why wouldn’t it be? I’ve never had anything good last as long as this...I’m just...I’m waiting for that day when it all falls apart...it has to. I saw it.”

Ben stepped towards her, falling to his knees in front of her to reach out and gather her up in his arms without a second thought, pressing his nose into her hair as he whispered into the night air.
“I’m not going anywhere, Ch’eo k’tusah. I’m here now. I always will be. I’ll always come back for you...I promise.”

Rey pulled herself away, sending another stream of silvery tears down her cheeks with a slow blink of her eyelashes.

“Part of you is already gone, Ben. I can feel it.”

Ben let out a heavy sigh, feeling his heart lurch in his chest as his mind flickered to the waiting whispers in the back of his mind, and how they poisoned his every thought and leeched away the light every moment he was away from her. Here, with her, he felt more whole than he had in weeks...but he knew she was right.

He reached up and tucked a stray strand of her chestnut hair behind her ear, “I feel it too...and I’m afraid. I’m afraid of everything. I’m afraid of what will happen to me. I’m afraid of what will happen to us. I’m afraid of how much I love you.”

Rey blinked up at him, her hazel eyes wide as she captured her bottom lip between her lip.

“You are?”

“More than anything.” Ben murmured, knowing that the source of his fear that surrounded his love for Rey was steeped in what the whispering voice would do to her...to her light...in order to use Ben to its twisted advantage. Ben knew that he would never let anything happen to her, so long as he held a flicker of light in his darkening heart. As long as he had her, there was still a chance.

He pressed his mouth together into a thin line, letting a sigh out his nose to try and quell the rapid beating of his heart as he reached up and ran his thumb along the bottom edge of her lip. They parted beneath his touch while his gaze flickered to her wide, hazel eyes and back down to her mouth as the urge to feel her mouth against his own began to take over.

Rey lifted her hands and trailed them along the long line of his arms, giving Ben a small nod as he circled his arms around her waist and cupped the edge of her jaw with his palm.

There, in the rising darkness that would draw any eye towards the heavens, Rey and Ben only saw each other, and in the ethereal glow of the orchids that surrounded them, brought their lips together
for the first time in a kiss that both of them would remember forever - Beyond darkness. Beyond the light. And everything in-between.

Chapter End Notes

kaybohls here. We love these two more than we could possibly say...but you know us...BE READY.

Heathyr here: Remember... we promise that HEA...but that doesn't mean we won't put your heart through a bloody blender first! <3
I Saw a Fire, I Felt it Burn

Chapter Summary

And I knew that change was coming  
But I could not stop myself from wanting you  
So I stood and I let that old door open  
I let myself fall into your arms again

Chapter Notes

Some things are inevitable.....

It was raining again.

Ben sat in his room, squinting at the datapad as he worked to transcribe an ancient Chiss text into Galactic Basic. He had always found Cheunh to be easy for him - but was this really what being a Jedi Knight was all about?
“No” Ben said, shaking his head as a rumble of thunder shook the ancient Massassi temple. Lightning split the sky, and Ben reached out through the Force, drawing in a deep breath when he found Rey sleeping peacefully in her own room. She had never liked storms, and if she caught any inkling of discontent from him, he knew she would wake and appear at his door to comfort him.

He didn’t deserve her. He was only going to tear her apart. Ruin her. He had known it from the moment he saw her - even as a young boy.

“Your love for her makes you weak, young Solo. Unless… unless you convince her to join you. Your power is formidable, my boy - but combined with hers, you would be an unstoppable force.”

The voice had been growing louder, echoing through his brain more often now. Ben tried to block it out, tried to ignore the whispers that echoed through his head like poison. He felt tainted, his soul shriveling with each word that was whispered.

“No… no. Not her. You can’t have her,” Ben said into the stillness of his room, another rumble of thunder shaking the ancient stone structure. “I won’t let you have her. You can take me… but not her. Never her.”

“We’ll see, my boy. We’ll see. The path that will lead you to fulfilling your destiny, to finishing what your Grandfather couldn’t, will be revealed to you soon. She either walks that path with you…

The voice faded to a menacing whisper then, barely heard over the rain pelting the tiny transparisteel window in his room.

...Or she dies.

“NO!” Ben yelled, standing and sweeping everything off his desk as lightning crackled outside the Praxeum. He was panting, the mere thought of Rey’s life force being gone enough to send him into a blind panic. His knees buckled, and he fell to the cold stone floor as tears flowed down his face, sobs wracking his large frame as he let terror overtake him.
All he heard in answer in his head was laughter.

....

Rey sat up in her bed, her breath coming in gasps and tears flooding her eyes as she blinked, trying to get her bearings. For a moment, she had thought she was still on Jakku, the howling winds of the X’us’R’iia threatening to tear the durasteel walls of her AT-AT apart.

Ben...

Rey bolted out of bed without a second thought, one hand outstretched to call her lightsaber to her hand as she ran to the door. As she threw it open, Ben stumbled inside, his hair hanging in his face in clumps as tears ran down his face. He pushed past her, pacing back and forth like a wounded animal, his eyes wide and wild with fear.

Rey’s heart clenched in her chest as she took in the man she loved, clearly in distress about something as he wore a hole in the floor with each anxious step. Going to him, Rey gently pressed his palms against his chest and wrapped her arms around his neck. She instantly felt him relax, melting beneath her touch with a quiet gasp before his shoulders sagged and his emotions shifted. Burying her face in his neck, Rey felt Ben pull her closer to him, murmuring in her hair as he sobbed more.

You can’t have her... you’ll never take her. Not her.

Finally Ben quieted, and his voice whispered through the darkness, hoarse from crying. “Are... are you okay? I’m sorry I woke you.”

Rey shook her head softly, rolling her eyes in the darkness. “I’m fine, nerfherder. Come on, let’s get out of here - like we used to. I bet Luke is snoring in the meditation room when he is supposed to be doing his nightly rounds.” She grinned, reaching out with her hand to twine her fingers through his. “We need to stop in the kitchen first, though. You know why.”

Ben let out a wet snort, reaching up with his free hand to swipe at his eyes, wiping the tears away. The voice had quieted in his head with Rey’s presence twined around his in the Force, and Ben heaved a sigh of relief. “I think Uncle Luke is on to us by now, Ch’eo k’tusah. I’m pretty sure he just orders the kitchen droid to make sure aircakes are always stocked there for us.”
Rey let out a giggle, reaching out to run her hand through his unruly hair before tugging on his hand. “Come on, Solo.”

“Rey…” Ben glanced out the window, where the storm showed no signs of abating any time soon. “It’s storming pretty bad out there.”

“So? We both know that once we get into our clearing, there’s enough foliage to keep the rain to a minimum. You afraid of some water, recat sasni? Or are you afraid of being alone with me?”

Ben swallowed hard around the lump in his throat. That was the issue - wasn’t it? He couldn’t trust himself around her, not now. Not after the kiss they had shared, because if he started kissing her again - he didn’t think he’d be able to stop.

He loved her - Force, he loved her.

Bucketbrain. Ben finally looked at her, letting one corner of his lips curl up in a half smile. “That’s not very nice, Ch’eo k’ tusah.”

“Yet it has such a lovely ring to it, doesn’t it? Now come on, before Master Luke wakes up and we’re stuck here.” Rey tugged on his hand again before standing on her tiptoes to place a chaste, playful kiss to his full lips.

“As you wish,” Ben finally stood, wiping his eyes once more with one hand as Rey tugged his other hand, and all he could do was follow behind the whirlwind that was his beloved, trying to keep the darkness always whispering in the depths of his mind at bay.

*Soon, Young Solo. Soon.*

…..

The rain was relentless as they made their way to their clearing, the glow from the orchids casting an eerie light as raindrops fell from the thick canopy of foliage above them. Ben laid out a blanket he had swiped from the laundry before they sat down, and as Rey settled in front of him his arms went around her, pulling her back against him. Reaching into his pocket, Ben pulled out an aircake,
presenting it to Rey like it was some kind of rare treasure.

Rey half turned in his arms to grin at him before taking a bite from the cake and putting the remaining half to his lips. Ben complied, chewing on the tasty treat they had both loved since they were kids, watching Rey as she ate.

She had a crumb hanging on her bottom lip, and Ben surged forward, kissing her, his tongue swiping over her bottom lip to gather the crumb. Rey turned all the way around, her lips pressing to his desperately, as if it might be the last time they ever touched.

The laugh in his head caused him to pull back, his palms coming up to touch his temples as it ricocheted through his brain. *The power. The power you two bring to the Force… turn her, Solo. It’s the only way to save her. Your love for her will be your undoing…*

Rey’s hands pushed his out of the way, replacing them with her own on his temple as she closed her eyes. Ben could feel her Force signature reaching out to wrap around his, her light beating back the dark as she pushed against it.

As quickly as it had come into his head, it receded, and Ben’s mind was once again his own as he looked at Rey, wide eyed and panting.

“Ben…” Rey breathed out, his name like a benediction on her lips, “You need to fight it. The darkness, *I felt* it. It… it’s going to take you away from me. Please… remember your promise to me. *Fight for us.*” Her hands fell from his temples to his cheeks, and time stilled as they looked into each other’s eyes - neither one needing words to convey what they were feeling inside to the other.

Then their lips crashed together as they clung desperately to each other, both of them eager and hungry for more. Ben pulled her down to the blanket, covering her body with his as their kisses changed from exploratory to passionate, their hands also joining their mouths in exploring each other intimately.

Somehow, Rey’s hands found their way under his shirt, her fingers dancing over the muscular planes of his chest. Ben’s breath caught in his throat at the feeling, and in turn he let his fingers brush under the hem of her sleep shirt, travelling upwards over the soft skin of her stomach, until they reached the taut peaks of her breasts.
Rey let out a tiny mewl against his lips, and Ben pulled away, his eyes meeting her passion filled ones. Clearing his throat softly, he asked… “Is… is this okay?”

Rey gulped, the feeling of Ben’s hands on her bare skin left her feeling heady and needy for more. She had never felt more alive than when he was kissing her, when their hands were on each other. Words failing her, she simply nodded before leaning forward, her lips pressing against his once more as her hands started moving downwards, across his chest and over his stomach.

*Jedi. Get back inside.* Luke’s voice rang out in both their heads, causing them to break apart, both Ben and Rey panting, their faces red and their hands already itching to touch each other again.

*NOW! Four extra rounds of meditation for you each for the next week, plus you are both to clean the training rooms every night after dinner.*

*Yes, Master Skywalker,* both Ben and Rey thought, sending it out through the Force towards Luke’s presence within it. Their eyes never left the others, and as they stood, Ben pulled her into his arms again. Their lips met, and Ben had never wanted to slap his uncle more than at this moment.

It was normally a fifteen minute walk to the clearing, but tonight it took Ben and Rey double that time, as their lips and hands simply refused to be apart for long. Whether it was standing in the middle of the trail, or Ben pressing her up against a tree trunk, when they arrived back at the Praxeum, wet and disheveled as Luke greeted them at the door, his lips pressed firmly together in displeasure, neither Ben nor Rey cared what he thought.

They were in love, and for now, that was all they cared about.

They strode down the corridors towards their rooms, their clothing dripping over the stone floor, and as they reached Ben’s room they stopped, Ben turning to look at the girl he had loved since he was ten.

Rey wrapped her arms around his neck, pressing a kiss to his lips before pulling back to put her forehead against his for a moment before whispering, “Ch’ah ch’acah vah, ch’eo ch’etecerci.”

*I love you, my warrior.*
Ben smiled, and as she pulled away to go to her room, Ben said the first thing that came to his mind. “Ch’ah rsah.”

\[I\ \textit{know}.\]

\[
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* Reystrode down the narrow corridor of the S-161 Stinger Ben had “borrowed” for their little excursion, centering herself in the low thrum of the sublight engines as the sound of her boots on the durasteel grates echoed with her every step. The Mantis was both sleek and fast, and honestly something she didn’t expect to ever step foot on.

The craft that were kept in the main hangar of the Praxeum came from countless worlds across the galaxy, and the luxury yacht always seemed a little too far out of reach for a pair of young Jedi to be entrusted with. How Ben was able to get his hands on it, and why, was something Rey couldn’t quite understand.

Her fingers lingered on the cool metal as she slowly traipsed around the circular holomap at the center of the main hold, looking at the planet focused in the center of the image as she wondered what on earth they were about to go do.

Finally eighteen years old - an adult in the eyes of her master and the New Jedi Order - Rey tried her hardest to keep her emotions under control like she’d been so meticulously taught since she was a child, but her excitement to be on an adventure with her favorite person in the entire galaxy threatened to win out.

“We’re about to make planetfall and it looks like we are landing in a storm,” Ben hollered from the cockpit, drawing Rey’s attention from the holo table in an instant, “You’d better get up here and buckle in, it’s gonna get bumpy.”

Rey bounded forward with a low \textit{thunk} and \textit{clang} beneath her boots, ducking as she stepped into the cockpit. Her eyes scanned the wide-open viewport that gave them a bird’s eye view of the turquoise jewel of a planet sprawling out from the transparisteel at their feet.

Her eyes narrowed as she stepped around the console and settled into the copilot’s seat and slipped the harness over her shoulders.
“Please tell me that we aren’t making our approach through that,” Rey nodded towards the thick swirl of clouds that covered a large part of an emerald landmass.

“Our approach, yes, but ironically, where we are going is in the eye of that storm,” Ben answered, keeping his dark eyes focused on the task at hand as he reached up and flipped a series of switches.

“You weren’t kidding when you said this was going to be something I’d never forget,” Rey drawled, curling her fingers around the armrests of her seat, closing her eyes with a grimace as the ship gave a rattling lurch when they shot into the turbulent atmosphere.

The Mantis gave another heart-lurching rattle, drawing a sharp gasp from Rey’s lips as the craft dropped what felt like a mile in the thin, upper-atmosphere. Even with her eyes crammed shut, Rey could feel Ben brush up against their bond, sending a surge of comfort that eased the trembling of her hands while he dexterously guided them through the thick of it.

She let out a soft gasp of relief when the unmistakable feeling of landing gear gently pressing down on dry land reverberated through the tired ship with a creak, smiling softly when it was immediately answered with a swift kiss upon her lips and a playful order from Ben.

“You can open your eyes now, kid. The scary part is over.”

Rey rolled her eyes as she opened them, groaning as she lifted herself from her seat to follow him into the main hold.

“Don’t call me kid! If you haven’t already guessed, I am a kriffing adult now, Ben Solo.”

“Yeah, I heard a thing or two about it, seeing as you haven’t shut up for a single moment the last few weeks,” Ben drawled with a facetious grin, throwing her a quick wink as he reached out and pressed the release on the loading ramp.

As soon as the seal was broken on the S-161, a rush of wind swept in, flicking and fluttering every stray strand hair around Rey’s face. She shielded her eyes as she stepped down the durasteel ramp, scanning the environment to try and get a grasp of what they were up against. Maybe she’d finally be able to figure out the mysterious reason Ben had taken her to this world in the first place.
Rocky mountains dotted the distance, and a smattering of worn buildings dotted the hillsides. There must have been sort of a settlement there once upon a time. The ghost of the Empire remained, with torn and tattered banners fluttering in sharp snaps on the wind with the unmistakable eight-pointed Imperial insignia emblazoned on the crimson bits of fabric.

Ben hopped down to the ground and looked up at her with a broad grin, motioning towards the scattered stacks of crates across the glistening landing pad.

“Welcome to Zeffo, Rey.”

“Ben, I hate to break it to you, but if it was romance you were going for, I’m afraid that you kinda missed the mark.” Rey deadpanned, reaching out to press her palms on his shoulders as he guided her hop to the ground with his long fingers around her narrow waist.

“I love you, Cheo k’tusah, but this trip isn’t for romance. Not of the traditional variety, anyways. If I wanted to woo you, we’d have gone to Canto Bight. They are having a springtime festival of light right now.”

“That sounds fun,” Rey chattered as the wind sliced through the roughspun fabric of her tunic, “Let’s do that. It sounds warmer.”

“Quit your bellyaching,” Ben chuckled, reaching for her hand to give her a tug towards the structure ahead of them, “You’re a Jedi Knight now. The mission is the priority. The cold doesn’t matter. Once we get moving, you’ll forget all about the wind. We have an... acrobatic day ahead of us that is right up your alley.”

Rey’s eyes lit up as the heavy durasteel door slid open with a creak, and Ben led her into the dark. She followed him through a series of black corridors with only the light of their lightsabers to guide their way, until the durasteel at their feet melded into loose gravel and they emerged into the muted daylight.

Ben stepped out into the narrow, rocky basin and turned to smile at her with a proffered hand.

“We’re protected from the wind down here, and we’ve got a lot further to go. You ready?”

Rey met him with a smile of her own, that slowly faded away as an odd sensation pulled at her
from the back of her mind. She slowly turned around and looked back into the darkness they’d just emerged from and stepped away from the light.

“What is it?” Ben pressed, following close behind her with his blue blade held aloft to light their way.

“A feeling…” Rey murmured, her brows furrowed in deep thought as she followed the sensation that tugged at her senses, telling her that there was something she needed to find.

She stepped up to a black crate, and with a deep breath and a swipe of her hand with the Force, the lid burst open. Rey let out a laugh when Ben cursed and jumped backward, unable to help her amusement when a tiny droid emerged from inside.

A bipedal with a pair of legs and a flat, square head with a pair of wide photoreceptors, he looked to Rey to be both cute and functional. The little white and red thing beeped and whooped at Rey as she sank down to her knees to inspect his antenna.

“He answered her again with a few more beeps and whistles, cocking his mechanical head to the side as he spoke to her.

“Oh, classified, really? Us too, big secret,” Rey let out a laugh as Beedee answered her with another whistle, “The Jedi? You worked with Master Cordova? How long have you been here, little one? That was so long ago!”

“Rey,” Ben groused from behind her, “We don’t have time to be playing house with droids right now.”

“Hush, you. He might be able to help us. If he was here exploring the planet...what are the chances that he knows what we are looking for?”

“I haven’t told you what we are looking for...not yet, anyways.”
“Does it have to be a surprise?” Rey answered, rising to stand and planting her hands firmly on her hips, “It’s my birthday, after all.”

Ben looked from Rey to the droid, and back to Rey with a deep sigh and a roll of his eyes.

“I guess not,” he grumbled with a frown, “We’re going to find the Tomb of Miktrull to find a holocron.”

The tiny little droid burst into a series of excited whoops and whistles, climbing up onto Rey’s calf with a child-like squeal. The young Jedi Knight reached down and gave him a boost onto her shoulder with a broad grin at Ben.

“Lucky us, Beedee says he’s been there before and can help show us the way,” she laughed as she stepped past an obviously frustrated Ben and into the sunlight, “See? A feeling. My feelings are never wrong, Solo.”

“No, I don’t suppose they are,” he mumbled with an ache in his heart, shoving the dark, twisted voices in his head as far down as he could manage. They didn’t have much time left, and he was determined to make the most of it.

Rey stepped out into the clearing, glancing around at what appeared to be a long-abandoned village. She sucked in a deep breath and approached one of the doors, brushing her fingertips against the durasteel with a soft gasp. She turned to Ben with tears brimming in her eyes, tucking her bottom lip between her teeth to keep her emotions in check.

“Something...something terrible happened here, didn’t it?”

Ben strode towards her and curled his fingers around hers to give her hand a comforting squeeze.

“The Empire held an occupation here for a really long time. They used the planet, mined its resources, and drove the villagers away.”

“With blasters and AT-STs, right?” Rey questioned, dashing away her bitter tears with the back of her hand, “Damn them. Monsters in masks tearing families apart. Maker help if I ever meet someone like that. I’ll tear them to shreds with my lightsaber and make them wish they’d never joined the wrong side.”
“I don’t doubt you would,” Ben murmured, eyeing her warily as she strode away and deftly climbed up a steep hill to a waiting bluff, unable to keep the vision of the masked knight he’d seen during his trials from his mind.

He followed her over the hill just in time to see Rey look back at him with a grin before taking off at a run to elegantly leap over a wide gap between groups of the villager’s homes that were built into the hillside. With a shake of his head, Ben let out a quiet chuckle and bounded after her, letting himself enjoy the fleeting feeling of his weightlessness for a split second before landing hard on his feet on the other side.

They made their way across windswept bluffs, making their way up the side of the mountain where Beedee was leading them - towards a mammoth statue of an ancient Zeffo that watched over the entire valley from the peak.

The entire time, Ben kept his eyes trained on Rey, watching her every movement with a sense of pride as he thought back to the little girl he’d first met so long ago. The guardian of his dreams. The keeper of his heart. The only person he was sure he would ever love - who foolishly returned it.

He couldn’t be sure what was going to happen in however much time they were afforded before the dark whispers in his mind became too loud to ignore or push away, all he knew was that he loved her and would do anything in his power to protect her - even from himself.

The Jedi holocron they sought had been calling to Ben for some time. It whispered the promise of answers, but he was smart enough to prepare himself with the fact that they would more than likely be answers he didn’t want. Yet, his hope, the foolhardy kind that he’d inherited from his mother, held strong. He spent too much time hoping and praying to whatever gods that would listen that there would be some way for him to banish the voices so he could live the life he’d always dreamed about with her - with Rey.

They’d talked about nearly everything, from mechanics, to books, meditation - which Rey unsurprisingly and automatically turned her nose up at - and even podracing, stopping at a rocky clearing to share a Corellian aircake, just like they’d done since they were kids.

“All I’m saying is,” Rey’s voice echoed against the dark, stone walls of the narrow, ancient cavern they ventured through as she squeezed her lithe frame through a tight crevice in the stone, “If the Zeffo hid this thing so well, are we sure we want to find it? Do the Jedi want us finding it?”
“I mean...we could turn back and jet straight back to the Praxeum if you’ve had enough of being off-world,” Ben mused from behind her with a grunt as he pushed his hulking frame against the cool stone.

“Not a chance in kriffing hell, Solo!” Rey called out with a giggle, “Plus, we are getting close. *I can feel it.*”

“Me too, Ch’eo k’tusah. Me too.” Ben kept his gaze locked on hers as she pushed her way out through the final few inches and her face broadened into a wide-eyed gaze of wonder.

The stone walls had opened up into a towering cavern that reached hundreds of feet above their heads with a tarnished brass tower at the core. Ben strode up to the edge of the rocky cliff that stretched around the entire chasm and stood beside Rey as she surveyed their surroundings.

“I think,” Rey’s brow scrunched as she craned her neck towards the sunlight that seeped in from the very top, “I think we need to be up there...”

“It looks like we are at a dead-end and need to find some other way to cross, kid.” Ben shrugged, keenly watching Rey as the wheels turned rapidly in her mind with a delectable bite of her lip. The corners of her mouth curved into a knowing smile as a gust of wind twisted and swirled around them, fluttering the baby hairs around her freckled face.

“Oh Ben, you’re thinking so one dimensionally,” Rey’s grin grew and, before Ben had a chance to react, she took off running and leapt from the edge. His heart gave a great lurch as she plummeted into the dark abyss. Ben sank to his knees when she was no longer in sight, only to watch, wide-eyed, as she floated on a vertical gust of wind to a ledge high above him.

“Kriff,” Ben breathed a deep sigh of relief as she flashed an infectious grin down at him.

“Get up here, nerfherder!” Rey called out, turning on her heel to slip between a crack in the stone wall to the air outside.

Ben let out a nervous *whoosh* of air past his lips as he stepped backward until he collided with the stone wall, bouncing on the balls of his feet to encourage a little bit more courage on his part. It was true that Solos were brave, but they weren’t stupid. At least, Solos didn’t think of themselves that way. Ben was fully aware that a majority of all the stunts he’d ever heard of his father pulling off were some incredible mixture of blind fortitude and dumb luck, and he wasn’t about to chance
anything now. Not with Rey by his side.

He pushed off the wall with a yell, hurling himself into the chasm to wait for death, or the wind - whichever came first.

The wind, thankfully, won out, lifting him like he weighed almost nothing until he was high enough to stretch out and land on the ledge where Rey had.

Carding his long fingers through his hair, Ben squared his shoulders as he pressed through the narrow space and into the muted sunshine. Rey was there waiting for him, looking out over the world below with her hands clasped behind her back. Ben could see the glint of the Mantis in the distance and, if he knew any better, he swore that she was meditating.

“I heard that, you know,” Rey stated softly, the amusement in her dulcet voice evident from the very first syllable.

“If you tell anyone, I swear, in Maker’s name…” Ben growled, stepping up behind her to wrap his arms around her waist. He tucked his nose against the soft flesh at her neck, inhaling deeply as he centered himself in the steady rhythm of her heart. He smiled to himself when he felt Rey’s hands slide over his and her body melt against him. Oh, to slip back into the moment they’d shared earlier, alone in their place, with only the orchids as witnesses as they lost each other to the feeling of their bodies, and how right it felt to be intertwined in such a way. “You scared me, Ch’eo k’tusah. Please, don’t leap off any more ledges without me.”

“As long as you promise the same thing,” Rey giggled, leaning her head against his broad chest as she smiled up into the clouds.

“I promise,” Ben answered with a deep hum, “No bottomless pits for me, I swear.”

Rey turned slowly in his arms, wrapping her own around his shoulders as she reached up on her toes to press a lingering kiss to his lips.

“Good. There better not be, or I’m going to have some words for you.”

She bounded away with a grin, leaping towards a ledge above her head, catching her fingers in a loose vine to pull her to the top.
Ben grinned and shook his head, marveling at her strength as he always did. She always surprised him, even though he knew her by heart, Rey somehow always found a way to show him just how incredible she was, and how lucky he was to have her - even for a short time.

With a grunt, he heaved himself over the ledge behind her, turning his gaze to the gleaming archway to what he assumed was the Tomb of Miktrull.

“We made it,” he breathed, planting his hands on his hips as he caught his breath. Beedee let out an excited whoop and a whistle, eliciting a glorious smile from Rey that most certainly didn’t make Ben feel jealous of a droid at all.

“Beedee says it’s just below...that this is the entrance, and once we are inside and retrieve the holocron, there’s a way out...with the Force.”

“The Force, huh? Does he know how we’re supposed to get down there?” Ben groused as he peered through the metal carvings.

“Did you...did you research this mission at all, Hotshot?” Rey lifted her eyebrows and gave him a scathing look before stepping forward, “That’s it. I’m listening to the droid.”

“It’s just a droid, Rey,” Ben argued as he jogged after her, watching as she investigated every nook and cranny in the circular, gold space they’d stepped into.

“Never underestimate a droid, Ben,” Rey chided him as she traced the tip of her finger over a series of hieroglyphs in the metal.

“That sounds like something my mother would say,” he grumbled darkly with a frown.

“That’s funny, because she’s the one who told it to me. At least one of us listens to her,” Rey laughed as she stepped inside an intricate carving of interwoven circles on the floor.

Unexpectedly, the floor beneath their feet shifted with an alarming sound of crumbling stone, like the tomb itself was sinking into the mountain for the first time in a thousand years.
Rey reached out and curled her fingers around his arms, holding him closer as the platform sank further into the mountain, blotting out the light more and more with each inch they descended into the darkness.

Eventually, they came to an abrupt halt that sent a sheet of dust and rock raining down upon their heads as their eyes adjusted to the dark.

As connected as always, the pair of them tugged their lightsabers out and ignited them in a single, fluid motion, illuminating the darkest corners of the tomb with a blue glow. The Jedi Knights stepped forward, over bits of broken stone and ancient vases left behind from another life, a time long since forgotten by so many.

Each of their steps echoed high above their heads, lost somewhere amongst the shadows that lingered out of reach from their light. Beedee chirped quietly as they made their way deeper into the unknown, hearts beating in time as the call of the holocron grew louder.

At the end of a long, statue lined corridor was a dimly lit room with lamps that glowed with some sort of ancient magic that Ben didn’t understand. Rey gave him a sidelong glance when they both spied a stone chest in the center of it with the unmistakable energy of the holocron reverberating out from deep inside.

Rey sucked in a breath and gave Ben a small nod before she disengaged her blades and hung them back on her belt, kneeling slowly in front of the chest to lift the stone lid with a grimace.

“Be careful,” Ben murmured, his heart beating frantically with the anticipation of it all, curling his long fingers into his palm as the brightly lit cube came into sight.

Rey gave him a sidelong look with a dirty, yet playful, look. She traced the edge of her upper lip as she reached down into the chest and gripped the ancient device, practically holding her breath with deep concentration as she gingerly pulled it free of it’s home in the stone.

“I’m always careful,” she whispered, hazel eyes wide as the bright green light illuminated her face as she held it out between them, “What’s next?”

“We open it,” Ben answered, his gaze trained on the intricate carvings that made up each side panel of the mystical device. He lifted his palm with a deep breath and turned his eyes to Rey’s with a
Perfectly in time with the other, the pair of them sucked in a deep breath, closed their eyes, and summoned their combined Force energy towards the holocron. It began to vibrate in the palm of Rey’s hand, shaking with such force that Rey had no other choice than to let it fall.

The glowing cube stopped between them, glowing brighter than it had before as each corner rotated counterclockwise and the sides split open. Rey felt completely entranced by the sight of it, eager to reach out and touch it, summon every secret it held and absorb anything it would offer to her.

Ben clamped his fingers around her wrist, pulling her hand away as a voice from inside echoed out into the chamber.

*Long have I waited to see such a pair as the two of you. A rarity, to be sure, bound together since birth, the life force of your bond....A DYAD in the Force. A power like life, itself. Unseen for generations. What the Force has rendered within you both, not even death can tear asunder. The power of two will lead you both to great things, but beware - Your coming together will be your undoing. This...is the will of the Force.*

“A… what?” Rey looked to Ben with a baffled look in her eye that quickly turned to fear as Ben reached out with a grimace and Force-pushed her into the wall behind her. She groaned loudly with a swear as her head lolled from shoulder to shoulder. Rey reached up and pressed her fingertips to her temples, centering herself within the constant thrum of the Force.

Her attention was drawn immediately to the bright swirls of blue light ahead of her as Ben fought with a towering, mechanical temple guard. He fought valiantly, truly a vision of an experienced Jedi Knight that no one would trifle with for fear of the dangerous fury he’d bring down upon them.

With his teeth bared and dark eyes sharp, Ben gave the hilt of his lightsaber a spin and leapt through the air at the metal giant, only to be knocked out of the way like he was a child’s plaything.

“Ben!” Rey rose to her feet, tugging her dual blades from her belt as she lunged towards the fight, pulling the attention of the temple sentinel away from the fallen Knight to her, sliding on her knees to cut at the durable metal of their attacker’s knees.
She flipped to her feet in a flash, joining her lightsabers at the hilt with a twist of her wrists as she held out a hand to Ben.

“Looks like we angered Miktrull,” Rey muttered with a grunt as she hoisted Ben to his feet.

“That’s not Miktrull,” Ben groaned with a grimace as he held his ribs, “It’s a temple guardian. It isn’t alive, it doesn’t care what we are. It’s only programmed to get rid of any type of intruder.”

“Well, that would have been handy to know earlier,” Rey drawled before they both jumped into action again.

Rey dodged and parried as quickly as she could, as her heart thumped wildly in her chest. She split her blades, holding one in the reverse grip Ben had taught her as she lunged towards the damn thing again. Swinging with a roar, Rey swore she made enough solid contact that was more than enough to take away a limb and give it less to strike her with, but her sabers merely made a glowing scratch in the gleaming metal.

“Can this thing ever die??” Rey panted with a twirl of her blades as the mechanical guard pivoted around.

“It’s not sentient, so no,” Ben answered with a grin, bending back on the balls of his feet as he prepared himself for the next attack.

“How about deactivation, is that an option?” Rey bounded forward, ducking a swing of it’s heavy, metal arm as she slid between its legs, tearing her sabers across it with everything she had. She bounced back onto her feet with a determined look in her eye as the guardian, completely unphased by her parry, thundered towards Ben. “It must be powered by some sort of energy force!”

Rey scanned the shape of the vexing thing. Its body was built like armor, towering over them with each lumbering step. It had a broad head, square shoulders, and an empty chamber in the center of its chest that glowed a soft blue - until it abruptly squared its shoulders and shot a bolt of energy directly into Ben.

“Kriff,” she muttered to herself, sliding away from the guardian as it turned its attention back on her, “Get up, Ben! Hold it steady, I’m going to try and break into it and deactivate the core!”
Ben scraped himself up from the broken stone on the temple floor, giving his dark hair a shake as he centered himself in the web of life the Force wove around them, grimacing to hold the powerful sentinel still with his mind.

The guardsman began to slow with Ben’s laborious task, vibrating as it pushed to break free of the Jedi knight’s powerful hold. Their eyes met from across the temple chamber. Ben gave her an encouraging nod, with his teeth bared from the effort. Rey met his nod with one of her own, sucked in a deep breath, and ran as fast and as hard as she could.

Rey let out a shout as she whipped her body towards the sky, surging in an elegant arch in a way that was almost like a dancer, rather than a warrior. With her toes pointed, back strong, and her eyes trained on her target, Rey was as deadly as she was beautiful. She landed in a low crouch on the temple guardian’s shoulders, using the Force to keep herself steady.

“Hold it! Just a little longer,” Rey called out to Ben as the mammoth machine still struggled to break free of Ben’s iron hold. Her eyes flickered to his for a split second and marveled at the sheer ferocity of which he summoned the Force. She should have been alarmed, she should have noticed the way his rage simmered beneath the surface to call upon such power, but Rey could only focus on the way he looked at her - and how it made her body feel.

“Rey!” Ben bellowed through gritted teeth, “Hurry!”

She shifted her focus back to the task at hand, using the Force to aid her as she ripped open a panel on it’s back, tore apart a pair of dusty wires, and twisted their ends together. As soon as she’d done just that, the whole thing began to buck and wobble beneath her, taking step after rickety step until, finally, it fell to the floor with a lazy hum and a thunk.

As the machine crashed to the floor, Rey held her foot out with a pointed toe and a smile, grinning broadly at Ben’s open-mouth expression as she gracefully stepped to the stone surface.

“If I had known that there was going to be a near-death experience on this little birthday trip, I would have stayed behind at the Praxeum and died of boredom, Solo.” Rey clapped her hand on his shoulder with a breathless laugh, “Plus, I had to do all the kriffing work. What kind of birthday gift is that?”

Ben let out a soft laugh as he looked down at her, reaching up with his fingers to tuck a stray strand of her chestnut hair behind her ear.
“I’m sorry if this mission has been a disappointment for you, Ch’eo k’tusah.”

“A disappointment? Ben Chewbacca Organa-Skywalker-Solo, don’t you dare put words in my mouth!” Rey stepped up beside him, close enough that she could feel the heat radiating from his broad chest. “This has been the most amazing time of my entire life. Thank you.” Rey reached up on her tiptoes, her lips parting softly and her eyelashes fluttering closed to press a featherlight kiss to his lips - when a mechanical sound and the rumble of loose stone tumbling to the floor interrupted their quiet moment.

Rey whipped her head around and saw another Tomb Guardian crashing through a stone wall. They moved quickly, perfectly in line with the other as they dashed out of the cavernous chamber, scooping up the holocron along the way.

“It can’t kill us if it can’t catch us!” Ben hollered with a laugh as they bounded into another chamber and, seemingly, into a dead end. “Kriffing hell, I spoke too soon.”

“No, you didn’t,” Rey grinned as she nodded towards a fissure in the temple wall. With her teeth bared, she threw out her hand and pushed with the Force, sending the stone tumbling into the wide-open chamber on the other side. Beedee whooped and whistled happily as they rushed through the brand-new opening, “Beedee says this was the way out he told us about earlier, that was lucky!”

“I don’t believe in luck, Sweetheart,” Ben drawled as they barreled ahead and careened around a corner. Rey let out a giggle as he slid in a boy-like fashion on his boots.

“You ought to believe in it. You’re a Solo, after all,” she argued playfully, winking at Ben as she vaulted herself over a crevice and caught a vine that was hanging high above them. Her lithe body and strong muscles made quick work of the makeshift rope, easily climbing to the top to swing to a waiting durasteel platform.

Rey followed a feeling in the back of her mind as she waited for Ben to follow her, stepping softly towards the massive door that separated them from the outside - and the way back to the Mantis. The wind whipped and howled against the thick wall of metal, split with metallic sounds of heavy rain and the occasional rumble of thunder. They’d been through rain before, but this storm felt like something else, and that something told her that they were going to be on Zeffo a little longer than they planned.

Your coming together will be your undoing. What the Force has rendered within you both, not even death can tear asunder.
Rey shivered when the voice they’d heard come through the holocron seeped back into her mind, leaving her to wonder what in Maker’s name it all meant.

Her gaze shifted to Ben as he pulled himself onto the platform, centered himself with a stretch of his neck, and looked to meet her eye.

“Sounds like there’s quite a storm out there. You think we’ll make it all the way back to the Mantis before we blow away?” Rey queried, lifting her chin as he stepped up beside her. A sly, lopsided smile spread across his long face.

“What, are you afraid of a little bit of rain, desert girl?”

“Fat kriffing chance,” Rey argued, answering his grin with one of her own, reaching out with her thumb to press the release on the door to bolt into the downpour.

Only, it wasn’t merely a downpour. The eye they’d miraculously landed in through torrential winds that threatened to make the hull of the Mantis split down the middle had long since passed, bringing with it the true nature of the storm. The trees creaked, and the sky was nearly pitch black with a thick layer of clouds, with only the occasional blast of bright blue light when a bolt of lightning would fork violently across the sky.

Rey slipped on loose boulders as they skirted across the side of the mountain, trying to make their way back to the Mantis as quickly as they could - without dying a premature death first.

The rain pummeled them, making the ground hard to traverse across as it ripped across their skin until it was raw. Rey’s hair whipped violently across her face as she tried to wipe the water from her eyes and bring back even a fraction of her visibility. It wasn’t much, but it was just enough to glimpse a bright, cerulean blue through the sheets of wind and rain.

“There! Shelter until the storm passes!” Rey bellowed against the howling wind, pointing towards it to draw Ben’s attention.

“You don’t even know if the door will open,” he argued, his dark hair hanging in his eyes as the rain dripped in steady streams down to his chin.
“It’ll open!”

“How do you know?” Ben’s eyes narrowed with a frown as he reached out and steadied her on her feet.

“A feeling.” Rey stated, licking the rain from her lips as she gave him a trusting nod, “Come on!”

She wrapped her fingers around his hand and gave him a tug, holding herself steady with the Force as she skid down the muddy slope. The wind screamed more than it howled, whipping their ropes in sharp snaps against their flesh, urging them to move faster - like a fathier in the races on Canto Bight.

Rey shielded her eyes from the prickly sting of the rain, determined to keep her feet planted firmly on the ground as the whipping gusts of wind threatened to lift her from the planet’s surface and send her skyward.

She reached out through the Force and motioned towards the brightly colored, blue door as they approached, making it swing into the shelter with a crack. They tumbled inside with the help of another blast of wind. The pair of them turned into it and, working together, used every ounce of strength they possessed to push the door shut against the gale that refused to give them a single inch.

With a yell, Ben and Rey managed to get the door to shut with a _click_, and suddenly, the entire world was quiet. Like all of the sound was sucked away in a vacuum, the sound of the raging storm vanished in an instant, leaving only their labored breathing and the frantic beating of their hearts as accompaniment.

Their eyes met as they leaned, exhausted and sopping wet, against the smooth, cool surface of the door. The smiles in their shared gaze melted away as a charged silence stretched between them, and suddenly, the inches they were apart was too far.

They reached for each other in an enthusiastic and desperate flurry of limbs, bringing their mouths crashing together as Rey pulled at the dark tabard that crisscrossed Ben’s muscular chest. She’d never seen him before, not in that way, and while they were so delightfully alone and away from home, she was determined to find out.

Rey moved like her body had taken over for her, all cognitive thought suspended, and the only
needs she had was to be as close to Ben as possible and feel the same sensations they’d only begun to explore in their clearing. She reached down and ripped open her belt and unwound her obi, letting it all fall to the floor with a metal *clank* when the hilts of her sabers collided with the floor.

She let out a quiet whimper when Ben pulled away, his eyes dark and full of... *something* Rey couldn’t quite put her finger on. Lifting her gaze to meet his, she pulled her bottom lip between her teeth and gave him a nod, urging him to move forward and touch her in the way she so desperately needed him to.

Beneath his touch, as he slowly dipped his fingers below the dripping wet fabric of her tabard, Rey’s body bloomed, lit aflame with every inch of her his fingers caressed. He slowly pushed the modest fabric over her lean shoulders and let out a quiet growl when her tunic fell to the floor with her discarded belt.

“*Kriff,*” Ben murmured with a deep breath, reaching out to slowly brush the pad of his thumb over her budding nipple. Rey watched as a series of thoughts passed over his face. Ben Solo was never one for being able to keep his emotions to himself, always wearing his heart so obviously on his sleeve, no matter how he tried to hide it.

Rey knew a change was coming. She’d felt it since she was a kid, and no matter how much Ben tried to deny it, she felt it in her bones that their time was running out. Their love...their love was something special. Something rare. The holocron had told them as much. And if their coming together was to be their undoing, then it was already too late for them, so she may as well make the most of the time she had left before he was lost to whatever thing was haunting him.

Part of her wanted to fight, wanted to push him to battle against whatever darkness was eating at him, whatever thing he was keeping from her. But, from the flickers of it she’d seen in her darkest nightmares, Rey knew that Ben would have to choose to save himself, and no matter how badly she wanted it, how much she wanted to save him, it was something he needed to decide.

So, she foolishly pushed it aside and decided right then that, if this was to be their last goodbye, their last moment alone, then they were going to break every rule the Jedi Order had locked them into.

Rey stepped towards a wide-eyed Ben and tucked her fingers in the band of his obi, pulling the latch on his belt to let it fall to the floor with the rest of their discarded clothing. Her hands skirted slowly over the warmth of his flesh, taking in every blessed inch of his body as she pushed his tunic over his broad shoulders. A deep sigh tumbled from her lips as she looked over his body, unable to keep the soft smile of pure amazement from her face.
She reached out with the tips of her fingers, eager to touch him, to map the space between each blessed beauty mark that speckled his alabaster skin, but hesitated with a stern press of her brows when she saw the mottled, purple bruise that had blossomed over his ribs.

“Stars,” Rey whispered, brushing her touch gingerly over the injury, jerking it away when Ben sucked in a quick breath and winced. She lifted her eyes to meet his with a quiet sigh. His dark eyes shifted back and forth between hers, filled with a quiet sense of alarm as he continued to try and mask his pain from her. “The guardian really got you good, didn’t it?”

“Rey, don’t,” Ben argued as Rey stretched out her fingers over his damaged ribs, silencing him with a look before focusing her energy like a laser, circling her breathing round-and-round as she fed a fraction of her lifeforce into him - knitting his battered flesh and bones back together until the purple faded away and made it like-new.

She straightened up and rubbed soft circles against the ache in her palm, meeting Ben’s eye with a hesitant smile that melted away when she saw how Ben’s face had darkened into a pained grimace.

“Why’d you go and do a stupid thing like that, Rey? Huh?” Ben fumed, taking Rey aback with a confused bend of her eyebrows.

“It’s not a big deal. I just transferred a bit of my life energy to you. You would have done the same,” she shrugged, stepping up to him with a soft caress of her fingers against his cheek. He balked beneath her touch, and Rey’s stomach turned when, for a split second, someone different was looking at her from Ben’s eyes.

“What’s the matter with you?” Rey stepped away, stubbornly leaving herself uncovered as Ben averted his darkened gaze.

He turned his head away, gazing about the room with a press of his plush lips. Working his jaw back and forth, he sucked in a shaky breath through his nose before meeting her eyes again.

“Maybe it’s for the best if you put your clothes back on, Rey.” Ben murmured with a growl.

“Why?” Rey argued, taking a determined step towards her beloved, her eyes narrowed with a silent challenge for him to dare look away again.
“You don’t want this,” he motioned between them, averting his gaze as his voice cracked, “You
don’t want me.”

“Ben,” Rey’s voice was tinged with a surge of unshed tears and a flash of anger as she sucked in a
shuddering sigh, “Don’t you dare. Don’t you tell me what I want. What I should do with my body.
Whether it’s transferring my energy or giving you every part of me.” She stepped closer and gently
laid her palms against his quaking chest, “I love you. I want you and I refuse to let you convince
yourself that you aren’t worthy of me, because you are. I know...I know we are young...but I know
in my heart that there’s no one else. There never will be. Kriff, even the Force said so. What the
Force has rendered within you both, not even death can tear asunder, remember? I am here. There
is nothing you could ever do that would make me question my love for you. Ever.”

Rey sent a surge of comfort across the bond, smiling softly as the labored rise and fall of Ben’s
chest relaxed beneath her touch. She tracked him with her eyes as he bent down to the floor and
swept up their tabards - his black and hers white - from the stone floor. He held them between
them with a whisper of a smile pulling at the corner of his mouth.

“I….” he anxiously pressed his mouth into a thin line with a deep exhale from his long nose, “I
love you. I do want to be with you, more than anything Ch’eo k’tusah. But there’s something I
want to do first. Will you help me?”

“ Anything,” Rey whispered with an encouraging smile. Ben gave her a silent nod as he lifted her
hand in his and began to tenderly wrap the dark fabric around their joined hands. She watched him
as he wound the fabric again and again, dexterously twisting it into a figure eight with the pale
material of her own tabard - joining them together as one.

“Ben,” she whispered, her heart thudding wildly in her chest as the gravity of what they were doing
dawned on her, “We don’t have an officiant.”

“We have the Force,” he answered as he tucked the tail of their tabards into the folds, lowering his
gaze with a deep breath, “What the Force wills is…no matter time nor place. Through light and
dark. What the Force has brought into being, shall never be torn apart. No matter the time nor
place, we are bound. The Force binds us together for all time, as does our love for each other.
This...is the will of the Force.”

He held her eyes for a lingering moment, the space between them marvelously charged with each
shallow breath they took. Rey tucked her bottom lip into her mouth and whispered, “So what
now?”
“We kiss, Ch’eo k’tusah.”

Rey reached up with her free hand and softly brushed the softness of his cheek, letting her eyes rove over his face like he was something precious she needed to memorize, to lock away to remember in the darkest of moments. A smile pulled at the corners of her mouth as she brushed the moist tendrils of his dark hair with the tips of her fingers before reaching up to press her lips to his.

Ben answered her kiss enthusiastically, wrapping his arm around her waist to pull her closer with flesh pressed against warm flesh. Their bound hands held between their bodies would have presented a curious challenge to anyone else, but Ben didn’t let it deter him as he hoisted Rey from her feet.

With her arm wrapped firmly around his shoulders, Rey moaned softly with parted lips as they deepened their kiss, becoming more insistent, hurried, and greedy with each delectable twist of their mouths.

Ben let out a quiet grunt when his shins collided with a stone surface and reluctantly pulled away for a moment to look at whatever was impeding them.

“What luck, Sweetheart. I found a bed,” he rumbled with a deep chuckle before leaning down to resume where they’d left off.

Rey hummed softly, smiling against his kiss before letting out a giggle as they tumbled head first onto the stack of dusty blankets. They burst into peals of lighthearted laughter, breaking apart from the kissing that had distracted them so wonderfully well to untangle themselves from the other. With Ben’s guidance on the swell of her hip, Rey sat back on the woolen fabric, watching him contentedly as he lovingly unwound the fabric from their hands. He folded them gingerly, taking the time to press firm creases, keeping the black and white together - bound as they now were.

Ben leaned forward and let his long fingers caress the curve of her ribs, wrapping his muscular arm around her to hold her close as he slowly guided her back to the bed. Rey’s eyelashes fluttered with nervous anticipation as he brought himself to rest over the top of her and mapped a series of slow, molten kisses down down down, across her breasts, down her toned stomach, to the top of her trousers.

Her breath came in sharp waves, her hazel eyes ablaze as Ben hooked his index fingers in the waistband and leisurely peeled the still-damp fabric from her thighs. She watched him from her back, stretching her arms lazily over her head like a Loth-cat in the summer sunshine as Ben slid off the narrow bed and quickly dispatched of his own.
Suddenly, with both of them completely bare in front of the other for the first time, the stakes seemed higher, the risks greater, and their love more powerful than any of it.

Ben pressed his knees to the mattress, falling to his palms on either side of her as he settled over the top of her. Like it was second nature, Rey’s feet skirted towards her shoulders, lifting her knees as she spread herself apart for him, sucking in a feverish breath when the warmth of his body spread across her core.

In the dim light of the shelter they’d taken from the storm, Rey trembled as they sat on the precipice. The distant rumble of thunder and the muted howling of the wind seemed to flow in time with their quivered breathing and the frantic drumbeat of their hearts.

Rey could feel the warm puff of Ben’s breath on her cheek as he grazed the curve of her jaw with the tip of his long nose.

“Are you sure?” He breathed in her ear. Rey reached up and cupped his cheeks between her palms and positioned his face so that she could see the glimmer of his amber-flecked eyes in the hush of the quiet room. With a tilt of her chin, she pressed her lips to his and devoured a quiet groan from his mouth, savoring the sound of how she made him feel - committing it to memory so that it would last longer than the most precious stories in the Jedi Archives.

“There’s so many things I don’t know, Ben.” Rey whispered when she breathlessly pulled away. “I don’t know what’s going to happen tomorrow or in the next ten years. There’s so many unknown things on the horizon that terrify me.” She swept him up into another kiss, holding onto his muscular shoulders with all her might, sending a surge of love and comfort through the bond when his own, poisonous self-doubt began to seep through. “But this, Ben Solo. My love for you. My soulmate. My greatest friend. A dyad in the Force. My husband. I have never been more sure of anything than I have about this thing between us. I felt it from the first moment we met, do you remember?”

“Aircakes and orchids,” Ben mumbled, letting his head fall to lean against hers with a trembling breath, “I could never forget, Ch’eo k’tusah. Not ever.”

“You will,” Rey smiled softly as she carded her fingers through his dark hair, blinking in the murky light, “We’re here now, and what I know is that I want this. I want you. Forever, if I can.”

Ben nodded, pressing a lingering kiss to her lips as he held his weight upon his hand and reached
between their naked bodies to grip his length with his long fingers. Rey peered up at him through her lashes, giving him a resounding nod as she mouthed *I love you*.

Rey tilted her hips towards him, holding her breath as the feeling of his girth brushed up against her soaked folds.

She’d explored enough here and there in the quiet, lonely nights at the Praxeum, when her imagination would run wild with thoughts of Ben while he was away. In moments of delectable weakness, Rey would find herself unable to sleep unless she chased the heat that built up in her core, moving her fingers through her essence to spark a joyous sensation that only made her crave more. Crave him.

Everything the Jedi Order had taught her, had taught them, told her that what she felt in her body, what she felt for him, was wrong, but Rey couldn’t be convinced of their lie. Why would something so magical and pure and right be wrong?

Rey’s breath caught in her throat as Ben traced one of his thick fingers between her thighs, gently slipping inside her with a delicacy no one would ever think possible from a hulking man like Ben Solo. Her back arched off the mattress as he slipped in a second finger to join the first, moving at a languorous pace as he slowly stretched her and prepared her for what was to come next.

Even though she was desperate to stay in the moment, to be connected to him as they explored each other’s bodies, her body had a mind of its own, and she closed her eyes with a quiet moan as he curled his long fingers upwards and elicited a feeling Rey was never able to conjure on her own.

With each firm, yet deliberately tender, movement, Rey felt something strange and oh so wonderful build up inside her. An unexplainable heat that curled up deep within her, spreading out with a delicious heat that coiled around her every limb, every finger, and every strand of her hair.

“Ah, Ben…” she whimpered, coiling her fingers in her hair as she hovered on the cusp between agony and everything beyond. Rey followed the feeling, chasing the sensation as Ben continued to rock his hand against her core, pulling sounds from her lips she never thought she could make.

Her breath came in great gulps as she tumbled down from the heights, practically delirious, and yet— they’d barely scratched the surface. Rey panted with a bite of her lip as she looked up at her Ben—her lover— and watched with a wild sense of wonder as he held his palm out in front of his eyes for a moment before he dipped a single finger into his mouth with a groan.
“Is...is that all you’re going to do, Solo?” Rey teased playfully, her hazel eyes gleaming from the delectable aftereffects of her first gifted orgasm, but ravenous for more.

A slow smile bloomed across Ben’s face as he looked upon her with a laser focus, leaning down to slowly walk his naked body up the length of hers until their faces were level.

“I’ve barely begun, Sweetheart,” he growled, dipping his nose to trace the supple skin behind her head, nibbling at the tender flesh of her earlobe before he murmured again. “Those sounds you just made?” He shifted his body to her other ear, repeating the shiver-inducing actions. “The way you taste?”

Rey watched, wide-eyed, as he hovered with his face mere inches from hers.

“They’re better than I dreamed.”

“You dreamed of me?” Rey whispered, unable to help her bashful smile and the color that bloomed in her cheeks.

“Many times,” Ben answered as he leaned away from her and carded his fingers through his hair to hide the pink tinge on the tips of his ears, “Too many, probably.”

“I thought of you, too,” Rey murmured, completely caught up in the divine spell that was being woven around them, wishing they could linger in their little hovel for longer than just this chance moment. “Alone. At night, when I was desperate to sleep. I would think of you. Of us doing...this.”

“Of... this?” Ben crooned as he bent down and pressed a languorous kiss to her lips, taking his time to twine his tongue with hers, taste every inch of her, and do things properly before they had to rush back to the strict rules of their daily lives at the Praxeum.

“Mmm, a bit, yeah...and...other things.” Rey cooed, winding her arms around Ben’s shoulders to hold him firmly against her. She traced the tips of her toes up the length of his calf, hooking her feet around the backs of his knees with a slow roll of her hips, silently urging him to make the final move, and take her where she so desperately wanted to go.

“If you’re still sure...” Ben’s eyes flickered with worry, like she was a precious, fragile thing he was afraid he was about to break.
“More than anything,” Rey answered, lifting her chin to press a tender kiss to his lips as she reached between them and wrapped her fingers around his substantial length with the beat of her heart reaching a deafening level in her ears.

Rey sucked in a deep breath, keeping her gaze locked with Ben’s as they revelled in their unspoken bond, letting it do the talking as he palmed the curve of her thigh. He held her firmly as he lifted her knee against his chest, letting out a low groan as he centered the tip of his erection at her entrance.

The time stretched into infinity as Ben stretched her at a painfully slow pace. Rey let out a gravelly sob as he slipped inside, gasping for breath when a sudden rush of pain ricocheted across her body.

It vanished nearly as quickly as it appeared, and all Rey could think about was the divine sense of fullness that enveloped her, and the pressure and heat of Ben’s body being truly intertwined with hers.

Rey could feel him tremble beneath her palms on his back. The curtain of his dark hair shook with each labored breath he took as he focused his energy to linger in the moment and not lose control.

“Are you okay?” He gasped, his dark eyes out of focus as he absorbed his own version of their new, shared sensations.

“I’m-I’m good,” Rey breathed, giving him a shallow nod and a pained smile as her body shivered from the overwhelming flood of...of everything the Jedi warned her against.

“Are you sure? Did I hurt you?” Ben scrambled at his words, trembling in his own way, holding on to every ounce of self control he could.

“Ben ,” Rey whined with a buck of her hips that summoned an animalistic growl from his lips as he balanced his forehead against hers. “Move. Please. I need to feel you.”

She felt his head bob up and down against hers, sucking in a slow breath as he balanced his weight on his palms as he slowly, finally, began to move.
Rey let out a quiet mewl that was almost musical as they leisurely rocked against each other, taking their time to linger between each one. Ben lifted his head and brought the focus of his gaze back to hers with gravelly breath. He commanded her attention with every tender roll of his hips, holding fast to the way their connection flared in new, unimaginable ways.

The wind outside continued to sing its mournful tune, adding to the enchanting rhythm of the smattering of rain against durasteel, and the sounds their bodies made as they chased their shared release.

Rey could feel it cresting inside her, the unique combination of sensations that could only come from the joining of their bodies, intertwined together in something of a fever dream - something they couldn’t be sure they’d ever have the chance to do ever again.

Ben’s breath began to come in short, ragged waves as his movements came in short bursts, and he struggled to string his words together.

“Kriff, oh gods, Rey…”

With a low, stuttering growl, Ben’s motions came to an abrupt halt, and her ears were filled with a smattering of half-mumbled apologies as he collapsed on the firm mattress beside her. Blindly reaching for the blanket that had been there for only Maker knew how long, Rey tugged it over the top of them as she nestled herself up against Ben’s bare chest.

It felt achingly familiar, like the countless nights one or the other had spent in each other’s beds as they grew up, providing comfort on the darkest of nights. But this was something else.

Tucked up against him in a place that felt like home - with him - Rey’s mind raced as she traced absentmindedly circles across his alabaster skin.

The holocron told them that they were essentially meant to be - bound together since their births. A dyad in the Force, whatever that meant, but as she laid with the rhythm of his sleeping heart beneath her cheek, Rey couldn’t help but wonder what it meant when it had foretold that their coming together would be their undoing.

Had they just made a grievous mistake?
No. No matter how the darkness inside him terrified her and where it would lead them both, Rey couldn’t bring herself to lose faith in him. In them.

**What the Force has rendered within you both, not even death can tear asunder.**

The Force was on their side, and no matter what sort of trials they were headed towards, Rey had the faith and the hope that they would make it through. Her promise was her bond, and she meant it when she told Ben that there wasn’t anything he could do that would change her love for him.

Darkness loomed over them, but it wasn’t a battle that the Jedi were unfamiliar with. The whispers of the Sith had been around for over a millennia, and no matter the victory, they always managed to reach out with their twisted claws from the shadows. If the ancient ones could keep them at bay, so could she. So could Ben. She’d help him do as much, so that he could keep his promise to her.

*I’ll come back for you, Sweetheart. I promise.*

Rey rolled to her side, smiling softly to banish her anxious tears as she chose to focus on the man beside her. Her love. *Her husband.* Bound together since birth. A power like life itself.

She traced the tip of her finger up the center of his chest, marveling at the strength that manifested in the hard planes of sculpted muscle that covered every inch of his mammoth frame. Her hands continued their exploration, mapping the peaks and valleys of his collarbones, to the soft edge of his jaw to his mouth.

Rey lingered there, tracing one of her most favorite parts of him. They held his every emotion, delivered on the best and worst conversation and teachings, and carried with them an infinite amount of kisses. Kisses that Rey hoped would always belong to her.

Ben groaned in the dim light and shifted his weight to face her with a slow blink and a lazy smile.

“Hey.”

Rey met him with a dazzling grin of her own, letting out a soft chime of laughter when his fingers brushed across the skin that was still charged like a live wire.
“Hey, yourself.”

“That was,” Ben murmured, reaching up to coil a strand of her loose, chestnut hair around his finger.

“Incredible.” Rey beamed, tugging her lip between her teeth with a press of her thighs as the ghost of her orgasm ran through her with a shiver.

“I was going to say brief, but I’ll take incredible.” Ben let out a deep chuckle that reverberated deep in his broad chest, “You know, there’s a whole lot more where that came from.”

“Is there?” Rey cooed, grinning as Ben wrapped his arm around her waist and pulled her on top of him in a single, fluid motion. With her knees on either side of him, Rey walked her hands down his sculpted torso, stretching her shoulders in a way that instantly stirred Ben’s body against her core. She looked at him with a wicked gleam in her eye, giving her hips a wiggle that pulled a groan from his plush lips.

“Yeah, but it’s starting to sound like the storm is dying down. We could probably make it back to the Mantis in pretty good time, if you wanted,” the Jedi Knight drawled from his position beneath her.

“Shh, listen!” Rey held out her hand and lifted her eyes to the stone ceiling, feigning concern with a soft oh on her lips, “Oh my...I think...I think the storm was much worse than we anticipated and will delay our return to Yavin IV for at least a day or so.”

“If you say so, wife.” Ben reached up and flipped her to her back with a girlish squeal, wasting no time in devouring the delectable sound with his mouth. They were breathless all over again when he came up for air with the signature, Solo smirk playing on his lips, “Since we seem to be stuck here, we might as well make the most of it and... hone our skills in this new endeavor.”

“Oh, I love you ,” Rey grinned with a shake of her head, thankful that Ben was more than willing to play along and delay their inevitable return to their real lives.

“I know.”
They were one, and Rey had never been happier. As she lay beside Ben - her husband - as far as the Force was concerned, anyways, Rey pondered how they were going to make this work when they arrived back at the Praxeum. She knew Ben was going to be in trouble - he hadn’t exactly asked for permission to take the Mantis, and she was positive Master Skywalker would have an interesting punishment for his nephew.

A smile graced her face as Ben’s voice rumbled through the dark to her. “Stop thinking so loud, Ch’eo cabpen.” My wife. “You wore me out, and we need sleep before we have to deal with Uncle Luke.”

Rey giggled, her head finding its way onto Ben’s chest as she let her fingers dance lightly over his skin. “Well, Ch’eo capb,” Rey stopped as she used the Cheunh words for my husband, liking the way they sounded leaving her lips before she continued, “We had to make sure every surface of the Mantis was defiled well before we left the planet. I mean, we don’t exactly get a honeymoon, you know. You weren’t complaining when it was happening.”

Ben snorted in answer. “Like you would let me come up for air long enough to complain, you voracious beast. Really, Ch’eo k’tusah… we are going to have to be so careful when we get back. You know how Uncle Luke feels about relationships between Knights.”

“I know,” Rey whispered, falling back into silence before taking a deep breath and centering herself in the Force. Their bond flared into life, pulsing like a supernova, and Rey smiled as she saw the way her and Ben’s Force signatures were twined together.

*What the Force has rendered within you both, not even death can tear asunder.*

She heard Ben gasp, and then his voice came into her head, his voice within the Force the same deep timbre as if he were speaking out loud.

*Well, this is interesting. Perhaps we don’t have to worry quite as much when we go back to the Praxeum, Ch’eo cabpen.*

Ben kissed the top of her head, listening to the mechanical whirs of the ship as it hurtled through the hyperspace lane back to Yavin IV.

*Sleep, Ch’eo k’tusah. Ch’ah ch’acah vah.*
“I love you, too, Ben.” Rey whispered into the space between them as she closed her eyes and fell asleep, both of them safe in the other’s arms.

Their bond being different afforded them some liberties as they went about their lives at the Praxeum. Master Skywalker, as Ben had presumed, had been less than happy at the fact that Ben had stolen the Mantis and left on a mission that hadn’t been sanctioned by him.

Ben had to put in a lot of hours of meditation, and had to stay inside the temple taking dictation and translating ancient texts for two weeks. To say he was disgruntled was an understatement. Throughout the day he would complain to her through their bond, and Rey did her best not to be distracted. Master Luke had decided that her punishment was to be more meditation - as he knew how much she despised it. She always had trouble clearing her mind, finding the balance within herself. Only when she was with Ben was she able to find it - and now they knew why.

_Ch’ah ch’acah vah, Ch’eo k’tusah._ Rey smiled as she led a group of new Padawans through their Form I velocities. A slight blush crept onto her cheeks as one of the other Knights looked at her oddly for a moment.

She simply couldn’t think about Ben - her husband - without grinning.

_I love you too, Ben. See you tonight?_ It had been hard, with Master Skywalker setting a new routine and also using other Knights to patrol the Praxeum, for them to sneak to each others rooms every night - but at least they had the new aspect of their bond to help them through. They had been playing with it, seeing if they could manipulate it to touch each other, but so far all they could do was speak.

_Yes, Ch’eo k’tusah. I think I have their routine down now. I’ll be there._

Rey knew if she closed her eyes, she would be able to pinpoint where Ben was in the temple. His Force signature was so familiar to her, so wrapped around her own, that she wondered if - as time went by - it would become so intwined with hers that they wouldn’t be able to tell where one ended and the other began.

It was comforting to think about. Rey had been so lonely for so long on Jakku - and now she had
Ben. She had friends. She had *belonging*. She was happy, even with the feeling that something was coming - something dark, something that was going to tear her and Ben apart. She would take all the happiness she could before the inevitable happened. Sometime in the future, Rey knew she would have to cling to her memories, to the way she was feeling right now - because they may very well be all she had.

Turning her attentions back to the Padawans and their velocities, Rey tried not to think about being alone again.

…. 

They had two weeks of bliss before the voices started again. Ben woke in the night, the voice insistent.

*It is almost time, my boy. Soon, you will take your final steps as a Jedi, and take your first steps to fulfilling your destiny. Soon, you will choose the darkness over the light, just as your Grandfather did.*

“No,” Ben said, shaking his head, as if the motion would free him from the sound. “No, I won’t. I can’t.”

Pain exploded in his brain, causing him to hitch in a breath as he fought against the intense urge to lean over his bedroll and empty his stomach onto the floor. The pain intensified, every nerve ending on fire, burning him from the inside out.

*You can’t deny your blood, Young Solo. Your destiny. SOON. When I call for you, you will answer.*

*Or the girl will die.*

As quickly as it started, the pain faded, leaving him a quivering, sweating mess in his bed. He heard her voice in his mind a moment later.

*Ben? I’m coming. I’m coming, husband.*
The voices grew louder as the minutes ticked by, and Ben knew he wouldn’t be able to resist much longer. The darkness wrapped around him, around his soul, a little tighter each day, and even in meditation he still couldn’t find his balance.

Even Rey’s light wasn’t helping, and Ben did his best to distance himself from the only person in the Galaxy he loved, and who loved him in return. He would talk to her through their bond, trying to soothe her and making lame excuses for why he couldn’t see her.

But she knew. Rey knew.

_It’s happening, isn’t it, Ch’eo capben? I can feel it. It’s wrapping around you. I’m losing you, aren’t I? I knew it was going to happen._

Ben tried to ignore the tears she tried to hide, tried to ignore the urge to go to her, to comfort her. He couldn’t lie to her, though. He couldn’t give her false hope. He knew the dark would win, knew that the darkness was pulling him away from his beloved wife one painful strand at a time, until all that would be left would be so frayed, so in danger of breaking that he would have to close off their bond to keep it safe.

He wasn’t ready. He wasn’t ready to give her up, even though Ben knew it was selfish of him. How could he cling so tightly to her light, when all he was going to do in the end was break her, and cause her light to fade in his darkness?

“No,” Ben said out loud into the darkness of his room. “No. I won’t do that to her. She’s the only good thing I have ever had.”

_She’s a hindrance to you fulfilling your destiny, my boy. She will only hold you back… unless you turn her. Your love for that girl will be your undoing._

“No. I won’t. She’s the light. I won’t turn her!” Ben reached out in a fit of rage, sweeping everything off his desk with one arm. The chair was the next victim of his fury, as he picked it up and beat it against the stone wall of his room until it was nothing more than a pile of splinters scattered across the floor.
Good. Your anger will serve you well. You know she’ll find another, my boy. You know she doesn’t love you enough to join you. Search your feelings. You know I’m right.

Ben huffed out a breath, trying not to listen to the voices in his brain. There was no way Rey would love anyone else… not when they were bound the way they were. The Force had bound them together, and Ben knew that could never be broken.

The laughter echoed out in his head again, followed by pain that threatened to break him in two if he didn’t heed to the voice, to give in to it.

The Force didn’t create the bond, my boy. I DID. What better way to keep tabs on her than to forge a soulbond between you?

“NO!” Ben cried out, the pot of ink he used for calligraphy the next victim of his rage as he picked it up off the table resting near his bed, obliterating it with a great heave against the wall. The ink splattered across the stone, creating a black river rushing to the floor. Ben could only think it was the visual representation of what was happening within him, what was happening to his very soul.

He was racked by pain, and as he doubled over from it, dropping to his knees, he felt the darkness squeezing him like he was in a vacuum, sucking the lifeforce from him. He vomited, panting and sweating as the attack continued.

None of them love you, my boy. They tossed you aside like trash because they feared you. They feared the power within you. Even now, Skywalker is afraid of you, afraid of the very blood that runs through his veins, as well. She fears you, too, you know. She just wants you for your power, for your family name. She’s nobody.

Soon, my boy. Soon you will come to me to complete your training. Ready yourself.

The inky fingers that had been squeezing him receded, leaving Ben a panting, sobbing mess on the floor of his room, his only thought to go to Rey. She was the only person that could help him now.

It was raining again.
Rey lay awake in her bed, tossing and turning, her mind whirling with everything that was happening.

Ben was slipping away more and more every moment, and Rey knew she was helpless to prevent it. It was as inevitable as the rain pouring down on the Massassi temple she resided in, or the sun scorching the sands of her homeworld of Jakku.

She took a deep breath, centering herself in the Force as the first attack came against Ben. She sent tendrils of light towards him, trying to beat back the darkness, but it was too much. Something curled around her throat, pressing in until she started to see spots behind her eyes.

Panting, she sat up as a rumble of thunder shook the temple, lightning illuminating her room. It was at that moment that Rey knew without a doubt - their time together was over. As much as they loved each other, there was something else out there, a dark force so powerful that they couldn’t defeat it.

All she could do was let him go when the time came, and hope that the Force hadn’t lied.

*You promised, Ben. You promised you’d always come back for me, Ch’eo capb. Ch’ah ch’acah vah, seo.*

“I love you, always.” Rey’s voice was a whisper into the darkness of the night as she fell to her knees in the middle of her room, weeping for what she knew was about to happen.

….

It was raining again.

As Ben stood, his eyes surveying the wreckage of his room, he knew what he had to do - but he didn’t know if he had the strength to do it.

He had to go to Rey, had to hold her in his arms and tell her goodbye. It was the only way he could keep her safe. As he strode towards her room, fighting against the tears that wouldn’t stop falling down his eyes, Ben knew she was waiting for him, already aware of what had happened. She had
tried to help, his wife, his beloved, his *everything*, and yet she couldn’t.

Not anymore.

He reached her door, put his hand on the handle preparing himself to go in, when the voice came to him again.

*It is time, my boy. I have a task for you to complete before you come to me to complete your training.*

Ben nodded, tears dripping onto his cheeks as he turned away, his palm resting on the wooden door for a long moment before he turned and walked away.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading!!!
In Your Darkest Hour, I Hold Secret's Flame

Chapter Summary

“No. It’s all a lie. Can’t you see that? It’s been that way from the beginning. All of it. My entire life. Master Skywalker…ha...he can’t save you, Rey. Only my new powers can.”

“New powers? Ben…” Rey’s eyes widened as she looked over his black clothing once more and centered herself in the dark look in his eyes...how he held his body differently...how he himself had changed, “What have you done?”

“My name,” he snarled with a sneer, “Is Kylo Ren.”

Chapter Notes

Ben could feel it wash over him - the darkness - more potent than it had ever been before. He flinched as the ship shuddered, signaling their entrance into the upper atmosphere of the sulfur-
filled skies of the volcanic planet. It took nearly everything he had to keep his wits about him and not let on even the slightest hint of fear that lingered in the back of his mind.

Even through their faceless masks, Ben could feel their eyes watching him, appraising him, like he was a new toy. Freshly made and pliable to their needs. With a square of his broad shoulders, Ben kept his face impassive as he looked over the rag tag group of legendary warriors. Each one of them had a different, blunt instrument made for killing in creative ways - for control and for fear - but most of all, Ben could feel it in them too...the darkness.

He’d met them once before as a boy, and even then, Ben felt like he somehow belonged there - with them - so much more than he ever did at Luke’s Praxeum.

Their bodies all shifted in unison with the stutter of the heavily modified engines of Night Buzzard as the ship came to land upon the planet’s surface. Out of the cold vacuum of space, Ben could feel the heat of the world radiate through the durasteel. His heart flipped in his chest as he stood and strode to the top of the gangplank and watched in awe as the shadow of an obsidian castle came into view with the lowering of the ramp. Darth Vader’s castle. His grandfather’s castle.

At long last, after a lifetime of it being hidden from him with a curtain of lies, he’d finally arrived on Mustafar.

His six companions - The Knights of Ren, as they were called - flanked him on either side as they stepped down into the blinding heat of the magma covered planet. They’d picked him up on the Ring of Kafrene, plucking him from the tightly knit crowd of people who wanted to go unnoticed, Ben supposed that he and his signature stuck out like a sore thumb. They remained silent throughout the duration of their journey, keeping a veil of mystery over what’d they’d all been tasked to do, but the young Jedi Knight knew one thing for sure - even through their masks, he could feel their eyes linger on the shining lightsaber hilt on his belt.

He could feel the darkness swarm him as he stepped through the soft ash that fell down around him like snow - only it was burning beneath his boots. They watched him, even then, as they climbed steadily up a steep incline to where the mammoth castle stood. The tendrils of their doubt lingered in the back of their mind, but Ben couldn’t bring himself to care. Their power was nothing compared to his - and what he would become.

It became clearer to him with the heavy footfall from their boots, that echoed against shining black stone as they left the crimson-tinged sky behind them and sank into the darkness within. The closer he drew to the heart of the castle - the heart of his grandfather’s legacy - the further he stepped into the dark cloud, the more Ben understood what needed to be done - and who he needed to become.
Ben slowly blinked to adjust to the dim light within the grand chamber, letting out a quiet sigh as the delicious thrum of the dark side coiled around his limbs and welcomed him like an old friend. Gone was the pain, his fear vanished, and he was left only with the desperate sense of anticipation and dread of what would be required of him to do what he must - to save her.

*Ch’eo k’tusah. Ch’eo cabpen.*

*Come back to me, Ben. You promised.*

“My boy,” a voice rasped from the shadows in front of him, yanking him in an instant from the distant thought of her. He banished her face from his mind and turned his rapt attention to the phantom voice. The one that had haunted him since he was a child. Finally face to face with his tormentor, Ben’s face darkened as it stepped into the muted light. He saw his feet first, with golden robes that draped over the toes of his gilded shoes, and as he emerged, Ben took in the sight of the unseemly humanoid. He thought at first that it could have been human, but he was at least a foot taller than Ben, with long, hooked fingers, and a face so disfigured, the Jedi Knight wondered if he had ever been a person at all. Bright blue eyes, cold and unfeeling, gazed down upon him so sharply, Ben couldn’t help but avert his own as the voice spoke again. “Long have I waited for you to come to my side. It has been an arduous journey to find you here, and yours is only beginning. I assume you’ve come after the promise I made to you should you fail. What are you prepared to do, boy?”

“Anything, Master,” Ben rumbled to his boots on the obsidian floor, trying hard to mask the protesting of his heart as the words tumbled from his mouth.

“*Goooood. Now, give this here,*” with a wave of his hand, the hilt of Ben’s lightsaber went flying through the air to his waiting hand. He held the thing aloft as he inspected the details of the weapon Ben had so carefully crafted. “You’ve done well. The heart of it is strong,” he floated it back towards the knight. Ben gripped it with both hands as he brushed his thumbs over the gleaming, industrial alloy and felt the steady thrum of the kyber inside. He could feel her there, as beamingly bright as she ever was, the kyber she’d given to him.

*It doesn’t feel like me...it feels like you.*

...*take it...take it so that, when you leave me...you have a part of me to remind you to come home.*

The heart of it was strong, just as the specter of his nightmares suggested, and his heart ached when he thought back to the moment she’d given it to him, and all the promises he was about to break.
“Feel how it resists it...the darkness...I can sense how you hold onto it - to the light. It’s time to let old things die. It’s holding you back. Making you weak. It is time to strike against the light inside you. Snuff it out. It’s the only way for you to become what you were meant to be.”

Ben closed his fingers around the hilt and lifted his eyes to the humanoid who sneered down at him with a trembling breath as he held tightly to his resolve.

“Tell me what I have to do.”

So, he descended, both into darkness and the depths of the castle, following the twists and turns of the labyrinth that wound its way through the magma channels that made up the veins of the planet’s crust.

Further down he went, until a faint red glow began to seep over the obsidian stone at his feet. Ben slowed his steps with an anxious swallow, turning round a bend in the corridor until a great stone table at the center of a wide cave came into view.

Stripes of magma coursed in thin lines through the obsidian walls, casting an eerie glow on a set of mammoth tablets with eerie hieroglyphics etched into the stone - glowing so brightly that Ben, in all his studies, knew in an instant that he’d stepped onto sacred ground of the Sith.

They whispered to him, urging him forward into the room, tugging on his senses as the darkness enveloped him. He welcomed it like an old friend, and let it tether itself to his heart - a heart that he feared had already turned to stone - except for the part that belonged to her.

The murmurs of the ancient ones, rife with dark power, circled around him, overwhelming him with the delectable promises and threats - falling further and more readily than he thought he’d do.

Ritas shiyi Nu asarji dzis ri niati iw ri Jidai an tina dzu ki tos.

Long have I waited for the last of the Jedi to fall at my feet.

Ri drosar tuti zo tirmaka anas zitsiiji mus. Tirmaka nayir imohtini. Sosûtumohtirsiai ant ri drosar tuti zûtadijsatsa, ki drida. Ridasizi ji is tu'iyia asarsi.
The past is a ghost that haunts us. Ghosts must banished. Lingering on the past is weakness, my boy. Rid her from your mind.

J’us tuti tutsi, drida – kad Nu waria kots j’us!

You are strong, boy - but I will break you!

Tsias rurzu dias ri jin’ tnirma tnoi dro ri tarji iw ki ditra, Nu ra saiyr tuti zudyti.

As long as the dark side flows through the cracks of my flesh, I cannot be killed.

Ben shivered as their voices taunted him, pulling at his senses as they drew him further in - deeper - until his attention was drawn to the object waiting for him at the center of the stone table.

At first glance, one might have mistaken it for a mere piece of plastoid, bent and twisted from flames that had wreaked havoc upon it - but Ben knew better. He could feel it - feel him - as he stepped closer and was instantly overwhelmed by the presence. Suddenly, with the mask of Darth Vader, his grandfather, set before him - all of his doubt faded away and a different voice entered his mind.

Impressive. Most impressive. My son has taught you well. You’ve controlled your fear, but it is time to release your anger. I see through the lies of the Jedi. Search your feelings - you see it too. You do not need to fear the dark side as they do. Follow it. Embrace it and bring peace, freedom, justice, and security to our new empire. You’ve only just begun to test the limits of your power. Join me and complete your training. The saber. Take it.

With a trembling breath, Ben tugged the hilt of his saber from his belt and held it out into the faint red glow that shone onto the stone table. He could feel her energy - her heart - pulsating through the kyber at the core, and for an instant, he felt the urge to turn away from the delectable call of the darkness - the one that would inevitably save her - and run back to her arms.

I feel the darkness in your heart, boy. It consumes you. Let it in. Embrace it. Feed it into your saber. Corrupt it.

Ben held his hands out over the shining alloy as he centered himself within the twisted thrum of the darkness, welcoming it like an old friend as it coiled around his limbs like a poisonous vine. Only,
it didn’t infect him - it gave him life instead, and Ben couldn’t help but open himself to it - to feel the power of it all and how it surged deep inside him.

*Good. Feel it. Teach it your pain. Teach it your anger. Hear it as it sings a hymn of darkness. Make it bleed.*

Ben reached through the tendrils of life that the Force wove around him, pressing beyond to summon the darkest parts of him, the ones he kept locked away and well-hidden from everyone around him, but especially from Rey. He curled them around the pulsating light of the kyber at the heart of his saber, and staggered back when the stone instantaneously fought back against the darkness.

*Give into your hate and anger. Feel it. Let it flow through you. Accept it. This is who you are meant to be. Not the lies they told you. Remember how they kept me from you. Remember their betrayal. They were afraid of your true power - of what you would become. They must answer for their lies.*

The knight pushed with a furrow of his brow, tearing up another wave of his darkness from within, summoning it with the mere thought of sleepless nights, the moments of struggle when he was a child, the fear on his mother’s face when he lost control, and the way his parents sent him away because they didn’t know what else to do. Banished from his home to rot for half a lifetime in a place where he felt lonelier and more misunderstood than ever. A lifetime’s worth of disappointment and anger flowed through him like the scorching rivers of magma that bled to the surface of the very world he stood on.

*Blood of my blood...let the Darkness in. It’s in your nature. Welcome it. Bind it to you. It is your birthright. Hear the song? Listen, how the Darkness sings for you, my boy. It is attuned to you. Push harder. Make it bleed.*

With a surge of power, Ben pressed against the life force of the crystal, an inherently good thing that was perfectly attuned to the light - to her light - and pummeled it with his own agony, but it wasn’t enough.

*Your fear, boy. The anger isn’t enough. Give it more.*

Ben, with his eyes screwed shut in concentration, felt his face relax when a swell of light washed over him from the kyber that battled from within his grasp.
Come home to me, Ben. You promised.

He saw her, the curve of her face, the swell of her breast beneath his hand, the way her face contorted with pleasure as they bound themselves together as one. He counted the freckles on her face and the way her eyes creased as she smiled - but suddenly it all shifted. The bright light that surrounded her faded as an inky black seeped into his mind, painting everything in a shade of darkness.

His world was in ruins, broken and bleeding, and at the center of it - was her - tucked in his arms, with eyes wide and unblinking, and no matter how he searched for her light, it had been snuffed out. Dead.

The walls began to quake as Ben was battered with a different series of visions as the crystal fought back against his palpable fear of losing her. He staggered from the weight of it, coming in flashes so quick, he could barely keep up. His mother’s smiling face, younger than he’d ever seen her.

“I know. Somehow. I’ve always known.”

His father, in the captain’s seat of the Millennium Falcon with him as a boy, goofy eared with a mop of unruly black hair as he reached for a pair of golden dice hanging from the center of the console, convinced that, if he held them long enough, he’d be a pilot just like this dad. He could feel it - his father’s love. Something he’d doubted more times than he could count, but there it was.

"The boy had seemed to light up the whole world when he’d first arrived: this simple, impossible sliver of hope amid so much death and destruction."

Ben’s heart ached when his mind went to them and imagined what they would think, what they would say of his betrayal and renunciation of the light - even if it was the right thing to do. Even if it was who he was always meant to be at his core.

Lies. All of them. Don’t deny how they’ve wronged you. How they’ve betrayed you. They will betray you again. All of them.

He flicked away the light-fueled visions from his mind with a maniacal twitch of his head, summoning wave after wave of his pain, of his fear, the agony he’d felt for years at the hand of his tormentor. He was in control now. He was the one with the power. He could change her fate and
finish what his grandfather started.

The kyber at the heart of his lightsaber began to dwindle with each surge of darkness he used to twist and manipulate it, bending it to his will until he could feel the core of it start to shift. The light grew dimmer, smaller with each passing second as the delicious, crimson strands of the darkness roped around it, smothering the last bit of light, until -

Sunlight. Dripping down in radiant beams upon the vision of a boy with a mop of unruly black hair. His hand was wound around that of his mother’s as they strode through waist-high grasses. He tried to shrug off the thought of another memory of him and his mother. He wouldn’t be tricked again. With his teeth bared, he dug deeper than he’d ever dared to go, ripping through every ounce of light in his way, tearing it to shreds as the threads of darkness choked the life out of the light from within the kyber. His vision began to bleed red as he focused every ounce of energy he possessed, pressing inwards with the palms of his hands, losing himself to the delectable feeling of the dark side, when, with a blink of his eyes, he saw a flash of hazel looking back at him.

Ben stumbled backwards as the explosion of energy ricocheted outwards, leaving him breathless and reeling - unsure if he’d succeeded or not.

He cautiously stepped forward, closing his eyes as he let out a shaky breath. As he approached the stone table, he held out a trembling hand as he curled his fingers around the hilt of the lightsaber. Turning the alloyed hilt from side to side, Ben tilted his head to inspect the weapon and what bleeding the crystal had done to the weapon as a whole.

Evidence of the kyber’s valiant struggle stained the column of the hilt, with scorch marks graying every seam that would open to the heart of it inside. He sucked in a deep breath and squared his shoulders, hoping that they’d be able to hold the weight of what he’d done as he silently bid the spirit of his grandfather behind, turned on his heel, and strode purposefully out of the cave.

The first step had been finished - now he was fully prepared to do whatever else would be required of him.

*

His mind was blank as the shuttle he stole thundered through the endless expanse of stretched-out stars beyond the transparisteel viewport. He anxiously fiddled with the sleeve of the black armor he’d been wrapped up in prior to leaving Mustafar. Of all the things that his new master, Snoke, would require of him to do with the Knights of Ren by his side, this wasn’t it.
The clothing was restrictive and only spurred on the rage he felt inside. Mixed in with the guilt and dread that swarmed him, it only added to the dark fire that grew inside his heart as each moment passed on.

*Finish it. Tear it all down. It’s time for the Jedi Order to end. That is your task. Make the past die and return to claim your future.*

So, he reluctantly found himself returning to a place he’d already made his peace with never returning to ever again. He’d left - abandoned her like she so desperately feared - without saying goodbye, and he wasn’t sure how he’d he possibly be able to face her.

The ship thundered out of hyperspace with a crack, and the green jewel of Yavin IV came into view below him with the great gas giant Yavin Prime casting a glow over the console.

He curled his hands around the joystick, and with a confident crease between his brows, guided the ship into the atmosphere. What had to be done would be done, there was no avoiding it now.

Hurtling over the expanse of the jungle canopy, he tried to put the ship down as far away from the Great Temple as he could, hoping that he wouldn’t draw attention to himself as he nestled the craft between the snug carpeting of trees and vines.

As he stepped off the old T-6, the torrid air of the jungle world stifled him, aided by the black fabric that covered him from stem to stern. He trudged through the undergrowth, ducking vines that hung down from the very tops of the ancient Massassai trees, and stepping over bits of stone and ferns that painted the dense forest floor.

After what felt like forever, with miles walked on his new, black boots, a familiar sight came into view. One that both filled him with a sense of comfort, and a blinding swarm of guilt.

Even in the afternoon light, the orchid blooms gleamed like they were glowing in the moonlight. They trembled with the slight breeze that gently coursed its way between the maze of trees, and he was helplessly drawn to the center of the grove.

As the fading sunshine streamed through the coiled vines and collection of gnarled and twisted trees, he closed his eyes in the soothing cacophony of life within the jungle, centering himself in the bands of light that wound around him, knowing that he wasn’t sure when he’d have another
chance.

He’d hoped that the jungle would gift him with a little...he wasn’t sure what he was looking for, really. Enough had happened that he wouldn’t find such peace or serenity that the Jedi always preached about. Meditation would take on a whole new light in the mantle he’d taken on, but there was still part of him, be it the tiniest sliver of his mother he’d never admit to having, that clung to the tiniest shred of hope that it would work. That all of it hadn’t been for nothing.

The light faded away as he stayed at the center of the grove, watching the bioluminescent blooms come to life in a whole new way that never ceased to make him feel a sense of childlike wonder as they began to glow with an iridescent luminescence.

He could still feel it - the darkness - and how it bent and coiled around his own light. Closing his eyes with a frenetic twitch of his head, he pushed it back, pummelling it down as far as he could so he may hold onto the sliver of Ben who remained - even for just another precious moment. To linger in the place that held so many dear memories that were about to become merely a ghost of what they once were. A treasure to another boy - another man.

Even with the fortified defenses he’d built around his mind, to try and keep himself well-hidden and tucked away from prying eyes until the time came, he could feel her before he saw her. Glimmering like the dawn cresting over the horizon, her radiant light practically blinded him now that he was so far rooted in the darkness. As her steps grew closer, he squared his shoulders with a deep breath - with the acceptance that he wouldn’t be able to avoid what was to come - and how their worlds were about to change.

He’d have to leave her behind - just as she’d always feared he would.

Turning slowly, he looked coolly over his shoulder and met her gaze - wild and uneasy - as she tuck her lithe body through a wall of mossy vines. Her freckled cheeks were flushed a rosy pink, something he wasn’t quite sure if it was from the effort she took to get to him, or her underlying anger that he could feel simmering beneath the surface.

A silence stretched between them as Rey stood motionless, as she unblinkingly held his gaze. For a split second, he watched her hazel eyes flicker down the length of his body and back up, after which he saw her suck in a deep breath as her jaw tightened.

“Where have you been?” she whispered with a concerned crease between her brows, “It’s been days. We’ve been worried.”
“That’s not your concern,” he drawled in return, lifting his eyes to indifferently scan the jungle behind her, “Were you followed?”

“Followed?” Rey balked as she took a solitary step forward, regarding him like a wild Orbak she didn’t want to spook. He knew then that she could feel how firmly he’d locked her out, that one glance inside his mind would tear her to shreds in a way that he couldn’t bring himself to witness, “Ben...I don’t understand.”

“No,” he snapped, stepping backward as she inched ever closer, “You wouldn’t. You never could.”

“That’s not true. I know everything I need to know about you. I can help you. Please. Just let us help you. Me. Master Skywalker. You don’t have to do this.”

His head shook as she pleaded with him, tearing his gaze away from hers as he pressed on with what he knew to be true.

“No. It’s all a lie. Can’t you see that? It’s been that way from the beginning. All of it. My entire life. Master Skywalker… ha... he can’t save you, Rey. Only my new powers can.”

“New powers? Ben…” Rey’s eyes widened as she looked over his black clothing once more and centered herself in the dark look in his eyes...how he held his body differently...how he himself had changed, “What have you done?”

He coolly turned his eyes to his hip as he tugged the hilt of his lightsaber from his belt, lifting it between them for her to see. A soft gasp tumbled from her lips as he turned it slowly from side to side, showing the modifications he had to make in order to provide the weapon with some stability.

With a flip of his thumb, he brought the shrieking blade to life, painting their precious grove of orchids with a crimson glow as the saber spit and crackled between them.

“I’ve done what was necessary, Rey. I did it for you,” his voice was cold and indifferent as the darkness began to swarm him all over again, creeping up from where he’d momentarily banished it.
Rey’s eyes glittered with tears as she came towards him, closing the space between them with each tentative step. He watched her with a trembling breath as his love - his reason for everything - gingerly reached between them and curled her fingers over his on the hilt.

“Ben… Ch’eo cabp….my love. Please. We can figure a way out of this. All I want is your love.”

“It’s too late. What’s done is done,” he shook his head with a trembling sigh, “That’s not my name anymore. I hate that name. ” He slowly turned the blade from side to side, his eyes flickering across the jagged beam that once used to be a steady blue, “I was named after a legend - Obi-Wan Kenobi….big famous Jedi. Everyone thinks I’m supposed to be him. I never even met him. And Solo,” he let out a bitter chuckle as the plasma continued to spit and snap from the heart of the broken kyber, “Did you know that’s not even his real name? He’s a lie. My whole life is a kriffing lie.”

With a press of his thumb, he disengaged the shrieking crimson and pulled away from her grasp to pace between the faint blue glow of the orchids.

“I have my true name, now. My master helped me see what the truth is, and I accept it. This is who I am. This is what happens when you step away from the deceit of the Jedi. That’s the beauty of the Dark Side. I was scared of it before...of what it would mean - but it’s only led me to embrace my truest self.”

“No,” Rey whispered, attempting to close the space between them again, reaching towards him with a stretch of her fingertips, “You’re Ben. You’ve been him since the day you were born. And I have loved him...I have loved you for longer than I can remember. Don’t do this. Don’t take him away from me. Let me get some help. It isn’t too late,” the tinge of silvery tears pooled on her eyelashes.

“I won’t lose you, Rey. I’ve done what I could to prevent your death. I saw it. And....I can’t...I can’t lose you. I wouldn’t survive.” He faltered over his words as he choked back a sob of his own.

“But at what cost? You’re a good person, Ben. Don’t do this. You say you won’t survive if you lose me....but what am I supposed to do without you? I...I don’t want any of this if I don’t have you,” Rey reached up and dashed the hot tracks of her tears from her cheeks with the back of her hand.

“I’m doing it for you. To protect you. Don’t you turn against me...not after everything I’ve done for you,” he spat, baring his teeth with a snarl that made Rey instantly recoil.
“You’ve done that yourself, Ben,” Rey murmured, her brows creased with a flurry of emotions, “You’ve allowed the darkness to twist your mind. Can’t you see that is the true lie in all of this? You’ve let it poison you, and now you’ve become the very thing we swore as Jedi Knights to destroy.”

“Don’t lecture me, Rey. I see through the lies of the Jedi. I don’t fear the dark side like they do. If embracing it means that I can save the ones I love from death, then so be it.”

“There’s no time now,” Rey shook her head with a bitter gleam in her hazel eyes, “I’m going to get help.”

“Don’t. You don’t know what you’ll cause if you do.”

“If getting help means that I can save the one I love from a fate worse than death, then so be it,” she threw his words back at him with a poisonous glare as she turned on her heel to walk away. His heart lurched in his chest with a curl of his lips and a twitch of his fingertips.

“If you’re not with me, then you’re my enemy,” he hissed, curling his fingers into his palm with a crack. He felt a troubled sense of victory when Rey stopped in her tracks, spun on her heel and strode towards him with a fiery point of her finger at his chest.

“Your enemy? If you think that me or the Jedi are your enemy, then...then my worst fears have been realized, Ben. I know who you are...this isn’t you.”

“It is.”

“No. I refuse to believe that your choice has been made. I can feel the conflict in you. Your uncle loves you. He’ll help us. He’ll help you.”

“You put too much faith in him, Rey. He’d only turn against me. He’s been against me for years.”

Rey stared up at him with a trembling of her chin as she anxiously coiled her loose, long hair around her hand.
“Maybe I don’t know you anymore. The Ben I know wouldn’t speak this way. He wouldn’t break my heart by going down a path he knows I can’t follow…”

“Because of Luke?” he spat, angling his shoulder toward her as his fists remained flexed at his side.

“Because of what you’ve done! What you plan to do…stop this…come back with me. I love you, Ben.”

“My name,” he snarled with a sneer, “is Kylo Ren.”

In the blink of an eye, he reached for her, coiling his long fingers around her wrist to tug her to his side. He caged her face between his hands and pressed a ferocious kiss against her lips. Rey stiffened in his grasp, instantly shoving him away. He knew he must have looked wounded to her, but he could only focus on the taste of her that had been left behind.

Her chest heaved as the silence stretched to an unfathomable depth as she stared at the jungle floor, slowly tracing the tips of her fingers across the long line of her lips. Rey’s eyes flickered to his in an instant, and the next thing he knew, she was launching herself at him, slamming her lips to his and knocking the air from his lungs.

Kylo reacted instinctively, pushing every thought from his mind in order to let their bodies to communicate where words so hopelessly failed. That, through all of it - the light, the darkness, and everything in between - they still had this one thing.

The kiss didn’t linger. It wasn’t soft or tender - filled to the brim with a desperate need and a ferocious hunger for more that could only be satiated by one thing. With a growl, he twisted her hair around his fist, tugging her head to the side to hungrily mouth the tender flesh at her throat as she blindly pawed at his dark tunic with an airy whimper.

Kylo let out a deep groan when Rey ripped open the garment and brushed her palms across his chest, to push it from his shoulders to land at their feet in the orchid grove. Her fingertips traced the spaces between the beauty marks upon his flesh, like the maker had flicked a paintbrush and made them so. She reverently paid attention to each one, painting the distance her fingers left behind with a series of molten kisses.
He wanted to slow down. He wanted to remember every moment, ever delectable touch of her mouth against his, but he knew that their time was limited. It had run out, officially, and the tiniest shred of Ben who remained was desperate to stay by her side.

With a firm grip of his hands around her waist, Kylo lifted Rey’s feet from the ground and sank to his knees, paying no mind to the way the moisture in the soil seeped through the fabric of his trousers, abandoning all thought to focus on the task at hand, and the sense of urgency that boiled ferociously in his veins.

Rey settled her back against the moss-covered ground, blinking up at him in the muted blue glow of the bioluminescent orchids that surrounded them as she slowly pulled at the fabric of her obi at her waist, wasting no time to tug open the roughspun linen and shrug it from her shoulders.

Kylo groaned at the sight of her, with her golden skin impossibly lustrous in the moonlight. He reached out and palmed the swell of her breast, skirting the pad of his thumb over the pert tip of her pebbled nipple in a way that made her eyes flutter closed with a sigh.

He leaned down and devoured her mouth with a searing kiss, nipping at the tender flesh of her lip with his teeth. Her arms tangled between their bodies, frantically tearing at the waistband of his trousers to force the black fabric down as she pulled herself to her knees, flipping the control of their heated tryst on its head in a second.

Wrapped up in the intermingling of their shared breaths and the feeling of her bare skin against his, their hands moved at a blinding pace, shedding them of their layers - the physical ones, anyway - until they were both equally bare at the center of their sacred place.

Kylo leaned back and held firmly to her waist as she settled her knees on either side of him, balancing herself with her palms on his shoulders. With their chests pressed together and her heated breath in his ear, he growled softly as Rey tore her mouth away from the tender lobe long enough to sink down onto his cock with a quiet sob.

Her nose traced the edge of his jaw as she slowly began to move, sending an electric bolt of heat to the center of the molten coil that tightened at his core as she murmured in a heated whisper.

“Give it to me. Share it. It doesn’t have to be your burden to bear. Let me help you.”

Kylo leaned his head back and stared into her eyes with a sigh as she gave a leisurely roll of her
hips and her lips parted with a quiet mewl. Rey’s gaze was unwavering and sure as she sent a flood of her love through the bond that crashed against the fortified walls he’d built so carefully, like waves upon a rocky shore.

_Give it to me, Ch’eo cabp. I am stronger than you know. Let me carry the darkness with you._

With the tips of her fingers, Rey gently carded her fingers through his dark hair and gave him the tiniest of imperceptible nods. Kylo was hesitant, terrified that providing even just a taste of it would tarnish her light and he’d have to suffer the consequences of it.

“When _Give it...to me..._” Rey gasped with another heated twist of her hips. Kylo let out a strangled growl when she did it again...and again...until, with a clench of his jaw he relented, keeping his eyes trained on hers as he broke the seal on the barrier he’d built to keep her out - to keep her safe - and let a sliver of the darkness through.

Rey’s eyes opened wide with a fevered gasp, her lips parting into a soft _oh_ as it coiled around her, only adding fuel to the flame that burned so brightly behind them. Kylo reached up and cupped the curve of her jaw as her eyelashes fluttered closed, and he could feel in an instant that she’d grabbed hold of it and pulled more of it than he’d allowed her, wrapping it around her like a tantalizing blanket.

“Rey,” he rumbled into the moonlight as his gaze darted over every illuminated freckle, watching her every movement and reaction as the darkness settled over her. With the tip of her tongue, the Jedi knight ran it over the seam of her mouth with a quiet purr.

Her dark lashes parted slowly, heavy-lidded with her pupils blown wide open as her mouth opened into a silent moan of pleasure.

“I had no idea...” her voice was low as a slow smile curled up from the corners of her mouth, and with a single look, Kylo was lost to her in a whole new way. Part of him screamed to stop it, to tear it away from her grasp and leave the girl he loved as she was always meant to be, but, as wrapped up in the delectable intoxication of it all, he couldn’t bring himself to deny her.

He coiled his arm around her narrow waist and, fueled by his desire, rolled them to the ground in a single fluid motion. Kylo brushed his fingers along the long line of her bare leg, tearing his teeth along her flesh as he made his way to her mouth.
They were lost to it now, swimming together in the darkness in a way they’d never imagined, in all the ways they’d been taught to fear, but at that moment, all Kylo could think about was the feeling of her body wrapped around his and how easily, how salaciously they fit together.

Rey reached up to tangle her fingers in his hair, but Kylo answered her with a firm grip of his own, anchoring her hands above her orchid-haloed hair as he sank deeper inside her. Her chest heaved, rising and falling with each measured thrust of his hips. Kylo wanted to lose himself in the molten flecks of gold amongst the green in her eyes, how the muted blue glow of the orchids painted her flesh, eager to make what little time they had left - this single, solitary moment - last forever.

Their bodies - fueled by the captivating thrum of the darkness as it snaked around them, across their flesh and around their hearts - had other plans. The way the curve of her thigh fit so perfectly in the palm of his hand, the way she rolled her body to meet his with each lascivious snap of skin against skin.

The sound of their lovemaking - if Kylo were to call the more animalistic nature of it all by that name - echoed through the jungle, intermingling with the soft croaks of the wildlife and delicate song of the birds who filled the foliage high above them.

Rey’s eyes rolled back with a bite of her trembling lip as Kylo kept up the delectably punishing pace, bucking into her with a desperate rhythm that was only fueled by the wicked inferno being fed by their darkness fueled rendezvous.

He could feel that they were both close, both dangerously skirting against the precipice with each moment they fed into the dangerous appetite of the dark side. The scorching heat coiled deep within him, and he was suddenly, painfully aware of his ability of a mortal man - not a god like others claimed he’d be - and of the ache in his heart when he realized that once they were finished, it would very well mean it was the last time.

With a flex of his fingers and a honeyed whine from Rey’s lips, Kylo released his firm grip on her hands and went with her as she tangled her fingers in his hair and brought his mouth to hers for a scorching kiss, twining their tongues together as she hooked her feet behind his knees and rolled them to his back.

She buried her head in the expanse of sensitive flesh at his neck, trailing her teeth over his beauty mark speckled shoulder and up to his ear. With the tip of her tongue she flicked at the tender lobe and murmured in carnal whispers between each quivering roll of her hips.

“Ch’eo vust’i cart veo.”
My body is yours.

“Ch’eo ch’an’eci cart veo.”

My soul is yours.

“Veo ch’acuzah viz csabun can nen, nah cas ch’usci tuzir ler ch’at’ist.”

What the Force has rendered within us, not even death can tear asunder.

Raking her fingertips across his chest, Rey pulled herself up, tilting her face to the moonlight as she followed the divine spell they’d cast, chasing her feverish hunger with each libidinous undulation of her hips.

He watched her and found himself lost alongside in her in the hypnotic sort of dance she was performing, with her hand draped softly over her head as she got caught up in the sensation of it all, and her golden skin painted a muted silver-bue in the delicate shards of moonlight that streamed down in glittering beams from between the leaves of the ancient Massassai trees.

Unable to prevent himself from touching her any longer, Kylo pulled himself from the soil and firmly wrapped his arms around her waist, guiding her every moment as he devoured the quiet keens from the long line of her mouth. Together, wrapped around each other in an infinite band of lust and love, with a dangerous dash of darkness, they chased their shared release, breaking into elysium like waves crashing upon the shore.

Kylo let out a low groan with a shudder of his broad shoulders, nipping at the toned curve of Rey’s with his teeth as they both came down from their debauchery. It wasn’t something he’d planned or even hoped for. He’d left the Praxeum with an idea of what was to come in the back of his mind, and he’d certainly never expected what happened.

With strong, guiding hands, Kylo pulled them to the dirt that still held a surprising amount of warmth from the day’s sunlight, and held Rey close against his chest as the heavy rise and fall of their combined breaths slowed to a normal rate.
Slowly, he felt Rey release her hold on the darkness, as the web of life the Force wove around them became all the brighter with her restored back to her true self. He turned his head and pressed a lingering kiss upon her forehead just in time for flecks of the tiniest raindrops to freckle their bare skin.

They separated then, each of them wordlessly donning their clothes as a rumble of thunder threatened the storm that was to come. It wasn’t until the last button on his tunic had been snapped closed that Kylo drew his gaze back to Rey’s and the rain started to fall.

A silence, different than the others, stretched between them as the raindrops pelted their skin, Kylo’s eyes darting between hers as his heart caught in his chest and he knew that, without a doubt, the moment she had so grievously feared had finally come.

It was there, behind her eyes, and in the intermingling of tears and raindrops that coated her freckled face - the sad acceptance that everything they knew was about to change.

A soft smile curved up from the corners of her mouth as she tilted her face to the darkened sky before bringing her eyes back to him.

“Will you come back with me?”

Kylo looked to his lover - his wife - and let his eyes flicker to her proffered hand, letting a fraction of a beat pass by before stepping forward to take it with his own. He slowly lifted it to his mouth and pressed a lingering kiss to her palm before reaching out to wipe away the rain from her flesh with the pad of his thumb.

Their gaze remained twined together for a moment, desperate to linger in one last precious moment in their treasured hideaway, before Kylo leaned down and pressed a kiss - long and slow - to her lips.

They tasted like her tears, salty and impossibly sweet like the rest of her, and Kylo wished they could stay encased there forever, where the rain could cleanse him of his sins and wash away the darkness, blurring the lines between light and dark so that there would only be the two of them, somewhere between it all.

When they were feeling bold enough to break away, Kylo’s eyes were unreadable as she peered up at him with a hint of a precious smile that never quite reached her hazel gaze. With the tips of his
fingers, he caressed the curve of her face with a comforting nod.

“You go. There’s something I have to do first, but I’ll be right behind you,” he gave her a little push from his hand that was still intertwined with hers, letting his fingers slowly fall away as Rey took a step back. He saw the trembling of her breath behind the guise of her smile, so he pushed harder, cementing his lie with each one of his words, “I’ll come back for you, Sweetheart.”

“Do you promise?”

Her words stung and Kylo tried to not let her see, but he knew in his heart that they both knew it was a lie. Everything she’d feared had come to fruition, and it was too late to turn back. He let out a trembling sigh as he forced his own face into the ghost of a smile - the ghost of a boy who was long gone, lost to the twisted grip of the darkness.

“I promise, Ch’eo k’tusah. I’ll come back to you before you know it.”

She offered him one last ghost of a smile before turning her back towards him and walking back in the direction of the Praxeum.

His heart lurched with that tiny shred of doubt, that one seed that threatened to upend the entire reason he’d gone down a dark path and answered to the voice in his head, but he knew that, after it was all said and done, she’d be better off - and she’d be alive. Nothing else mattered if that one thing was true.

As her vision faded from view, Kylo turned his gaze to the bed of flattened orchids at his feet - evidence of their concupiscent goodbye. He choked back a quiet sob as he looked over the remains of the precious hideaway, and the physical manifestation of what he’d done - destroyed one of the only things he cared about for the sake of the dark call inside him. But, at the center of it all, was a miraculous bloom that had made it through unscathed.

He reached down and plucked it from where it grew, lifting it to eye level to look over the delicate flower, still miraculously glowing even though the moonlight had faded away with the coming storm.

How precious a thing to come from such a turbulent time, and how lucky was he to find it?
Kylo held it gently in his palm, afraid that he might break it with his too-big hands as he trudged his way through the bracken and bramble back to the shuttle he’d stolen a few days prior, eager to rest his eyes for only a little while before they came to make him answer for his promise to Snoke.

Tucked inside the old T-6, Kylo stripped off the heavy, wet fabric from his shoulders and slung it over the back of the pilot’s seat before him, and changed into a loose, linen shirt before settling himself into one of the snug bunks. He absentmindedly traced his fingers over the velveteen petals of the bloom, thinking of days long past and of her face as his eyes slowly grew heavy with sleep.

He wasn’t sure how much time had gone by when he was awakened by the low hum of a lightsaber.

Curled onto himself in the bunk, he slowly opened his eyes to the ship being awash with a green glow that sent his heart thundering with a surge of panic. With a trembling breath, he slowly turned over and came face to face with his uncle, his master, the hero of all the stories told across the galaxy. His mouth opened in horror as his eyes declared the truth of what his life had amounted to.

Luke Skywalker - hero of The Rebellion - stood over his sleeping nephew with his blade ready to strike, and suddenly - every word of the dark whispers that had haunted him his entire life were inexplicably clear.

They never understood him. They were never going to accept him. He was only ever going to be a disappointment.

Kylo never imagined that it would mean his death would come at their hands.

Without wasting a second, Kylo blindly threw his hand out and called his lightsaber to his palm, igniting it with a grimace to keep the green blade from slicing him through as he threw his other hand up to the top of the craft and brought it crumpling down on top of them with a twitch of his fingers as his uncle yelled out.

“Ben, no!”

Moments passed and Kylo could hear the Night Buzzard as it broke through the atmosphere, and he knew he was running out of time. With each labored push of his hands - assisted by the Force - he broke further free of the buckled durasteel until he finally reached the night air and instantly went barreling through the jungle towards the Praxeum.
His gaze was instantly drawn to the six warriors in the wide-open courtyard of the Jedi Academy in
the shadow of The Great Temple, eyes wild when they landed on the mammoth gun they were
towing from the hold of their malicious-looking ship.

With an anxious press of his lips, his eyes flickered across the masked men in front of him, to the
laser-cannon, and towards the temple when a cold wash of dread seeped over him and into his
bones.

_Burn it.. Destroy it. Finish it. Tear it all down. It’s time for the Jedi Order to end. That is your
task. Make the past die and return to claim your future._

The test given to him by his new master echoed through his mind as he watched the Knights of
Ren look to each other for a split second before he felt it. Beyond their doubt. Beyond their fear-
driven respect for the ignited crossguard saber that spit and crackled in his grasp. _It was her._

“ _No!_ ” Kylo bellowed, throwing a hand out to send the laser cannon off-balance, but it was too
late. A trio of blindingly bright crimson balls of energy went hurtling towards the ancient Massassi
temple, and the subsequent explosion ricocheted out into the jungle, knocking Kylo from his feet
to land on his back a few paces away.

The instantaneous flames curled out from the structure with a deafening roar, accompanied by a
cacophony of stone against crumbling stone as it all began to come tumbling down. None of it
compared to the cries of anguish coming from him.

Clawing at the stone, Kylo pulled himself to his feet and threw his body towards the now-burning
temple, desperate to get inside and help her. To find her. To save her from what he’d done.

Bolting towards the blaze, Kylo let out an anguished yell when a set of strong hands gripped him
around the middle and threw him back to the stone on his knees, holding him firmly with an assist
from the Force - from each of the six knights.

His eyes darted towards the Praxeum as he fought against his invisible restraints, watching in
horror as the monolithic building began to collapse inward in a swirl of flames and dust, ringing in
his ears as stone grated against stone.

Kylo frantically searched through the sea of lifeforms inside, darting from light to light as they
were snuffed out like a candle in stray breath of wind, and tore himself free with a scream when he came up empty - with no sign of Rey.

No no no no, it couldn’t be. Not her. It wasn’t supposed to happen that way. Kylo didn’t know what he expected, but as he tumbled to his knees with a silent scream, squeezing his eyes shut to the flames, he coiled his strong arms around his body to hold his emotions in.

\[A \text{ necessary sacrifice, my boy. I knew you were never going to kill the thing you love most, so I had the Knights snuff it out. It needed to be done in order to fulfill your true potential. The potential of your bloodline - a new Vader. Even he suffered the same fate and was all the more powerful because of it.}\]

The pain in his chest was inexplicable. Sending her away from him was one thing, but now - to have her so far out of reach, he knew he’d never see her again, not even to be reunited in the Force because of the dark choices he’d made.

He lifted his eyes to the searing flames that still consumed the inner structure of the temple, tearing their way viciously through bits of wood and the corpses that were surely there at the center, his breath coming in sharp rasps as he tried to swallow his grief.

“Why?” He lamented as the coils of his darkness licked gleefully at his misery, “WHY? Why did you do it? I never...I didn’t want this.”

\[And you did not choose it, Ben. The Jedi. SKYWALKER. They’re the ones who pushed you to this. Making you an outcast your entire life. Stolen so much of your life away. It’s time to move on. Embrace the gift you’ve been given. Come to me, and you will finally feel like you belong.\]

Kylo sank to the cold stone, pressing his forehead to the surface as he wished to himself that the ground would open up and swallow him whole, burying him with the rest of the Jedi who’d died at his hands. The tendrils of darkness twisted and wound its way up his limbs, and he couldn’t bring himself to push it down any longer. He welcomed the icy feeling, ignoring the last flashes of her face that echoed through his mind as the blackness drowned out the last bit of light left inside him - the light where the memory of Rey remained.

A scream ripped through him, torn from so deep inside that it terrified him as it forced its way from his mouth, like he’d released a demon that had been trapped inside him his entire life. Maybe that’s what he was to become, merely a ghost of the boy who loved and felt so deeply. Who was he to feel if he had no heart? What was there to fear if he was the fear?
Kylo slowly unclenched the fists he’d been holding so tightly his bones were beginning to ache, pressing his palms to the stone to slowly draw himself to his full height. He bent down to collect the hilt of his lightsaber, the one with the cracked kyber heart at its center - the one she’d given him, the one he’d broken - and coolly regarded it as he felt the weight of it in his hand.

With a trembling breath and a flip of his thumb, he ignited the shrieking, splitting blade and lost himself for a moment to the flicker of crimson that painted his face as it melted from grief to something darker and more sinister. Like a mask over the boy he was, he now wore the face of the man he was always meant to become.

Kylo slowly turned on his heel and watched with a cruel sense of glee as each of the six knights took a steady step backward as he looked from mask to faceless mask. Good. Finally he’d get the respect he deserved from the Knights, as he was their master now. The task had been done. The life he knew was over - and the new one had just begun.

His gaze shifted away as he disengaged the saber with a crackling hiss, striding forward as he hooked it on his belt.

“Let it burn. We’re leaving.”

As he strode purposefully towards Night Buzzard, Kylo held up his hand to halt the six men who’d fallen into line at his back. He dipped his body down and delicately gathered the iridescent blue bloom from the stone, silently marvelling at its continued miraculous survival. He didn’t even realize he’d kept it with him after fleeing the crumpled remains of the T-6 shuttle where he’d left the body of his traitorous uncle behind.

Somehow, through all the grief, pain, and darkness - the tiny orchid had been with him the whole time, survived and was somehow more beautiful than ever because of it.

* 

It was raining again.

Soft droplets stuck to her hair as the sky itself mourned the heavy loss before her eyes. The flames had torn their way through The Great Temple, disintegrating the internal structure into nothing as the blaze smoldered and turned the revered history of the Jedi Order to mere embers.
The fire and the darkness had taken what was alive and so sacred to her, and cast it to the sky like glowing bits of confetti that were snuffed out in the damp air to come falling softly back to earth like freshly fallen snow. As a jungle planet, Yavin IV didn’t have the climate for such a phenomena, but as Rey held a shaking palm out before her, it caught in her hand all the same.

She let out a soft cry, effortlessly summoning silvery tears that left hot, glistening tracks down her ash-dusted cheeks as her mind shifted back to the ghastly titian sneer of the flames, unfettered, devouring everything in their path with a ravenous hunger, licking and lapping at the now-charred remains of her brother and sister padawans who’d been unfortunate enough to be trapped inside when the structure fell - now one with the Force, snatched away before their time.

Even as the blaze began to die down as delicate shards of morning light began to peek over the horizon, casting an eerie, crimson glow over the jungle floor, Rey could still hear the jarring ricochet of the explosion in her ears, how stone ground against stone, smashing bodies into bits of bone and blood along the way. It was a sound that would stick with her forever, but none as much as the excruciating cries that came from him.

At that moment, as the boy she knew fell to his knees, clawing at the ground as the temple crumbled, Rey wanted nothing more than to run to his side, to take him in her arms, and whisper that everything was going to be okay, to soothe him from his nightmares like she’d done night after night since she was a child - but she couldn’t.

No matter how she wanted things to be different, no matter how much her heart ached to watch him fall, Rey knew in her heart that everything she’d feared had come to fruition. She had seen the signs for years, foolishly ignoring them, pushing the tendrils of warning the Force tried to show her through her dreams, and allowing herself to fall for him instead.

Even the holocron tried to warn her, but who was she to listen when they were already too far gone together to turn back? Perhaps he was always meant to fall, but no matter how deep her love for Ben, following Kylo into the dark wasn’t something Rey could bring herself to do.

It was tantalizing, to be sure, to feel it coil around her, whispering delectable promises as it took their pleasure to new heights. So tempting, that Rey couldn’t help but welcome it as she swam in the tragic realization that the most wicked of her dreams were about to become a waking nightmare in the form of the man she loved most.

Afterwards, as she released her grip on the seductive tendrils of the dark side, her heart ached because she knew that their time had run out. She tried to wear the mask of hope, to not show him that she knew how far he’d fallen, desperate to not give away her plan.
Rey could feel his lie in her bones. She wasn’t sure what she had hoped for, that he would take her hand, and suddenly the guise of Kylo Ren would fall away? No. She wasn’t enough of a fool for that, but she was smart enough to know that they needed help far beyond what she was able to give him on her own. Perhaps then, he could be turned back home.

She waited until she was far enough out of sight of their grove before breaking free from her slow, measured steps, taking off at a run to find Master Skywalker. Rey knew that Ben...no, Kylo - whoever he had become - would never forgive her, but she had no choice.

Luke had jumped into action, instructing her to follow him into the jungle so he may be able to hide her away from whatever storm was brewing.

So there she stayed, tucked into the shadow of the great Massassi trees as her world shifted on its axis.

Long after Kylo had left with the black knights who’d shown up during the blanket of night, Rey emerged from the jungle to quietly mourn the staggering loss of life at the hands of Kylo and his knights.

The softly falling ash tumbled down from the sky, sticking to her hair as silent tears streamed down her face, and after a time, just when Rey was beginning to fear that Master Skywalker had been lost as well, he stumbled through the treeline to her side.

Wordlessly, they stared at the wreckage, letting their eyes drift over the gaunt, skeletal remains of their home, still rooted to the festered, barren soil even after hours had long passed and the sun stretched up into the sky. Smoke bent and swirled into the expanse of crimson and blue, reaching out like ashen, gnarled hands, desperate to hold onto what was and make it whole again.

“I knew this was going to happen,” Rey murmured, her voice soft and raw from her tears. She lifted her gaze to meet Luke’s, whose own face contorted with bitter disappointment.

“Rey, no. You couldn’t have known,” he argued, reaching out to place a gentle hand upon her shoulder, “This isn't anyone’s fault but Ben’s. He made his choices, and now we suffer the consequence.”

“That’s where you’re wrong, Master Skywalker. I saw it. I saw his future, just the shape of it, but
solid and clear. I saw the signs, I felt it coming, but we hid it. And then...” she paused with a trembling breath as she remembered the ghostly green glow in the tomb of Miktrull on Zeffo, “The holocron said something...I should...I should have come to you then, and I’m sorry I didn’t.”

“What holocron, Rey?” the former hero of the Rebellion’s bright blue eyes narrowed as she turned her empty stare back towards the smoldering remains of the temple.

“The power of two will lead you both to great things, but beware - Your coming together will be your undoing. ” Rey echoed the ghostly voice that spoke to them from inside the ancient Jedi artifact, “I don’t know what’s coming, all I know is that I won’t have any part in it. I refuse to be a pawn in the game that the Force is playing with us. Dyad or not, I can’t. I won’t.”

“The power of two,” the Jedi master mirrored her words with a deep sigh, as his shoulders slumped in despair, “You’re not wrong. There is a darkness brewing. I thought...I thought that with him, we might be able to beat it back, but it’s too late for me. He was our last hope.”

Rey let out a quiet, trembling sigh, staring blankly at the slow swirls of smoke as her fingers absentmindedly hovered over her abdomen with a sigh. Their lives had been monumentally turned upside down in the span of a single night, but for Rey, it started before. She lifted her eyes to Luke as he anxiously prattled on about Ben’s betrayal and what it meant for them all when she pressed her lips together with a trembling of her chin, terrified that, if she said it out loud, then it would make the whole terrible ordeal true.

She whispered it softly, so much so that she wasn’t even sure the words had tumbled from her lips, but as Luke stared at her, she sucked in a deep breath and murmured it once more.

“No. There is another.”

Chapter End Notes

kaybohls here -

Thus concludes the first act of our opus. Heathyr and I are beyond excited over the wonderful response to this fic. It truly is for all of you, our love letter to the Reylo
fandom and what it means to us. Hope. Faith. Love...and family.

We are headed into The Force Awakens Land and we can't wait to share with you what we have planned!!

Thank you, THANK YOU for all the continued love!

xoxo kb
Symmetry

Chapter Summary

Nearly six years had passed since the destruction of the Jedi Praxeum on Yavin IV. Rey spent the time hiding, making a home for herself wherever she went as she tried to run from the past. Foolishly, the former Jedi thought that, if she kept running, it would never catch up to her, but with the First Order's tyrannical hold on the galaxy, it won't be long before she has to face what happened - and who.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was raining again.

She could hear it patter softly against the domed, durasteel roof of the subterranean home, lending a variation on the musical hums and clicks that accompanied the start of her day to day life. With a wide yawn and a grimace as the setla lamp next to her bed began to blink with a mechanical whirr, Rey stretched out her tired limbs before swinging her bare feet to the cool floor.

Shuffling her way around the dwelling, Rey kept the lights down low and her actions quiet as she went about her morning routine - blindly stirring together a hot cup of caf from muscle memory with another yawn.

After sipping at the welcome warmth of her drink, the woman pulled on her clothing, a departure from the roughspun tunic she’d worn as a Jedi padawan - yet just as practical. With a pair of worn, tan trousers, a simple tunic she tucked into the waistband, and a pair of leather cuffs on her wrist -
ones that made for a handy place to keep her smallest tools within reach - the tenacious and determined person she’d become over a handful of arduous years came into view with each piece she added.

Rey gave a quick glance at the steely-eyed woman who looked back at her in the mirror, letting out a lonely sigh as she wrapped a wide, thickly-woven Muunyak-wool cowl around her shoulders. The expensive material had been gifted to her by an old friend and had been invaluable to her after she wove it into the impossibly warm and delectably soft garment.

Leaving a solitary glow lamp alight, Rey ducked through the door to her humble home after tugging on her boots, closing it behind her with a hiss. She lifted her face towards the sky, where the early morning light lit the blanket of clouds with a warm, buttery hue, smiling to herself as the morning drizzle kissed the freckles on her face.

Going through the motions of her peacefully monotonous routine, Rey tried to find joy in the smallest moments. How the black, fertile sands of their temperate home, Lah’mu, bent and shifted beneath her every step, and the way the early morning light peaked in sharp beams over the dark hills that dotted the horizon.

The only sound to accompany her soft footfall as she walked down the rows of crops was the subtle *pitter-patter* of miniscule raindrops against bright, emerald green leaves. The world had been named for the Neimoidian word for prosperity - and it was no secret to Rey why it had.

After The Clone Wars, the planet - tucked far away from the prying eyes of the Empire, and now The First Order - had been a refuge to a few, scattered communities who found a home growing crops in the fertile soil.

It had been enough for her, to be so far away, but not quite alone. Alone enough, she’d suppose. Alone and *safe*. That’s what mattered most to her now.

The humble life wasn’t too far off from what she knew as a little girl, surrounded by the quiet as she centered herself in a daily routine that helped the time tick by. While she had her reasons - good ones - to keep to herself, there were times when the woman wished that she didn’t feel so lonely.

It wasn’t always that way. She smiled fondly to herself as she bent down to pluck a weed from between a pair of balka green stalks, thinking of the man who’d brought her the seeds - all of their supplies, in fact - and stayed for more than supper afterwards. It certainly wasn’t love, not for her, anyways, but it helped to have someone to anchor herself to on those dark nights where all she wanted to do was cry.
She battled through those solitary moments and set her focus on the task at hand - and the true reason why she’d chosen to keep herself so far removed from everything else. She strode through the rows of brightly colored Ferroan spinach, Bellissan peppers, and Ojomian onions - so vivid and bright against the stark, black soil - cutting topatoes from their vine with the small knife she’d pull from the leather cuff on her arm and put them to rest in the bag on her hip with bits of calarantrum root and everything else she’d harvested for the day.

Wandering slowly across the verdant and tranquil land, Rey hummed to herself as she adjusted a bolt on one of the many moisture vaporators that dotted the twenty-five hectares, reminding herself to tweak the geothermal vents of their dwelling before nightfall. The days were getting cooler, and the subterranean home followed suit as a result.

With a tug and a quiet groan, Rey tugged a lever on the vaporator to switch on the pump to move the water it had collected to the storage cistern inside. She let out a puff of air past her lips with a sigh, turning to stride towards home now that the morning’s work was finished, stopping along the way to switch on a SE-2 worker droid who’d help finish the day’s tasks and monitor their security while he was at it.

Back inside, tucked into the galley kitchen on the far side of the underground dwelling, Rey busied herself with cleaning and storing the day’s harvest, taking a moment to grill up a quick omelette with some houjix cheese and vegetables she’d picked the day before. She collected the meal in one hand and paused for a moment before reaching for a Corellian aircake with her free hand before venturing back outside.

It took a little effort but, upon their arrival on Lah’mu, Rey knew in an instant that she’d want to spend more than a little time on the peak of the domed roofs of the humble home they’d found there, and installed a series of short steps to aid little feet in climbing the often slippery surface. The view alone was worth it, combined with the sweet serenity the tranquil planet provided she’d always felt safe, even though they were so far away.

Sure, there were times when she’d look skywards, peering across the endless, inky blue of the night sky, wondering what was happening on the worlds she had dreamed of visiting in another life, wondering for only a split second if he thought of her. She’d brush the thoughts away in an instant, not unlike that particular moment when her whole reason for living would come into view.

Her face split into a wide grin as he slowly stepped up the homemade stairs up the dome, stubbornly unwilling to let go of the bright purple jogan fruit in his small, plump hands to hold onto the railing she’d created for that specific purpose. He lifted his hazel eyes to meet hers with an excited gleam as he waved the striped fruit at her.
“Tin’mi, look what I found!”

His raven curls bounced with every step as he made his way to her side, reaching out with his little arms for her to lift him into her lap like they did every morning. Rey circled her arms around him and nuzzled the curve of his ear that peaked through the curls with a smile.

“What did you find, Ch’eo Visahot?” she murmured as she combed her fingers through his hair.

“A jogan fruit,” he mumbled with a mouthful of the violet, Coruscanti delicacy, “I thought they were all gone, but one was hiding behind the nanowave!” he bounced triumphantly before turning his face just enough that Rey could see the smattering of freckles across his long nose, “When is Poe going to bring more?”

“Why do you ask, little one? Are you sure this is about jogan fruit or piloting?”

“Mmm, maybe both,” he grinned facetiously before taking another bite of the fruit, “Is both okay, Tin’mi?”

Rey smiled at her son, ruffling his hair as juice from the Jogan fruit dripped down his chin. He would be a sticky mess after his snack, and Rey knew she would have to chase him around their home until she finally caught him to wipe his face off. He had limitless energy most days, and Rey found herself wishing that he was with them.

Would she ever stop thinking about him? Ben had made his choice - and it hadn’t been her. She should be used to that by now. If her own parents hadn’t stayed - why would Ben? Why would anyone?

There was one constant in her new life, though, and the sole recipient of her time and devotion, and he was currently looking at her curiously.

“Tin’mi? You look sad again, do you miss Poe?”

Rey smiled as she looked into her son’s eyes and brushed her knuckle against the downy softness of his freckled cheek.

“I do miss Poe, but I’m okay. I’m just a little tired today. Now eat your breakfast so we can go
check on the kuvara trees. If you are lucky, they might have some fruit on them to pick.” Rey situated the boy next to her with a kiss to his plump cheek, brushing his unruly hair off his forehead as she set a plate on his lap.

“I love picking fruit, Tin’mi! It’s my favorite thing to do besides flying! Poe said when I get older I can be a pilot like him. Can I?” He shoveled a forkful of food into his mouth, his eyes glistening with excitement as his leg bounced as he chewed, “Then I can be in the Resistance and blast those pesky First Order TIEs!”

Rey grinned at the little boy before reaching out and ruffling his hair as he squinted one eye and pointed towards the sky, animatedly picking off imaginary starfighters with his own, silly sound effects, swallowing the fear she felt at thinking about her beautiful little boy being far from her side, traipsing around the galaxy - and coming across the things she feared in the process.

“You can be whatever you choose to be, Ch’eo Visahot.”

Rey ate her breakfast while watching her son eat his, listening to him chatter on about anything and everything that went through his head. He was so incredibly smart for his age, already showing the signs of a superior intellect and an aptitude for piloting. Rey had known he would be incredible the moment she had first sensed his presence within her - he came from good genes. She was resourceful and a survivor with a fighting spirit and strong in the Force, and his father - well, Ben was an incredible man. Even now, when he was steeped in the Dark, Rey knew if she let her carefully crafted shield go, she could reach out and find him within the Force.

“Tin’mi? Can I comm Kandri later? I want to tell her about the fruit I will pick today! Please?”

Rey let a chuckle escape her lips as she listened to her son. Kandri Terrik was his best friend. They had met while they were living on Pantora, and had spent a lot of time together. “Do you think Kandri will be as excited as you are, Ch’eo Visahot?” Rey ruffled his dark hair once more as he stuffed the last bite from his plate into his mouth.

The little boy nodded sagely as he chewed, his eyes wide and sparkling with excitement as he thought. He swallowed and stood up before setting his plate aside and wrapping his arms around his mother's neck, pulling himself close to her in a hug. “I love you, Tin’mi. You’re my favorite person in the whole Galaxy.” He pulled away and smiled up at her, and Rey felt her heart melt.

As her son slid off her lap and took his plate inside to be scrubbed off, Rey let her eyes wander over the horizon of the peaceful planet she had chosen for them to make their home on. She closed her eyes, getting some small solace from knowing that if she wanted to, she could drop the shield
she had built around her and reach for the tether that bound she and him together for all time.

He’d made his choice, one that prevented her from opening herself up to exposing herself - to exposing them - and putting them in an impossible situation that would be hard to dig out of. It was for the best that Rey had kept them hidden away, in more ways than one, but it didn’t stop the ache in her heart for the boy that she knew. She wanted to - so many times, in the middle of the night - she would wake from a nightmare and start to reach for him through the Force, only to be met by the wall she had erected between them.

Still, he was out there, and that was enough. For now.

Something told her, though, that she would see him again, and she wondered - could you really live your whole life without seeing the other half of your soul?

With a sigh and a sad shake of her head, Rey stood and made her way down the steps to go inside and wash the breakfast dishes before they began their day officially.

***

Rey let out a quiet, anxious sigh as she brought the old VCX-100 light freighter out of hyperspace above the blue-green jewel of D’Qar, reaching up over her head to scan for any sign of any First Order ships that might be lingering in the Ileenium System. They didn’t go off-world often, and without the Force to alert her to nearby threats, Rey was vigilant about staying on her guard.

Closing herself off from the Force had been a necessary thing, another shield to protect them from the growing darkness in the galaxy. Even though sometimes it felt like she was missing a limb, she’d grown used to it after a time and knew that for her child, she’d do anything.

The boy never suffered from boredom on Lah’mu, and Rey found herself invested in a more untraditional type of education. While she loved their quiet life on the fertile world, she made sure that - as long as it was safe and very, very carefully planned - the boy was able to explore other worlds and broaden his horizons.

It wasn’t long after things had fallen apart on Yavin IV before the full might of the First Order was shown to the galaxy. New Republic worlds had been safe - for the most part - and Rey found solace tucked away from prying eyes on Pantora. There, as a secret guest of the Pantoran senator - a friend of the “family” - Rey grieved the life she had before, the boy she’d known, and revelled in
the complicated joy of bringing her boy into the world.

The pair of them stayed there for a time, where close, secret visitors would flock to their side until, after three glorious summers had come and gone, Rey decided it was time for them to move on.

The whispers of the First Order had become too loud for them to stay any longer, even in the far reaches of the Outer Rim, so they did what Rey planned to do all along. They ran.

There were so many things that Rey loved about their vagabond existence, a sense of detachment and indifference to material items that she’d been so used to doing as a child on Jakku, with the clothes on her back as the only things she needed. Granted, a child needed something more than just a roughspun tunic and portions to survive. She certainly did, and Luke Skywalker had been the one to give her a home - one that became more about a person than things.

To her, that was the most important thing - that they were together. Together, where Rey could see her boy and be sure of her safety. Where was less important.

From time to time, they’d venture away from their home at the time, and Rey would let herself delight in the boy’s wonder when they’d travel to distant worlds. Her heart would feel impossibly full as he would bound from stall to stall, oftentimes with Poe by her side as extra security - and extra company - in a marketplace on Nantoon, or a secluded farm on Lothal, where it was only a matter of seconds before the boy had befriended a loth-cat.

Their life had been a quiet adventure, punctuated with the occasional visit to a certain person that had made Rey feel conflicted at first, but as time went by, she began to look forward to the visits and immersing herself in a world that had been so important to her in the past - even if just for a few hours.

So, when Rey had received a ping on her secure commlink, her heart had given an unexpected lurch, like their visit was something more than the usual.

It lingered as the boy had excitedly bounded from end to end of their subterranean dwelling on Lah’mu, and remained in the back of her mind as they hurtled out of hyperspace above D’Qar.

Rey maneuvered the old light freighter through the rocky rings of the planet, bringing them easily into the atmosphere and guiding it to land amongst the shallow emerald, grassy knolls on the planet’s surface.
Before the main engines had barely quieted, the dark haired boy had leapt from his seat in the cockpit and dashed out the hold door and out into the sunshine. A broad smile bloomed across her face as she followed him out of the ship, lifting her hand to her brow to block the bright light from her eyes as she looked across the narrow landing strip.

On all their other visits to the secret Resistance base, they’d always arrived with the smiling face of Poe Dameron to welcome them, with a little orange and white BB unit hot on his heels, but as Rey watched her son zig zag across the tarmac - peeking behind storage crates and in empty x-wing cockpits - it dawned on both of them that their favorite starfighter pilot wasn’t coming out to join them.

Rey waved him over with a wiggle of her fingers, smiling again when a petite blonde jogged out from the hangar tucked into the side of the sprawling hills.

“Kaydel!” the boy exclaimed, hurtling himself at their old friend in the blink of an eye. The young woman beamed, wrapping her arms around him before standing to offer him her hand.

“I hope you two are well, it’s been so long since we’ve seen you,” the Resistance officer stated, looking between Rey and her son, “Things have been...busy here.”

“Busy?” Rey inquired, falling easily into step with the woman she’d known for years now, “Good busy or bad busy?”

“I...uh...you know that it’s usually a mixed bag,” the blonde laughed, making a face at the little boy who answered her with a giggle.

“Is ‘busy’ where Poe is? Usually he…” Rey motioned back towards the old VCX-100 light freighter behind them, “He’s always here.”

“Is he off exploding TIE fighters in Black One?” The boy bounded on the balls of his feet as they stepped into the cool shadows of the hangar, each corner busier than the last with the mix of brown Resistance uniforms and orange X-Wing flight suits as he mimicked the sound of turbolasers with his stout little fingers.

“Come on,” Lieutenant Connix gave his hand a tug, “The General is expecting you.”
The trio wound their way through the labyrinth beneath the hillside, past people from every walk of life from the furthest reaches of the galaxy - each face known to the little boy and much beloved by them all. His freckled face had to be aching from the strength of his smile - one that only grew when they stepped around a corner and a low alto called out to them.

“There’s my little starfighter!”

“K’sio’ten!” he beamed, yanking himself from Rey’s hand without a second thought, flinging himself into the arms of an older woman.

Her hair, still long like it had been in her youth, with silver threads running through the dark brown, was twisted around her head in a thick braid. Worn hands, adorned with unique rings, brushed through the boy’s thick, black curls as she held the boy close and whispered in his ear.

Rey stood back as the former Princess of Alderaan shared a moment with her grandson, breathing slowly through the ever-present ache in her heart when Leia lifted the five year old into her arms with a quiet groan, settling into a wide chair in the cozy room before pressing a lingering kiss to his forehead.

“Oh, I can’t tell you how wonderful it feels to have you in my arms, Sweetheart,” the General tucked her nose into his hair, closing her dark eyes to breathe him in with a sigh.

The bittersweetness of it all was never lost on her, more sweet than sour as they both watched the boy grow, but the ache was ever-present when the missing piece to their puzzle was all the more obvious as they watched him grow.

As the years had gone by, after the initial shock and pain of it, Rey and Leia had grown close, and the former Jedi had begun to understand and realize the kind of pain the matriarch had to endure her entire life. From the destruction of her home, the near loss of her then-lover, enslavement, countless bitter losses and even more incredible victories - it wasn’t until Rey saw her own son blossom in front of her very own eyes that she understood the depth of the heartache Leia must have felt at the loss and betrayal of her own son.

Rey could see it as clear as day, folded between flecks of amber in her brown eyes - eyes that were so much like his - as she held the boy close, offering a wistful smile to Rey from across the room, “How long do I get to keep you, little Starfighter?”
“Forever, I hope, K’sio’ten,” the little boy wrapped his arms around his grandmother’s neck and gave her a squeeze that summoned a broad smile on the older woman’s face, “So then Poe can teach me how to fly and I can join the Resistance.”

“Oh, darling, you know I love a fresh-face recruit. We need all the help we can get for the Resistance, but we’ll have to wait on your pilot training,” Leia smiled with a soft sigh as she reached up to card her fingers through his dark curls.

“How come?” he inquired as he fiddled with the twin blue stones twined in gold around her finger, “Cause Poe’s not here?”

“You never miss a beat, do you, my darling?” Leia laughed, tucking her fingers to his sides to tickle him until he answered with his own peals of effervescent giggles.

“You know he noticed that he wasn’t here as soon as we arrived. Those two,” Rey breathed, chewing on the inside of her lip as she met Leia’s eyes with a sad smile, “They have a wonderful bond.”

“It’s okay, you know,” the corners of Leia’s dark eyes crinkled, giving Rey a knowing look. She should have known that the General would have figured out that she and Poe were more...complicated...than just friends, but the guilt and sense of betrayal hurt all the same, “He made his choice. It’s okay for you to be happy.”

“Who made his choice, K’sio’ten?” the inquisitive boy looked up to clutch his grandmother’s face between his small hands.

“No one, Ch’eo Visahot. But,” Rey changed the subject quickly, eager to avoid broaching the subject of his father, “Where is Poe?”

Leia’s smile melted away into a look of eager anticipation with a slow nod, “We found it, Rey.”

“You found...” her forehead puckered for a moment before her lips parted in frustration, “I’m almost sure he doesn’t want to be found, Leia. You know your brother...why else would he have run away?”
“I don’t know why he left...but what I do know is that he left a way back to him for a reason. And we found it. Well,” Leia shrugged with a wry smile, “Poe’s retrieving it. Well. Was.”

“What do you mean, was?” Rey’s heart gave a nervous twinge, and a sheet of goosebumps went running up her arms.

“That...that’s the reason I called you here, Sweets,” the Princess tucked her nose behind her grandson’s ear with a smile, “We need your help.”

“Why me? I’m hardly the most qualified. Where’d he go? What happened?” Rey stood and began to pace back and forth in the small confines of the general’s office.

The older woman’s eyes grew serious as a faint smile still played upon her lips to keep the boy unawares of the true danger, “There was an attack on the village where the map was. We know he got it before the First Order did. The thing is…”

“The thing is what, Leia?”

“The thing is...Kylo Ren was there,” she breathed, brushing her fingers through his dark hair, “And now Poe is on board the Finalizer. The map isn’t. That’s where you’re the most qualified, dear.”

Rey planted her hands on her hips with a sigh, with the echo of the name Kylo Ren ringing in her ears as she slowly clenched and unclenched her jaw.

“Where is it?”

“It’s in a BB unit. One of a kind, orange and white.”

“Yeah, BB-8, I am familiar with him. What about it?” Rey waved her hands in frustration to urge the old woman to hurry up and get to her point.

“It’s on Jakku. We need you to get it back before the First Order finds it. Before he finds it.”
All her young life, Rey had dreamed of flying far away - jetting off on adventures that would take her to every corner of the galaxy. Her upbringing as a Jedi had the promise of that life for her, but in the gypsy existence she lived now, never in a million system cycles did she imagine that she’d ever find herself back on Jakku.

As she guided the old VCX-100 light freighter through the bright, crystal blue atmosphere, Rey could remember every moment like it was yesterday. Well, almost every moment.

The day Maz Kanata found her was vivid in her mind, along with the flood of memories that came after once she’d arrived at Luke’s Praxeum. Everything before that was...fuzzy. She’d always been sure that she had a family, at least at some point in her life. All the times she wanted to feel angry for being left behind by literally everyone she’d ever loved - Rey never could feel angry with her family, and was sure there had to be a reason why. A reason that she would understand one day, once the Force deemed it time for her to know.

With a careful pull on the controls, Rey brought the ship around the dusty settlement of Niima Outpost, letting out a shaky sigh once the landing gear made contact with the sand. Her stomach turned with the nervous anticipation and the unexpected, thrilling excitement of standing on the precipice of an adventure - one not too dissimilar from the ones she’d dream of going on as a padawan. People to help, a cause to bolster, and a droid with secret information that they couldn’t risk getting into the wrong hands. The teenaged her felt like the embodiment of the stories of Master Skywalker when he had been a young man. Back when the Rebel Alliance was a way of life, and the Jedi were non-existent.

If she was honest, if it had been anyone else, Rey would have laughed in Leia’s face, taken her son, and gone home. But it was Poe, and Rey didn’t have the heart to not help when he was in need. Not when he’d done so much for her and the boy already.

Rey bristled under the frisson of goosebumps that ran up her arms beneath her tan jacket, protesting against the heat as she stepped out of the belly of the ship and into the bright Jakku sun. She tucked a thumb into her blaster belt, lifting her eyes towards the marketplace at the center of the outpost, idly wondering if the blobfish, Unkar Plutt, still ruled over the masses of scavengers.

Her tall boots slipped and shifted across the sand with each step as she ducked beneath a collection of hanging glass bottles and stepped into the blessed cool of the shade. Niima Outpost was as busy as she remembered, but all the people seemed so much smaller than in her memory. For the first time in her life, she was eye to eye with the other scavengers, and none of them cast her a second glance.
Some of the faces were familiar as she scanned from booth to booth, eager to recover the lost droid and get back to D’Qar as quickly as she could.

A crash on the other side of the bustling marketplace drew Rey’s attention away from the smattering of scavengers as something around her feet shoved her to the side.

“Oi!”

Rey wobbled on her feet, her brows bent in frustration when she saw a small droid hurtling across the cluttered market towards a man with a wide-eyed gaze. A flicker of recognition passed over her face as she looked him over. A sheen of sweat covered his deep umber skin from his broad nose to his full lips, lips that were parted in shock as the droid Rey was looking for raced towards him.

His face wasn’t the thing that was familiar to Rey, she’d never seen him before, but his jacket hooked her from the moment she saw it. Poe Dameron wasn’t one who liked to blend in with a crowd. From his droid, his starfighter, and the sheer brilliance of his smile, the ace pilot was one who didn’t mind standing out - especially when it came to his clothes, and a prized leather jacket Rey knew by heart.

Completely unaware of her presence, the man who wore her sometimes-lover’s jacket came running towards her. Without a second thought, Rey reached out, and, with her fists coiled firmly around the supple leather and a twist of her body, threw him to the ground.

“What’s your hurry, thief?” Rey hissed, planting her knee firmly to the center of his chest to keep him still.

“Wait, what?” he balked, grimacing when, with a yell, BB-8 rolled up beside them and zapped him with a charge of electricity, “Ow! What? Listen...I’ve had a pretty messed up day, alright? Could you just...let me be on my way and I won’t be any trouble.”

“This jacket - it belongs to this droid’s master. He would never let it out of his sight, so the only reason I can think that you’d be wearing it is that you must have stolen it. Where is he? Are you First Order?”

The man’s face melted from his look of baffled frustration to one of regret, looking to BB-8, “His name was Poe Dameron, right?”
The little droid’s dome wobbled on its axis, shifting between the stranger who was still pinned beneath Rey’s knee and her face.

“What about him?”

“He was captured by the First Order...I helped him escape, but we got shot down and Poe...” he paused with a twinge of his jaw that made Rey’s heart lurch, “Poe didn’t make it.”

A strangled laugh tumbled from Rey’s lips as she drew herself away from the stranger, lingering with her palms against the sand, holding on for dear life as her mind began to reel.

Poe. Her friend. Her lover. Mentor to her son. Gods, the boy. What would she tell him? Part of her knew there was always this danger, with Poe thrusting himself into dangerous situations on behalf of the Resistance, but she foolishly never thought anything would actually happen - or that she would ever feel enough for him to feel the same twinge of grief she’d only ever felt once before.

She reached out a hand and pulled him from the sand, looking over him from head to toe as she chewed on the inside of her lip.

“Are you with the Resistance, then?”

“The Resistance? Yeah? Yeah. I am with the Resistance. I am with the Resistance. ” He nodded enthusiastically - so much so that Rey couldn’t help but doubt his words.

“You don’t look like a Resistance fighter,” Rey cast him a skeptical look.

“Oh, yeah...well, this is what we look like. Others look different.”

“Mmmhmm,” Rey nodded, dusting the coarse sand from her taupe jacket with a deep sigh.

“So...the droid. Poe said that he’s carrying a section of a navigational chart that leads to Luke Skywalker.”
She let out a chuff of laughter, shaking her head with a sidelong gaze at the mention of her former master - who’d run away after she’d told him she was pregnant - convinced that it was safer for everyone if he was gone, “He’s a myth.”

“A myth? Really? I thought he was a Rebellion hero,” he inquired, trailing closely after Rey as she wound her way through the outpost, towards her ship now that she’d found BB-8.

“You shouldn’t believe everything you hear,” she groused, idly wondering where her former master had gone, and more importantly - why.

Rey wasn’t allowed much time to think when the buzz of a pair of voices echoed over the quiet din of the outpost.

“Have you seen an orange and white BB unit? It is imperative to the First Order that it be found as soon as possible.”

The former Jedi slid across the sand to peek around a stack of crates, drawing in a quick breath when the stranger or thief - she hadn’t decided which yet - murmured from beside her.

“Kriff. Stormtroopers. They’re here for me,” he reached out and tangled his hand around hers. Rey answered it with a glare.

“What are you doing?”

“We need to run!” He gave her a tug and took off in the opposite direction of the stormtroopers that were combing Niima Outpost for the little droid.

“I know how to run without you holding my hand,” Rey pried her hand from his, zig-zagging between carts and stalls until they hid for a moment in an adjoining tent.

“Why are they after you?” Rey breathed, taking a second to catch her breath.
“I...uh...no reason. I mean, because I’m so obviously a member of the Resistance, of course,” he babbled, pausing for a moment.

“Thanks for that,” Rey drawled, “And here I was hoping that I could get in and out of here unnoticed.”

He held up a hand to shush her, lifting his eyes to the tattered cloth that hung over their heads. Rey’s lips parted with a groan and her stomach flipped when the telltale whine of TIE fighters rushed over the horizon.

Within seconds of spotting the trio of starfighters crest the horizon, Rey found her hand wrapped up in his as they rushed across the sand and away from the TIEs.

“Stop taking my hand!” Rey exclaimed, pulling ahead of him with each step, until a blast of turbofire sent them flying into the air in a cloud of sand.

Rey landed with a groan, shaking away the ringing in her ears as she crawled across the sand to where her unexpected companion laid, unconscious. She pressed her palms to his chest, giving him a shake.

“Hey! Wake up, we gotta go!”

His dark eyes flew open, shifting from side to side as he took in the scene before landing on Rey with a flash of concern, “Are you okay?”

“Uh…. yeah,” Rey responded with a baffled look, rising to stand and offering him her hand once more, “Let’s go.”

They took off at a run with BB-8 hot on their heels.

“We need a ship!”

“We’ve got one,” Rey answered with a yell, pointing ahead of them to where the VCX-100 light freighter sat.
“And a pilot!”

“We’ve got one of those, too!”

“Thank the Gods, I thought we were about to get in that piece of trash over there. It looks like it hasn’t flown in years,” he motioned towards a ship half-covered by a tarp on the edge of the shipyard - one that Rey recognized in an instant.

She slid to a halt when the hot blast of an explosion rocked the ground beneath their feet as the TIEs obliterated her modest ship into a blazing fireball.

“The garbage will have to do,” Rey winced, mourning her faithful vessel for only a moment, unable to ignore how Fate seemed to be pointing her in the direction of the YT-1300. With no time to waste, they pivoted towards the ship, whose convex saucers and side-mounted cockpit told Rey in an instant that she - by pure happenstance - had found the Millennium Falcon.

She didn’t have time to look, to brush her fingers against the grimy, curved halls she’d seen a hundred times before, to revel in the smell of oil and age, awash in memories from the moment she stepped foot on the gangplank. With a point of her finger, Rey didn’t stop for a split second to let herself be reminded of the man whose ship she was on - and the man who loved to pilot it when he was a boy so much like her own, barking out an order to get in the gunner position as she flung herself into the cockpit.

Her hands worked of their own volition, moving with muscle memory in the captain’s seat as she flipped a series of switches and toggles to bring the old girl to life with a roar, mumbling softly to herself as she pulled back on the controls to lift her into the air.

“This is not how I thought today was gonna go…”

***

It was probably some of the best flying she’d done. Ever. And, honestly, Rey wasn’t exactly sure how she’d managed it without the Force on her side.
They made it off-world miraculously alive after a series of twists and turns through a graveyard of Imperial star destroyers, with BB-8 in tow and the stranger with no name.

No sooner had she been officially introduced to Finn, Rey found herself neck deep in the bowels of the Falcon, scraping together bits of bonding tape and a pilex driver to keep the propulsion tank from overflowing and filling the entire ship with poisonous gas.

“Come on, hurry up, I need to get back to the Ileenium system as soon as possible,” Rey snapped impatiently at Finn as he floundered over the container of tools, unable to pick the one she had been asking for.

“What’s the hurry? Got a family? Boyfriend? Cute boyfriend?” he inquired as he tossed her a tollo wrench.

“None of your business, that’s why,” she responded hastily, yelling out a small, victorious yell when the hissing steam stopped.

With her hands on either side of the hatch, Rey pulled herself from the hatch and ignored Finn as she started to make her way back towards the cockpit. The less people who knew about the boy, the better - least of all strangers.

As soon as she reached to prime the compressor on the hyperdrive, the controls went silent, sending a wash of darkness of them in the eerie quiet. Rey looked up through the half-moon transparisteel viewport and let out a soft gasp when they were suddenly bathed in a red light.

Beside her, Finn climbed on the center console, using her head as a balance to boost himself up against the glass.

“Get... get off?” Rey protested, pushing his palm from her forehead as her heart thudded nervously in her chest. The mission she’d agreed to go on for Poe’s sake was starting to become a lot more than she’d bargained for.

Finn plopped down in the seat beside her, his dark face stricken with horror, “It’s the First Order.”

“There’s got to be something we can do,” Rey wracked her brain as she watched Finn’s mind race.
“You said poisonous gas…”

“Yeah, but I fixed that,” Rey answered.

“Can you unfix it?”

She stared at him for a moment, confused, when his plan clicked into place in her mind. She rushed from the captain’s seat, grabbing a gas mask from a hook on the wall before throwing herself back into the belly of the ship.

“Hurry!” Finn exclaimed from beside her with a groan as he lifted BB-8 into the small space beside them.

“I’m hurrying!” she hissed, looking up in a panic when the lights flickered back on, answered by a series of clangs and bangs. Rey held her breath, praying that whoever was coming on board wouldn’t expose her. She’d lasted a long time without being noticed by the First Order, and didn’t plan on changing that anytime soon.

With a hiss, Rey heard the door of the Falcon slide open, and an all-too-familiar voice echo out, “Chewie. We’re home.”

The former Jedi didn’t waste a second, shaking off Finn’s attempts to hold her as she pushed open the grate that was hiding them, reveling in the looks of shock on the old man’s face when he looked at her face.

“You can put your blaster away, Han,” she groused, pulling herself up with a grunt, only to be immediately pulled into the warm embrace of the wookiee. She patted his arm with a smile, looking towards the legendary smuggler, who looked back at her with a shake of his head.

“Hiya, kid. Long time,” he grumbled, placing his DL-44 back into its holster with a lopsided grin, “Fancy meeting you here.”

“You mean, ‘thank you for finding my ship, Rey’,” she mimicked his gruff voice with a laugh.
“That was nice of you, considering that you were the one who got it stolen from me in the first place in that game of Sabaac,” he argued.

“It’s not my fault you didn’t teach me how to properly play, only to cheat!”

Finn watched them as they went back and forth, clearly with some sort of shared history between them. He held out his palms in frustration, halting the pithy back and forth with a huff.

“I’m sorry...am I missing something here?”

“Sorry, Finn. This,” Rey motioned towards the older man and his companion, “Is Han Solo, and his co-pilot, Chewbacca. This hunk of junk belongs to him.”

“Wait, the Rebellion General?” Finn’s eyes grew wide.

“No! The smuggler,” Rey laughed, giving him a look before turning back to the legendary scoundrel with a teasing smile, “This is the ship that made the Kessel Run in fourteen parsecs.”

“Twelve,” he growled, waving off Finn’s look of admiration, “It’s just someone I used to be. Anyway, where’d you find it, kid?” Han pressed, striding out of the main hold towards the cockpit.

“Niima Outpost.”

“That junkyard? I told you we should’ve double-checked the Western Reaches, Chewie!” he called over his shoulder, motioning towards Rey, “You’re lucky we picked you up when we did. The First Order is right on our tail...if Leia hadn’t comm’d when she did, you two would have been done for.”

“Thanks,” Rey murmured, leaning up against the pilot’s seat with a sigh, “I know you’ve been hiding out for a while...I appreciate you having our back.”

“I can’t stay for long. Kanjiklub is closing in on us, they’ll want their rathtars, and I’ve left a
surprise for them, so we better run,” he reached up and typed in a series of codes on the navicomputer, “I gotta get you two to Takodana.”

“Maz’s?” Rey pressed, “What’s she up to?”

“The First Order got wind of the base on D’Qar, so Leia sent the kid off to Kanata’s Castle to keep him safe. She knows him, so he’ll be none the wiser, I’m sure.”

“It wouldn’t hurt for you to stay a little while, would it?” Rey bumped his shoulder as she sat down in the seat opposite of his, “He’s been asking about you, you know. He’ll be dying to get on board this old girl again.”

“Yeah,” Han sigh, his eyes despondent, and Rey knew in an instant that he was thinking of a different boy.

“So, this droid,” Finn squeezed into the middle of their odd reunion, “Is it true that it’s got a map to Luke Skywalker?”

“The map’s not complete. It’s just a piece. All I know is...ever since Luke disappeared, people have been looking for him,” Han stated as he pulled back on the controls and guided the ship from the belly of the mammoth freighter.

“What happened? I heard he was a myth,” Finn gave Rey a sidelong gaze as the stars stretched into infinity outside the viewport.

Han let out a sigh, and Rey remained quiet in the corner, chewing on the edge of her thumb, “He was training a new generation of Jedi. One boy...an apprentice... turned against him and destroyed it all. Luke felt responsible, felt like he should have seen the signs, done something to prevent it...so he walked away.”

“So the Jedi were real?” Finn was child-like in his wonder and excitement, and it was clear to Rey that, to others who were far-removed from the reality of it, it all must have felt like a fairytale.

“I used to wonder that, myself. Thought it was a bunch of mumbo-jumbo,” Han shrugged with a half-smile, “A magical power holding together good....evil...the dark side and the light. The thing is....it’s true. All of it. The Force. The Jedi. It’s all true.”
Rey held her breath as Han peered over his shoulder and gave her a wistful smile and an acknowledging nod, aware of her own history and pain of that night.

They remained in a comfortable silence with only the steady ticks and beeps of the ship as they thundered through hyperspace. Rey closed her eyes with a sigh, eager to get back to her boy and back home on Lah’mu. Back where things were quiet...back where things were simple...and far away from the trouble that the First Order raged everywhere it went.

But, little did she know, they were closer than she thought.

***

*Come back for me, Ben. You promised.*

Rage. It was all Kylo Ren had left. Set at an ever-present simmer in the back of his mind, it was fed by his darkness - that had coiled itself firmly around his soul since he was a child - so tightly that the light had been snuffed out completely.

His life looked completely different than it had six years before. Six years since he sold his soul for the sake of the girl he loved, his other half, *a dyad in the Force*. All of it proved to be for nothing, a lie just like everything else. A twisted truth of the painful reality.

He was alone, just like she had always feared she’d be.

Part of him had been grateful to be the one left behind in the void without her, so that she hadn’t been abandoned in the way that haunted her dreams when they were children. The cost of it, though, was unbearable in unimaginable ways. Ways that only seemed to please his master.

The strongest hearts were made of kyber, and hers was never far from him. He closed his eyes from behind his mask, centering himself in the faint feeling of her emanating from the heart of the crossguard lightsaber on his belt, letting out a deep sigh when the image of her smile echoed
through his mind.

The voices in his mind, the ones that fueled his darkness and had been mere whispers once upon a
time, screamed painfully in his ears when his thoughts travelled too far away, too out of focus from
the task at hand.

The droid.


His master, the Supreme Leader, for whom he enforced the might of the First Order where ever it
was needed across the galaxy, had tasked him with locating a droid that held the secret location of

The talk of him had dredged up the past, memories that he’d kept firmly hidden away beneath the
mask of his rage. From the first moment Supreme Leader Snoke knew of the existence of the map,
Kylo had been haunted by the vision of his uncle standing over him when he woke, brandishing a
lightsaber.

It grew more nightmarish with each passing night, until, eventually, the face he saw was that of his
beloved. Even though she was gone, brutally ripped from existence because of his own actions, the
image was all the more terrifying in its vividness.

Her face was gaunt, like she’d been lifted from her grave and restored to the living Force, with a
dark hood pulled over her head and a blood red stone on her first finger. With a flick of her wrist,
she snapped open a double-sided snarling red blade, and spoke to him with a voice like honey.

Don’t be afraid of who you are. The future is inevitable, and soon, you too shall fall.

Kylo would wake in a panic each time, covered in sweat with a rapidly beating heart as he reached
out to the bed beside him, still half-expecting to find her there beside him like he’d done so many
nights before. But she was gone, no longer there to ease the nightmares of his own creation.

He’d channel his rage into battle, carrying the broken heart of his beloved in his hand in the form
of the cracked kyber - the one she’d given him.
"Take it ....Take it so that, when you leave me...you have a part of me with you to remind you to come home."

Losing himself to the throes of battle was easy. Blinded by fury that only grew with each brutal swing of his lightsaber, Kylo ripped a bloody trail through the galaxy, leaving behind only destruction. The Knights of Ren were an unstoppable force, feared in even the furthest corners of the Outer Rim, and he - their master - was the most fearsome of them all.

Kylo could see it - their fear - in every person he’d come into contact with. It wasn’t something he ever aspired to when he was young, but watching a flurry of First Order officers scurry away like a flock of birds in Autumn filled him with an intoxicating feeling.

Not that his reputation went unproven. His rage got the best of him from time to time, especially as of late, when he’d been so much more on edge than usual.

They’d thought they’d had it in their grasp when they ransacked the village on Jakku, capturing the Rebel scum and bringing him on board the Finalizer to extract the information they needed from the pilot. When the IT-O Interrogator failed, Kylo had no problems stepping in to assist in getting what his master requested of him.

The memory was fresh in his mind as he remembered the surge of his own twisted confidence as he strode into the cell.

“I had no idea we had the best pilot in the Resistance on board,” he sneered through the reverberator in his mask, unable to keep the sarcasm from his voice as he tried to think of anyone being a better pilot than him, “Comfortable?”

“Not really,” the prisoner answered with his own, biting tone - a bold move from someone strapped to an interrogation chair.

“No one can get out of you what you did with the map,” Kylo took a step forward, regarding the pilot carefully with a tilt of his head. Perhaps he enjoyed this part a little too much, basking in the way the darkness twisted around his limbs, rewarding his dark deeds with a fresh surge of power that crackled on his fingertips.

“You might want to rethink your technique,” the pilot drawled - a move that Kylo knew he would
very soon regret.

With a slow lift of his gloved hand, Kylo surged through the Force and sent a single, scorching probe into his mind, the corners of his unseen mouth coiling up at the corners when the confident visage of the Resistance officer faded away with the pain of the dark knight’s somewhat gentle assault.

Right away, Kylo found a sea of memories to sift through, a chaotic bundle of moments, each one fuzzier than the last. Frustrated from the start, Kylo quickly grew tired of the pilot’s vain attempt to shut him out. He surged forward, forcefully blasting his head against the rig with a metallic clang, silently rejoicing in the low groan he pulled from his lips.

“Where is it?” he growled, tearing through memory after memory with a brutal ferocity that his prisoner fought at every turn.

The images began to come in clearer, each one more convoluted than the last, none of any interest to him, until he saw the tender touch of a hand through a rest of chestnut hair, and Kylo found himself awash with memories of his own.

The girl in the pilot’s mind seemed achingly familiar to him in an impossible way, but Kylo was more than sure that it was his own loneliness projecting an image from his own mind into what he saw. He swallowed a growing lump in his throat as he watched the man in front of him make love to the faceless girl, filled to the brim with a dismal sense of love that the pilot held in his heart for her.

Kylo delved in further than he probably should have, more than likely getting further away from the location of the map with each memory he rifled through, but he couldn’t resist. He carded through page after page of nights his prisoner had spent by her side, with his hands roving over gleaming, freckled skin, and basking in the sound of his name on her lips, even in just a whisper.

Poe.

“Oh, how sweet. You love her. Trust me, that never ends well. Better to give up now than wait for her to put you out of your misery.”

“Get out...of my head. You leave them out of this,” Poe hissed through the pain, blinking slowly as he ground his teeth through the agony.
“Them?” Kylo inquired, amused at the pilot’s loyalty. It had always been a little different in Kylo’s experience. Cause first, family second.

A little more digging offered Kylo an image of a different sort. The woman from his bed, just a glimpse of the back of her - all lithesome and surely beautiful - hand in hand with a small boy. His raven curls fluttered in an unseen breeze, but then something truly odd happened.

The woman continued to walk away, shrinking away in the distance, but the boy remained. With the wind in his hair, Kylo almost felt like he was standing there beside him, reaching out for the boy’s hand himself, when the child turned his gaze to meet his own, and Kylo was struck by a pair of brilliant, hazel eyes lined by dark lashes and a freckle dusted nose.

Enough.

The voice of his master cut through his mind like a dagger, reminding him to stay the course and get what he’d come for.

Kylo pressed on, ripping through the images in his prisoner's mind until the memories became ones more familiar to him. There was the briefest flash of his mother’s face, followed by the stretch of the stars from a viewport, and eventually the glittering blue jewel of Jakku below him.

“The Resistance will not...be intimidated...by you,” Poe gasped as Kylo drew closer to his goal, to no avail, as the action only spurred Kylo to press harder, tear the memories forcefully from his mind until he broke under the pressure with a loud yell, and Kylo was able to see a clearer picture of that night on Jakku - when the pilot had placed a small chip inside a BB unit.

The victory had been short-lived when one of their own helped the pilot escape from his cell, crash landing on the planet below, but Kylo knew it was only a matter of time before they retrieved what they came for.

While he waited, the dark knight stood in front of a control panel, overseeing preparations for an assault on Kamino, when he felt the presence of a particular Lieutenant who was almost fun to torture.

“Sir, we were unable to acquire the droid on Jakku,” Mitaka’s voice trembled with every syllable, and Kylo could feel the fear reverberating off of him as he slowly turned towards him, his silence
speaking volumes, “It escaped capture aboard a stolen Corellian YT model freighter.”

It was almost comical, the degree of how carefully, and poorly in the process, Lieutenant Mitaka chose his words for him, clearly reluctant to elaborate any further. Kylo couldn’t help but toy with him.

“The droid... stole a freighter?”

“Not exactly, sir. It had help.”

Of course it did. Kylo turned his back, breathing slowly as his ever-present rage began to boil up from the inside. He could feel how the First Order officer had begun to sweat as he fiddled with his black cap between gloved fingers.

“We have no confirmation, but we believe that FN-2187 may have helped in the escape--”

In an instant, the rage boiled over. Kylo ignited the shrieking crimson blade of his lightsaber and slashed at the console in front of him, striking blow after blow to prevent himself from leaving a trail of bodies down the corridors of the Finalizer. He knew that he would be made to suffer for the mistake, and the mere thought of it enraged him in a way that even he couldn’t control.

When he was finished, Kylo retracted the blade with a hiss and attached it to his belt, sucking in a deep breath before he tried to show some sort of decorum with his next phrase.

“Anything else?”

Mitaka took a trembling breath, so very clearly afraid to provide any more details, and for good reason. Kylo Ren wasn’t someone to be trifled with - and certainly not the person you’d want to anger with bad news.

“The two were accompanied by a girl.”

Kylo saw red, blinded by his rage as he threw out a gloved hand and pulled Mitaka across the shining duraplast floors with a low staccato of the lieutenant’s toes bouncing with every inch. The
dark knight squeezed once his throat reached his outstretched, gloved hand, bringing his face close to his mask as he snarled.

“What girl?”

Chapter End Notes

kaybohls here!

Goodness. What can I say? The train has left the station, and we are barreling into Sequel Trilogy territory. We cannot wait to show you what's to come...hopefully we won't leave you hanging for long! A HUGE thank you to everyone who's read, kudo'd, and commented! We are endlessly grateful to each of you! YOU are why we are writing this!
To my co-author, MJL, thank you for dealing with my crazy, zigzagging thoughts, fixing my brain burps, and for going with me on this crazy ride!
To my PL fam - I LOVE YOU. Without you all, my writing days would never be complete and I am thankful for you all each and every single day.
We shall see you SOON - the next chapter is already WELL underway!

Got any theories about The Boy? We wanna hear them!
Come say hey on Twitter!
kaybohls
Chapter Summary

The gang heads to Takodana to the only person they can trust to get the droid to The Resistance - The Pirate Queen, Maz Kanata.
Things take a turn - and precious secrets are unearthed - when the First Order comes to claim their prize.

Chapter Notes

Takodana appeared in the viewport as the Falcon shuddered out of hyperspace, and Rey blinked sleepily at the blue and green pearl before them. She had been dozing in the pilot’s seat after sending Chewie and Han off to their bunks - sleep was not something she could do given their current circumstances.

Worry was eating at her. Every day, the First Order grew stronger, sweeping across the Galaxy and capturing more planets as they went. Rey wondered when they would set their eyes on Lah’mu. The little safe haven she had created for her and her boy might someday see Star Destroyers in its skies. As a mother, Rey wanted to protect her son from harm.

She was also saddened at the loss of Poe. Rey hadn’t had the time to properly mourn the passing of her sometimes lover yet, and even though he would never be the one, what they had shared was beautiful and meaningful, and had been exactly what she needed at the time. Rey had cherished the time they had together, and he was a generous and more than capable lover - a great love - who helped her to scratch an itch that had been there for a long time.

Poe would never be him, though. No one could ever fill that soulmate shaped hole in her heart but
him, but he’d chosen another path.

Rey landed the Falcon on the shore of Nymeve Lake, the enormous castle looming over its shore like a stone watchtower. She wasn’t surprised when Han made his appearance, a cup of caf in his hand as he glanced out the viewport.

“Still a good pilot, kid. Is there anything you’re not good at? I’d think you were part Solo if I didn’t know better.” He shrugged, giving her the half-smirk she was more than familiar with, causing her heart to clench for a moment as she thought momentarily about how much he and his son were alike.

Turning away, Rey coughed into the sleeve of her shirt to conceal a chuckle and an eye roll, reaching out to press the button that would open the ramp of the Falcon. The afternoon sun greeted them as they stepped onto the verdant soil, a light breeze made small waves lap at the stones of the lakeshore as Rey and Han strode confidently towards Takodana Castle. Finn trailed behind them as he took everything in with wide eyes and BB-8 chirped happily as he rolled along beside them.

Once they reached the courtyard of the castle, Rey held back, looking over at Finn and remarked with a squeeze of his shoulder, “Relax, Finn. We can trust him. Maz has been running this watering hole for a thousand years, but she is… well… she’s a bit of an acquired taste.” Rey grinned at Finn. “Let Han and I do the talking, and whatever you do… don’t stare.”

Finn looked at her, his eyes still wide as he looked up at the colorful banners and the towering statue of Maz standing in the center of the courtyard before bringing them back to her. “At what?” he asked, his eyes swiveling once more.

As her grin grew wider with her fond memories of the first time she had been here, Rey rolled her shoulders in a shrug before sweeping her hand in front of her with a laugh, “Any of it!”

“Uh… alright,” Finn said as they caught up to Han, who threw the large wooden doors open with gusto. Laughter and a cacophony of music and voices flowed out of the castle as they stepped inside, and Rey felt an instantaneous lightness in her heart. Her boy was inside somewhere, and Rey couldn’t wait to wrap her arms around her son and listen to him babble about everything he had seen while she had been gone.

They had just slid quietly into a table when Maz’s voice rang out across the chaos. “HAN SOLO!”
The room grew quiet as Rey and Han shared a look and Rey tried desperately to hide her smirk.

Han threw a hand up, giving the ancient alien a half wave. “Hey Maz!” Noise returned as she strode towards their table, shoving a patron out of the way before coming to a stop and peering at the smuggler for a moment with a frown.

“Where’s my boyfriend?” Maz asked loudly, looking at Han and searching his face before glancing over at Rey, whose laughter had finally burst free. Maz’s love for Chewbacca was well known to her, and was probably one of the reasons Chewie had stayed behind to do maintenance on the Falcon instead of accompanying them inside.

Finn looked between the three of them, his eyes lingering the longest on Maz.

“Eyes” Rey leaned over and said with a soft hiss, and his eyes snapped to the tabletop, causing a grin to come to her lips once more.

“Chewie’s working on the Falcon,” Han replied, and Maz looked over at Rey.

“I like that Wookiee,” she stated, and Rey could only grin at her in response.

“I know,” Rey remarked with a playful nod, her grin widening as she saw a familiar shock of raven hair winding through the crowd, his little arms pumping as he ran towards her. Rey threw her arms open wide, and as her son practically jettisoned himself into them, Rey looked at Han and Maz both, silently pleading with them to give her a few moments before they talked any business.

“Tin’mi! I missed you! But guess what? Maz let me feed the Convor every day, and I got to go hunting for Flurggs with Thromba for one of his and Laparo’s experiments! I found the biggest one, too! Laparo let me keep him, Tin’mi, and I named him Croaky! Plus, Maz let me help carry things to the table when some guys from Kanjiklub were here! I got to touch their blasters, even!”

At that, Rey looked at Maz, her eyes wide with a questioning gaze. Maz smiled back at her. “Dear child, do you think I would let anything happen to your precious son while he was in my care?”

Rey sighed before focusing her attention back on her son, who was still babbling on in her arms, now talking about how he had helped Maz run diagnostics on Emmie. BB-8 chirped a few times, and Rey smiled down at the orange and white droid before introducing him to her boy. “This is
BB-8, Ch’eo Visahot, and he wants to see if you and he can be friends.”

The little boy gasped as he looked down at the friendly ball droid, his lips pursing into an ‘O’ of wonder as he reached down to pat BB-8, and Rey let out a chuckle at the thought that it reminded her of someone petting a lothcat. BB-8 chirped happily at the attention he was getting, so Rey let her son scramble down from her lap after pressing a quick kiss to his chubby cheek.

After the boy had run across the room excitedly, BB-8 rolling along with him, Rey focused her attention back on matters at hand, eyeing Han before glancing at Finn and Maz. Maz leaned forward, placing her hands on the table as she peered at Han through her thick lenses. “I assume you need something besides retrieving the boy. Desperately. Let’s get to it!”

After having a server droid bring them plates of food, Maz looked at the three of them again, and Han took a long drink from the tankard in front of him before glancing around the room to make sure no one else was playing close attention before leaning forward and saying, “We found him. That BB unit has the map to him.”

Maz let out a chuckle, shaking her head. “A map to... him? Oh, Han, you are right back in the mess, aren’t you?”

Han just shrugged in reply, and Rey let her eyes drift around the crowded room until she found her son, who was sitting next to a Narquois with BB-8 in front of him. Looking back at Maz, who offered her a smile, Rey’s eyes next went to Finn, who was doing his best to keep his eyes focused on the plate in front of him.

“Maz, I need you to get this droid to Leia,” Han said, and Rey rolled her eyes. Han had been ignoring the fact he needed to go to his wife for a long time now. It seemed that no matter how much things changed in the galaxy - some things remained the same.

Maz leaned in, humming under her breath before finally answering the smuggler. “Hmm. No. You’ve been running away from this fight for too long! Han, nyakee nago wadda. Go home!”

Rey snorted, rolling her eyes before looking at Maz. “Han thinks Leia doesn’t want to see him.”

Finn finally picked that moment to speak, looking between the three of them with still wide eyes. “What fight?”
Maz turned her thick lensed gaze on him now before remarking, “The only fight: against the dark side.” Maz leaned closer to Finn, her voice just above a whisper as she said, “Through the ages, I’ve seen evil take many forms. The Sith. The Empire. Today, it is the First Order. Their shadow is spreading across the Galaxy. We must face them. Fight them. All of us.”

Rey sighed, wanting nothing more than to take her son and head back to the Falcon so they could head back to their peaceful existence on Lah’mu. Maz’s words had her aching to take her boy and get back home as soon as possible. She wanted no part of any conflict - that was why she was hiding in the first place. Han could take BB-8 and go back to Leia and the Resistance, Finn could go wherever it was he wanted to go, and Rey and her son would go home.

She jumped as Finn slammed his hand down on the table, his voice low and scared as he remarked, “There is no fight against the First Order! Not one we can win, anyways. Look around you - they have spies everywhere! I bet you they are already on their way here!”

Finn froze as Maz pressed her small, yellow hands to the wood and climbed onto the table, a scene that Rey was not unfamiliar with. A small smirk came to her lips as she watched Finn’s face, the man’s eyes widening with shock and disbelief as he watched her adjust the thick lenses of her glasses. Plates and cups went clattering to the floor as Maz moved across the surface, until she stopped in front of Finn, her eyes as big as Rey had ever seen them behind her goggles. She bit her bottom lip so she didn’t start laughing, looking over at Han, who was doing his best to contain his own amusement.

“What’s this? What are you doing?” Finn sounded panicked almost, his eyes going to Rey and then Han before he asked, “Solo? What is she doing?”

Maz adjusted her goggles once more before peering at Finn intently.

“I don’t know, but it ain’t good,” Han mumbled with a lopsided smile and Rey covered a titter of laughter.

Maz leaned closer to Finn, remarking, “If you live long enough, you see the same eyes in different people. I’m looking at the eyes of a man who wants to run.”

“You don’t know a thing about me,” Finn said softly with a shake of his head. "Where I’m from. What I’ve seen. You don’t know them… the First Order… like I do. They’ll slaughter us. We should all run.”
Rey watched as Maz crawled back across the table to her chair, once more urged by the feeling to go grab her son and find the first ship to take them back home. Maz pointed across the cantina to an unsavory looking pair at a corner table before she looked at Finn once more.

“You see those two? They’ll trade work for transportation to the Outer Rim. There, you can disappear.” Maz looked back at Rey, somehow sensing her thoughts. “Not you, dear child. Him.” Maz’s gaze went back to Finn now. “Come, let me introduce you to them.”

As Maz, Finn and Han stood and wandered over to the traders, Rey sighed, shoving another piece of Jogan fruit in her mouth as she looked around for her son. The sound of a child crying came to her ears, and Rey stood, eyes frantically searching for the familiar mop of unruly dark curls. Her heart started thrumming in her chest, panic setting in when she didn’t see him anywhere in the room.

“No! No! Come back!”

Tilting her head to one side as a young girl’s voice came to her ears from far away, Rey turned towards the sound, following the cries as she wove her way through the customers of Maz’s castle. Moving down a set of stone stairs into the catacombs beneath the structure, the sounds of the revelry from the main room faded away the deeper she went.

Rey stopped outside a small chamber, peering into the dusky light within before she stepped inside. There was something there - something calling to her and nudging her towards the middle of the room. A small, wooden chest caught her attention, and Rey slowly fell to her knees in front of it as something deep within her took control. She reached out with shaking hands to grasp the lid and throw it open, letting out a soft gasp when she looked upon what waited inside.

Inside lay a lightsaber, one that had been spoken of in reverence for years - along with the man who had wielded it - and had disappeared six years prior after the destruction of his temple.

“Luke…” Rey whispered, reaching out to grasp the weapon in one hand, gasping as the room violently twisted and she fell backward…

...And landed in the clearing where she’d had some of her favorite moments in life.

There was a full moon casting a gentle light down upon the clearing, softly illuminating the bioluminescent blooms as they waved gently in the breeze - and a voice she knew by heart.
“I’m not going anywhere, Ch’eo k’tusah. I’m here now. I always will be. I’ll always come back for you...I promise.”

The world tipped and spun again, and as Rey closed her eyes to try and stay upright, opening them in time to see a jagged bolt of lightning split the sky in two.

It was raining again... and the sound coming through the tiny window of the temple sounded like a monster, coming to eat her. She clutched her pillow, trembling, before getting up and running blindly into the hallway, falling backwards as she collided with a solid mass.

“Don’t like storms? I can sit with you if you want. I’m Ben.”

Once more the world twisted, and Rey felt a wet trail of tears dripping down her cheeks as the memories overwhelmed her. Hearing her husband's voice again, so gentle and kind, so much the boy and the man he had been before Snoke had twisted him into something else, someone she had to hide from - and hide their child from, as well - made her heart twist painfully in her chest.

Before she had a chance to dry her tears, the world stopped spinning again as she felt a cold wind blow against her cheek.

Opening her eyes, she watched as Ben wound their tabards - one black, one white - around their hands before looking at her, his voice quiet and loving as he spoke the vows that bound them together in the Force for all time.

“What the Force wills is...no matter time nor place. Through light and dark. What the Force has brought into being, shall never be torn apart. No matter the time nor place, we are bound. The Force binds us together for all time, as does our love for each other. This...is the will of the Force.”

The scene shifted again, this time to a cavern on Zeffo.

The holocron spun in the air between them and Rey gazed at it, wide-eyed, as it spoke to both of them.
Long have I waited to see such a pair as the two of you. A rarity, to be sure, bound together since birth, the life force of your bond....A DYAD in the Force. A power like life, itself. Unseen for generations. What the Force has rendered within you both, not even death can tear asunder. The power of two will lead you both to great things, but beware - Your coming together will be your undoing. This...is the will of the Force.

Rey swiped at her eyes with her free hand and a choked sob leaving her lips as the world tilted again.

She was in the jungle again. The last day. The orchids painted his skin in muted blue as they fought… and then made love. She had spoken sweet words to him in Cheunh - words that still meant everything to her.

“Ch’eo vust’i cart veo. Ch’eo ch’an’eci cart veo. Veo ch’acuzah viz csabun can nen, nah cas ch’usci tuzir ler ch’at’ist.”

In the blink of an eye, a ship was breaking into the atmosphere, then the temple and the jungle surrounding it was ablaze as he strode onto it, reaching down to delicately cradle one of their orchids in his hand as he left her behind forever.

Lightning flashed, and she saw six warriors surrounding the masked man that had once been the man she loved, closing in on something with fierce determination.

A man and a woman with eyes like her own.

A pair of plump little hands on a beauty mark speckled cheek.

Yet another sob left Rey’s lips as the scenes changed quickly before her now, every one swirling into the other with dizzying speed.

Her, Ben and their son in the cockpit of the Falcon, the blue white light of hyperspace in the viewport. A small house by the sea, their son practicing with a lightsaber while she sat beside Ben. The flash of a set of chocolate brown eyes.

A dark planet, teeming with darkside energy. Lightning. A spiked throne. A monster hanging in
front of them. She and Ben, side by side, both wielding blue lightsabers. Ben looking at her, his face bruised and bloodied as he gave her a steady nod that said more than mere words.

*The changes came, coming in sharp flashes that shook her to her core.*

*Force lightning. Ben flying into an abyss. Ben on the ground, his body fading away.*

The world stilled, and Rey let out a sob as she stood, her hands trembling as she dropped Luke’s lightsaber back in the chest, snapping the lid closed as she heard footsteps behind her. Rey turned, looking into the eyes of the woman who had rescued her from Jakku all those years ago.

“What was that?” The former Jedi Knight gasped as her tears streamed in hot tracks down her cheeks.

“Dear child,” Maz began, walking towards Rey with an outstretched hand, “Search your feelings. You know the truth. The belonging you seek is not behind you, it is ahead. I see your eyes. The fear within them speaks to me. I am no Jedi - but I know the Force. It moves through and surrounds every living thing. It has shown you things - am I right?”

Rey gulped and nodded at Maz, her hands still shaky and her chest heaving with unshed tears. “It… I saw him. Before he… I… I don’t want any part of this, Maz. I’m taking my son, and we’re going home. I have to keep him safe. The First Order can never find us, and I am sure there are more than enough fighters to join the Resistance in this war. I’m sorry. Th-Thank you for watching him for me while I helped Leia.”

Maz peered at her once more before nodding in agreement. “The child is dear to me, as are you. Be safe… and remember, dear one - no one is ever really gone.”

Rey nodded once before starting up the stairs. The din from the cantina grew louder with each step, and Rey worried her bottom lip as she stepped back into the room, her eyes instantly finding her son as he giggled while he sat on Han’s lap.

Reaching the table, Rey gave Han a tight lipped smile before kneeling so she was at the same level as her son. “We need to go home, Ch’eo Visahot. Tell your Pops goodbye, and Maz as well, alright?” Rey stood and looked at Han, offering him a sympathetic smile. “I’m sorry, Han, but we’re going home. This isn’t a fight I want any part of. The cost would be too great.”
Han nodded, ruffling her boy’s hair with an achingly familiar half smirk. “I know, kid. I know. I’ll let Leia know.”

“Thank you,” Rey murmured quietly as she watched her boy jump off Han’s lap to run into Maz’s waiting arms, his lips meeting the ancient aliens cheek in a sloppy goodbye kiss. With a whoop of excitement, her son was back at her side a moment later, his hand reaching for hers as he looked up at her.

“I’m ready, Tin’mi!”

Rey circled her fingers around his, marching across the loose, bark-covered dirt and away from the ancient castle, silently fuming at the turn of events everything had taken. All she wanted to do was go home. Not get caught up in a cause that she had no business being involved in.

She pulled her son through the crowd of lingering patrons in the courtyard, keeping her eyes to the ground in an effort not to cry from the lingering effects of her vision in the castle’s catacombs, when a collective gasp rang out through the people around her.

A stuttering gasp tumbled from her lips as she watched bands of red light tear through the sky. She lifted her eyes to shield them from the brightness that she was sure had to be parsecs away. A fleeting thought ran through her mind that, perhaps, it was merely a stray meteorite falling into the atmosphere of Takodana, but as the shards of red light began to split off into fragments, Rey knew exactly what it was.

*The First Order.*

They’d done it. They created something to bring the New Republic to an end. For good.

“Look, Tin’mi, TIE fighters!” the boy called out from beside her, pointing his pretend blaster to the sky as he mimicked the sound of a blaster bolt, “Don’t worry, I’ll shoot them for you!”

Her stomach dropped to her feet as she looked to the horizon and saw the squadron of First Order starfighters hurtling towards them, their telltale whine carried on the gentle breeze, so soft that she might have thought it was a figment of her imagination. There was no mistaking the sight of them, with their distinct vertical fins and cylindrical cockpits, Rey knew that they’d been found out, and there was no time to waste.
She fell to her knees and took the face of her son between her palms, brushing her thumbs over his freckles as she looked into his hazel eyes.

“Take BB-8 and run,” she frantically brushed her fingers through his dark curls, pressing a desperate kiss to his forehead before encasing him in her arms, “Run into the forest. Get far away from here and, whatever you hear, don’t come back. Do you understand?”

The little boy’s eyes darted back and forth between his mother’s as tears began to brim on his dark lashes.

“Tin’mi, I don’t want to leave you…I want to help.”

“No, it’s not safe Ch’eo Visahot. You need to go... dammit, this is exactly what I wanted to keep you from, and now I’ve gone and put you in the middle of it. I love you, now GO.” She gave him a little push, “I’ll come back for you, I promise.”

Rey watched with a sob as he ran with small leaps over stones and fallen logs until he disappeared into the treeline with the orange and white droid hot on his heels.

With a deep breath, Rey gathered up her senses and marched back towards the castle, ducking as a shock of turbolaser fire sent a flurry of rocks tumbling down around her. She pulled her blaster from her belt, tucking herself behind a stray crate for cover as the first troop transports landed only steps away.

One by one, she picked them off, flinching when the TIEs came by for another ear-splitting pass at the castle, tearing it apart stone by stone in a flurry of turbolaser fire. Rey wanted to mourn the loss of the ancient building, but there wasn’t enough time.

She darted forward, sliding on her heels as she picked off a pair of stormtroopers one after the other, letting herself have a small, victorious smile when they fell to the ground with a sizzling hole in their plastoid armor.

Behind her, in a thunderous cacophony of stones grinding together, the castle began to fall, and Rey couldn’t help but hope that Han, Chewie and everyone else had got out unscathed.

Her heart hammered in her ears, ducking out from behind her cover once more to pick off another
pair of stormtroopers. She let out a yell when someone plopped down beside her and the tip of her blaster was met by the palms of Han Solo held up in mock-surrender.

“Hey, it’s me. Calm down, Your Highnessness.”

“A little help, here?” Rey shook her head, nodding toward the oncoming fleet of stormtroopers that were sure to overwhelm them sooner or later. They weren’t an army, but they weren’t going to go down without a fight.

“Where’s the kid?” he hollered as he jumped up to fire off a few expert shots with his DL-44.

“I sent him into the woods, I had to get him out of here as quick as I could and there was no time to steal your ship.”

“Not like that would have been a safe option, they hate that thing,” Han gave her a wry smile and a quick wink that faded when a new sound joined in on the jarring racket around them.

The dual-ion engines of the Upsilon-class command shuttle echoed out in deep, throttling pulses as it came around the crumbling towers of the castle.

“We gotta get you out of here, kid,” Han groused, eyeing the black shuttle as it thundered down on the far side of the castle on the edge of the woods.

“I’m not going anywhere.”

Rey looked over her shoulder with a small gasp when she saw her unexpected companion on Jakku going head to head with a stormtrooper - the the glowing blue blade of a lightsaber in his hands.

The sound was one she’d never forget. It filled her days since she was a child, and her heart lurched when she saw Finn putting every ounce himself into his inexperienced combat. Part of her wanted to run out, take the blade from his hands, and end the fight right there, but she’d kept herself closed off for so long, Rey wasn’t sure if the Force would answer should she call upon it now.
“Hey, can I try that?” Rey pressed an elbow to the wookiee on the other side of her, offering him a broad smile when he gave her a dutiful nod and handed her his bowcaster.

It hummed deliciously in her hands, just in time to see Finn fall to his back in the dirt. Rey focused her aim, and with a squeeze of the trigger, sent the stormtrooper flying through the air.

“I like this thing!” She let out a victorious yell that was cut short when the firm barrel of a blaster was pressed up against the back of her head.

“Don’t move,” the stormtrooper snapped as he snatched the bowcaster from her hands while she slowly rose to a stand, “TK-338, we have targets in custody.”

Chewie let out a roar of complaint as they were shoved towards the edge of a lake and Rey let out a sigh, unable to ignore the frantic beating of her heart when her thoughts went to the little boy who was alone in the woods.

Before they reached the transport, the stormtroopers around them grew frantic, calling into their comms as a rush of sound came up over the surface of the lake on the castle’s edge.

“We have incoming at 28.6!”

“Move! Move! Move!”

“Scramble all squads, I repeat, scramble all squads!”

Rey couldn’t help the relieved laughter that fell from her lips, pulling her hands slowly from the back of her head as she watched a fleet of X-Wings hurtle across the water.

“It’s the Resistance,” she breathed, taking only a moment to watch in wild wonder as a dogfight unfolded above their heads and a distinct-looking black starfighter sent a TIE into a smokey spin.

Her hope once again restored, she dashed to retrieve her blaster, lending a hand to the fight in hopes that soon, it would be over and she and her son could finally go home in peace.
A nightmare. That’s what the woods reminded him of. And no matter where he looked, each shadow only spurred on the frantic beating of his heart. Every dark corner behind a tree was a faceless monster waiting to come out and snatch him.

His mother had told him to run, but what was he supposed to do once he was far enough away.

*I’ll come back for you, I promise.*

He could depend on her. Always. She was always predictable in the way she loved him, telling him truths, spinning stories, and keeping all her promises. And if she said that she would come back, then the boy knew that she would.

Only, the distant whine of TIE fighters and turbolasers cutting through the air amongst rapid explosions and crumbling stone told him a different tale. With each second that passed and every inch he delved further into the darkness of the forest, the more afraid he became.

The boy wasn’t a stranger to nightmares. They happened more often than he would like, but his mother was always there to guide him back and wipe away his tears when he would wake with a frantic, tear strewn cry. She’d shush him and hold him firmly in her arms, rocking him gently as she whispered to him that the faceless masks he saw in his mind were only a dream. That he was safe.

He was a smart boy. One not easily deceived. His mother may have always kept her promises, but there were times that the boy wondered if she had her own secrets. Her own fears.

In the deepest part of his heart, he knew that the faces in his nightmares weren’t a figment of his imagination. They were real. And they spoke to him. The figures in black and the swords made of fire.

They weren’t the only ones.
For as long as he could remember, the boy could hear the voices in all sorts of things. Warm whispers on the wind, a song in the sunlight. It was all around him, the melody of life, twined through every living thing.

In the darkness of the forest, though, it sounded different.

Through the thundering of his heart and the nervous tremble of his small hands, the boy was honed in on the frightening song of the woods.

Leaves rustled on the wind, punctuated by the sound of blaster fire in the distance. There was a distant sizzle and chatter of the wildlife hiding in their holes. His breathing filled his ears more than anything until the crackle of a laser sword cut through the eerie silence.

Like an image straight from the deepest, darkest parts of his dreams, a masked man, clothed from head to toe in black robes that swept down to the toes of his boots stepped out from the shadows. His blade was like fire, cutting through the air with a low hum and a shriek with even the slightest movement.

The boy let out a quiet scream, tripping over his own feet as he scrambled to run away.

The figure strode towards him slowly with his weapon hanging at his side, but the boy couldn’t get away fast enough - darting between branches and zigzagging around trees as the little orange and white droid followed close behind.

He could feel his frustration as the boy tried to gain some ground on the terrifying stranger, dodging between large stones before diving into a thick nest of brambles. They tore at his skin, but he paid them no mind, as the sound of plasma tearing through the brush filled his ears and he became aware of the embers that floated around him.

They landed softly on the moss-covered ground and encouraged on by the softness of the breeze to curl into the smallest flames. The boy tore his eyes away and scrambled out of the brush as quickly as he could and tore his way up a hill on his hands and knees.

When he reached the top, the boy took off at a run, slipping and sliding as he came to the peak. Tears threatened to spill forth as he ran to the edge of a foreboding ledge and found nowhere else to run.
He turned slowly on his heel, letting out a trembling sigh as he lifted his hazel eyes to meet the faceless gaze of the dark knight who stood before him. Hot, glittering pearls of his fearful tears rolled down his plump cheeks, coating the long line of his mouth as he stood frozen to the spot. He crammed his eyes shut, whispering softly to himself over and over.

*Wake up. Wake up. It’s just a bad dream like all the rest. Wake up!*

“You think I’m a dream?” the dark figure spoke as the boy reached out to pinch himself on his forearm. He winced when it stung and his eyes flew open when the man spoke again, “You’ve seen me before?”

The boy merely nodded, unwilling and unable to speak to the vision of his nightmares come to life, the same mask he’d seen countless times. Black and menacing, the boy was sure that he wasn’t the only one in the galaxy who feared it.

He watched the figure step closer, disengaging his saber as he towered over him. The boy averted his eyes, still trembling as he silently begged for his mother to live up to her promise.

*I’ll come back for you, I promise.*

But his mother was nowhere to be found. It was only him and the dark stranger towering over him as he struggled to hold onto his tears and not sow his fear.

His gaze flickered up for a moment to look at the mask when the stranger crouched down to his level. In an instant, he could smell him...he didn’t smell like a monster. He smelled like a man. Not unlike Poe, but so different and oddly familiar.

The masked figure tilted his head to the side, “Where do you come from?”

The boy chewed on the inside of his lip, slowly working his jaw back and forth as he sucked in a trembling breath. Even if he wanted to answer, he couldn’t. He was from *everywhere.*

When he didn’t answer, the dark knight lifted a gloved hand and the boy could *feel* him brush up against his mind. It was gentle, like his mother tracing her fingertips down the length of his nose to get him to fall asleep, but when he lingered, the boy began to *see things.*
The images came in flashes, with a flicker of voices he could remember from his dreams. They felt familiar. A mixture of memories...some his, some not.

*Just for once, let me look on you with my own eyes.*

A dark mask, one the boy had seen in his dreams, similar to the one in front of him, yet so strikingly different. The shape of a moon - no - a space station. An alarm. Fire.


The image shifted and the boy winced from the force of it, feeling dizzy from the weight of it on his young mind.

A city in the clouds. A beautiful woman who felt so achingly familiar. The crooked smile of a scoundrel. That same, haunting mask and the slow in and out of a respirator that haunted his dreams.

*No, I am your father. Search your feelings. You know it to be true.*

It changed again in a flash, and for a moment, the boy saw a flicker of a young man who’d looked like the woman in the clouds. He was sad. Angry. *Afraid.*

*We’ll see, my boy. We’ll see. The path that will lead you to fulfilling your destiny, to finishing what your Grandfather couldn’t, will be revealed to you soon. She either walks that path with you...Or she dies.*

The world within his mind shifted on its axis again, and the boy could feel the resolve of the dark stranger begin to crumble as an image flickered through his mind for only a moment. He saw the same young man as before, but so much different than before. The picture faded as quickly as it had arrived, blinking in a rapid series. Red. Blue. Cold. A pair of hazel eyes so much like his own.

*You can’t go back to her now. Just like I can’t.*
He had begun to tremble under the weight of it and his temples began to throb. It was unlike anything he’d ever experienced before and the ache teetered on the edge of something more painful, but part of his young, inquisitive mind was eager to explore the things that felt so vivid and real to him.

Things shifted again, flinging them across space and time to a place that surely had to be a dream. A cavernous cathedral and a voice like poison. It washed over his skin and made him feel so cold. Colder than he’d ever been before.

A power like life itself. Unseen for generations. What the Force has rendered within you both, not even death can tear asunder.

Heavy. So heavy. Too heavy for his untrained mind. Too much of a burden to bear. And, the last thing the boy saw before he began to slip into darkness, was a fleeting image of a family. The kind he always wished he had.

***

“Pull back the tree-line!”

Rey fired off a handful of shots from her blaster, lifting her eyes to the sky with a victorious smile when she felt the vibrations of a passing X-Wing in her chest. They’d come out on top and sent the First Order running.

“They’re pulling the division out,” Finn nodded towards the troop transports that had begun to lift away from the surface of Takodana.

Rey ran up beside Han, nudging her elbow in his ribs with a broad grin as she began to finally catch her breath.

“Looks like you still got it, old man,” she teased, but her smile faded away when she saw the grief-stricken look on the Rebellion hero’s face - like he had seen a ghost.

Turning slowly, she followed his gaze and felt her heart stop.
Striding from the treeline towards the Upsilon-class command shuttle was Kylo Ren. A name she knew and a faceless mask she’d heard tales of, his real face haunted her dreams and kept her hiding on the outskirts of the galaxy.

She’d recognize the cadence of his stride in a heartbeat, but there was something else. Something more concerning than the risk of coming face to face with the man who’d turned her life upside down. The Jedi Killer. Her other half.

Tucked in his arms, as he made his way through bits of crumbled stone from the once proud standing Kanata Castle and a smattering of flames from the firefight, was a bundle of roughspun fabric - and the boy who wore it.

In the grip of her sudden panic, Rey’s mind went into overdrive and she took off at a run, with no plan, no idea of what to do if she appeared by Kylo Ren’s side to demand he return her son - their son.

Her heart raced with each pounding step against the soil. She dodged rubble and leapt over crumpled bodies of fallen stormtroopers, screaming out his name until her voice was raw with the effort and the tears were falling from her eyes.

She knew she was fast, but not fast enough, staggering to a stop to watch in horror as the towering wings stretched out and the ship elegantly lifted into the air.

Rey doubled over, pressing her palms to her knees, gasping for breath as her legs momentarily gave out and she tumbled to the dirt. Sobs wracked her lithe frame, shaking her to the core as her mind reeled with every fear she’d held deep in her heart for the last six years.

Everything she’d done. Every home they’d left behind to begin anew. The way she was so fiercely protective of the boy. None of it had been enough and Rey found herself wholly overwhelmed by the guilt of letting him out of her sight, even just for a moment.

A hand pressed to her back and Rey could feel herself being pulled from the cloud of her misery. Han hooked his fingers around her elbow and gave her gentle tug to her feet.

“Don’t worry, we’ll get the kid back. You’ll see,” he shifted awkwardly from foot to foot. Never one to face his own emotions head-on, Rey could see the ache in his own heart as it etched itself in the creases of his forehead and the way he couldn’t quite meet her eye, “We need their help. The
“Resistance.”

“That means you’ll have to see her, you know. Not just a comm here or there,” Rey argued, wiping away the tears from her cheeks with the back of her hand. He was right. The Resistance was their only hope of getting close enough to retrieve the boy.

“Yeah, I know,” he grumbled, scrubbing the back of his neck with his hand, “He’d be worth the discomfort, though. Come on,” he gave her a nudge and nodded towards the Falcon.

Rey stepped on board, unable to quell the ever-present ache in her heart as she stepped further away from her boy. Being away from him already felt like she was missing a limb in any normal circumstance. This. This was something else. The pain ached so fiercely, a constant throb in the back of her mind, like a part of her heart had been ripped away.

Her mind spun in a dizzying wave as she dragged her feet over the durasteel grates on the floor and slumped down at the Dejarik table with a sob, followed swiftly by BB-8 who offered her a downcast whistle. With her fingers, Rey reached up and rubbed slow circles on her temple, going through every single thing she knew about the First Order in her mind, trying to figure out where he’d taken him - and how she could get him back.

A gentle kick to the toe of her boot brought her back to center. Han hovered over her with his thumbs tucked into his blaster belt with a purse of his lips.

“They’ll know how to get him back. Where they’ve gone. She’ll have some sort of answer, I’m sure of it. They...they do reconnaissance runs all the time, they gotta. This is war, right? That’s what spies and all that are for…” Han heaved a great sigh as he kept his eyes anywhere but on her.

“I just want him back,” Rey let out a sob that echoed into the main hold.

“Me too, kid. Me too,” said Han with a gruff murmur. He reached out and pulled open a drawer and threw a woolen blanket at Rey, “Get some sleep, Sunshine. You look like shit.”

Her chin trembled as she slowly brushed her fingers over the fabric, wondering idly if she and Han were talking about the same person. On the other hand, Rey couldn’t be totally sure if she was speaking about just the boy.
“I still look better than you,” Rey joked with a half-hearted smile as she picked at a loose thread on the blanket, “Anyway, I’m not tired.”

“Hmph,” Han grunted, holding out a palm to push her back to the bench when she tried to stand, “You won’t be any use to him dead. Now sleep before I have Chewie take care of it. Someone once told me that you haven’t lived until you’ve slept curled up in a Wookiee’s arms.”

“I’ll take your word for it,” Rey stifled a wide yawn, unable to ignore the signals her body was beginning to send her after so long without getting proper rest.

“Good, you’d better. I’ve got a bit of wisdom in my old age.”

“You’d like to think that,” Rey blinked slowly as she mumbled after him as he walked out of the hold. Chewie shook his head from the corner before ambling over in a pair of long, loping strides to push her head to the worn cushions and slowly cover her with the blanket with a quiet yowl.

Sleep now, cub. We worry how to get your pup.

Rey lifted a hand and brushed her fingers along the soft fur on his hands, opening her lips to respond to his kind words, but as the Falcon began to buzz around them as the turbolight engines roared to life, she couldn’t help it when her eyes finally began to slip closed.

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It was raining again.

Rey woke with a start and blinked rapidly in the darkness of her quarters. She slipped from her bunk and pressed her feet to the cool, durasteel floor and stretched her arms through the silken robe that once belonged to the young woman who the bedroom had originally belonged to.

A shock of thunder rattled the hull of the starcruiser as the storm raged on outside. The Tantive IV had been tucked away in a mountain crevice, but it was no match for the storms that blew through the jungles on Ajan Kloss every few days.
She and the boy had taken shelter on the well-hidden world that had once served as a refuge after the Galactic Civil War for the Skywalker twins. They were safe, for a time. Safe from the prying eyes of the First Order, anyway.

No matter how she tried, Rey couldn’t protect her boy from his nightmares.

Night after night, they came to haunt him, so much like his father. Except, these were different. The darkness didn’t twist the boy in the same way as it had him, but it was so much harder for Rey to take.

The rain pelted the metallic surface of the legendary Alderaanian star cruiser that had once belonged to the Royal House of Organa, echoing into a short corridor that separated Rey’s room from her son’s. His cries rang out through the rapid pitter-patter of the jungle storm, and his mother’s heart beat along with it as she opened his door.

A flash of lightning flickered through the transparisteel viewport, illuminating the contours of his freckled face - contorted with fear - as he twitched and shook through his fear.

Rey reached out and gathered the sleeping boy in her arms, letting out a soft cry of her own when his body instantly relaxed in her embrace - so much like the nights she’d done the same for another boy in another life.

Shushing him softly, Rey smiled down at the three-year-old when his black eyelashes parted and his hazel eyes were alight with his unshed tears.

“Mama…” his small voice broke with a sniffle before he buried his face into her chest. Rey held him all the tighter as he continued to cry, silently wishing that she could take the burden away from the boy and ease the ache of his terrifying visions again.

“Shhh, euhn in'a, you’re alright. It’s only a dream,” Rey whispered as she brushed her fingers through his raven curls.

“It’s so real. The knight with the fire sword. I can hear his voice calling to me. He knows my name, Tin’mi,” he clutched at the gossamer fabric of her white robe with his small fingers. Rey rocked him slowly until his cries quieted and murmured a promise that made her heart clench.
“As long as I live, Che’eo Visahot, I swear I will protect you from your dreams.”

“But what if they come true...what then?”

“I would protect you from him then, too.”

“Do you promise?” his eyes shone with the remnants of his nightmare-fueled tears, and Rey’s heart ached when she felt the whisper of a memory in the back of her mind. She swallowed a sigh and nodded before pressing a lingering kiss into his hair.

“I promise.”

Chapter End Notes

kaybohls here-

We are having the best time writing this fic! Things are starting to get exciting and definitely complicated!
The response has been incredible and we are so grateful to you ALL!

See you all SOON for the next chapter 😊

xoxo kb
Drunk on a Song of a Lie Gone Wrong

Chapter Summary

A reunion, a plan, and a secret revealed.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“We should leave her.”

“You don’t know her like I do, Big Deal. If we don’t wake her and she misses this briefing, we’ll both be dead.”

“How dead?”

“Dead, dead.”
“I’m going to kill you both right now if you don’t stop talking,” Rey grumbled, opening her eyes in the soft light that streamed in through the open ramp of the Falcon. She sat up with a groan, glaring at Finn and Han, who stood over her like she was either a science experiment or a caw-crab in a zoo.

She sidestepped the men and left a lingering hand on Chewie’s arm as she pulled her blaster from the Dejarik table and tucked it into the holster at her hip before stepping down the ramp.

The long strip of duracrete between the green rolling hills of D’Qar that she’d visited more times than she could count was a frantic flurry of victorious activity. Pilots and land troops alike ran back and forth from the base in the hillside, exchanging smiles and triumphant whoops and hollers from their victory on Takodana.

To them, they’d send the First Order packing, and Rey wanted to celebrate with them, but the constant ache in her heart for her son didn’t allow her to feel much else. She spun a slow circle amongst the celebrations, watching every interaction as they happened in slow motion around her.

Even Finn found himself wrapped up in it all, taking off at a run with a broad smile when Rey watched him reach the bottom of the Falcon’s ramp. His joy was so apparent that the former Jedi Knight couldn’t help the spread of her own smile as she watched him sprint down the landing pad towards a black X-Wing with BB-8 following close behind.

Poe Dameron?

Finn! You’re alive!

So are you! What happened to you?

What happened to me? I was thrown from the crash...woke up at night, no you -- no ship -- you’re - - nothing. Hey...you’re wearing my jacket!

Oh, here...

Oh, no. Keep it, keep it. It suits you...BB-8 says you saved him.
Rey couldn’t believe her eyes, and let out a soft gasp when she watched the moment unfold between her newfound, former stormtrooper friend and the starfighter pilot just steps away. She took a step forward, her heart beating wildly in her chest as the events of the last few days began to take their toll.

“Poe?”

He clapped his hand on Finn’s shoulder with a smile that slowly faded away when he lifted his gaze to meet hers.

Rey’s breath caught in her throat, and the strength she so desperately clung to over the last few, arduous days crumpled like a piece of parchment. They surged towards each other, closing the space between them in an instant. Poe caught her in his arms as she broke down in tears as the weight of what had happened finally came crashing down upon her.

Seeing Poe - alive - wasn’t something she expected. He was merely going to be another in a long list of those she loved leaving her behind, but the truth left her shaken and so wonderfully relieved in a way she never could have expected. Being in his arms - her friend, her confidant, and her sometimes lover - was just what she needed at that moment. Someone who could help her carry the heavy burden.

Her body shook with her sobs and Poe jumped into action, wrapping his arms around her to lead her from the center of the landing pad to somewhere more quiet where she would be free to speak, scream, and cry the way she needed to.

Tucked into a quiet corner between a stone wall and some storage crates, away from the hustle and bustle of the post-battle celebrations, Poe cupped her tear-strewn cheeks between his palms and lovingly wiped the silvery streaks from her freckled flesh. Her fingers lingered on his orange flight suit, melting into his touch when he leaned forward and pressed a lingering kiss to her lips.

Rey hummed softly, leaning into him with a trembling sigh as she felt her emotions anchor themselves in his capable hands.

“Shhh, *Min Laurel*,” Poe murmured softly to her in old Corellian, brushing the strands of her shoulder length hair from her face. Rey tuck her bottom lip between her teeth with a swipe of her
tongue, letting her eyes linger on the toes of their boots. The pilot tucked his knuckle beneath her chin and tilted her gaze to meet his with a soft smile, “What is it?”

Rey’s eyes darted back and forth between his, unable to quell the complicated joy in her heart from the overwhelming relief of seeing him alright and right before her. She threw her arms around his shoulders, squeezing him firmly with a long sigh when she pressed her nose into the downy softness of his black curls.

His hands lingered on her waist as she pulled away, and his dark eyes grew wide when she gave him a hard shove.

“Hey!” His dark brows puckered with a baffled laugh at her cross face.

“Poe Dameron, you got yourself captured by the kriffing First Order?” Rey fumed, beating her fists against his chest, “I am in this whole mess because of you, you know! All for a map of Luke kriffing Skywalker? What do you all think is going to happen, huh? Do you think he went to the most unfindable place in the galaxy so you guys can drag him back, toss him a lightsaber, and that will turn the tide of the war?”

A slow smile curled up from the corners of his mouth, infuriating Rey all the more when he merely shrugged.

“I mean... kinda. But, you did miss me, right?” he bent down and closed her into another warm hug, breathing in the scent of her hair, “Where’s the kid? I owe him a lesson.”

Rey held him all the tighter, practically holding on for dear life as she summoned the courage to acknowledge what had happened out loud.

“They took him. He took him,” she whispered into Poe’s shoulder against the coarse fabric of his flight suit.

Poe pulled away, blinking rapidly with a disbelieving quirk of his mouth, “What do you mean ‘they took him’? Who took him?”

“Kylo Ren,” Rey tried to swallow the name before it burst forth with a tremble of her chin, “Kylo Ren took him. Has him...” she watched the wheels turning in his mind and his own fury at the
situation build up in his dark eyes, intertwined with the worry for the boy who was so dear to him.

Poe clenched his jaw until it twitched, pulling away from her to lift his fingertips to his temple where a lingering bruise had bloomed next to his hairline - presumably from his time in First Order custody. He screwed his eyes shut with a grimace, shaking his head with a shaky sigh.

“İ’ve really had enough of that bastard to last me a lifetime,” he growled, parting dark eyelashes to look at Rey’s questioning gaze, nodding slowly with a thick swallow, “I got the star treatment from Snoke’s pet. It was... not great.”

“Poe…”

He sucked in a deep breath and rubbed the tip of his thumb between his brows before bringing his eyes back to hers and reaching out to tangle his fingers between hers.

“Come on. We’re going to get some help and get him back, I swear.”

Poe led her into the central command center of the makeshift Rebel base amongst the stone and the vines beneath the rolling emerald hills of the planet, striding up to General Organa without a second thought, pulling her from the in-depth conversation she was in with the other Resistance leaders.

“General Organa, sorry to interrupt. We need your help. Rey’s boy--”

“Han told me,” Leia looked at Rey with pain in her dark eyes, “I’m sorry…”

“Listen, Finn is familiar with the weapon that destroyed the Hosnian System. He worked on the base, and I’m sure he can help us find a way in,” the pilot looked to the former stormtrooper who stood close by Han beside the large holotable at the center of the wide-open room.

“I’m desperate for anything you can tell us,” Rey met his eyes with tears threatening to spill from her own, “That’s where my son was taken. I need to get there... fast.”

“And I will do everything I can to help, but first...you won’t like to hear this, Rey...we need to
regroup. We can’t just dive headfirst into this without a few hours to prepare,” the former Princess of Alderaan reached out and squeezed Rey’s arm, “You won’t be any use to him the way you are. Rest. Regroup. Tomorrow - we’ll get your boy.”

“General,” Poe argued, planting his hands on his hips with a frustrated sigh, “He’s with Kylo Ren. We don’t have any time to waste. He’s just a little boy.”

“I’m with Hotshot here,” Han chimed in from behind his wife, who turned to glare at him.

“I understand what’s at risk here, all of you, but you will listen to my orders, do you understand? You will endanger him further by going in unprepared for the exact reason you want to jump in with both feet,” the petite, yet powerful woman commanded, keeping the entire room hanging on her every word as Rey’s heart hammered in her ears, “I’ve sent out a reconnaissance group to gather more information on the weapon. Until then - we wait - and we pray.”

“What about the map?” Rey questioned, “All of this trouble was over finding Luke. Did it work, or was it all for nothing?”

Leia hesitated, pressing her lips together as she gave Rey a knowing look with a slow shake of her head, “We have the map, but it’s incomplete and doesn’t match any existing system on record.”

“A map to nowhere, how very like him. What did I tell you?” Rey looked to Poe with a lift of her brow, “What did I tell both of you? He doesn’t want to be found by any of you.”

“By you, he might. We could start to make things right,” Leia responded with a sigh, looking to her husband for a moment before looking back at Rey and Poe, “There’s nothing left to be done today. Go. That’s an order.”

Rey opened her mouth to argue, but Leia gave her a look that made Poe give her hand a tug and pull her away. The ache in her heart for her boy was as painfully persistent as ever, always in the back of her mind as she reluctantly walked away from the command center and left the work to the real Rebels, sighing with a tremble of her chin as Poe led her into the dim tunnels to the dormitories.

Once they were away and alone from the hustle and bustle of the Resistance Command Center, Poe pulled her to a stop at the center of the south passageway and reached up to skim his thumb against her cheek.
“I missed you, kid.”

Kid.

The sound of the name wasn’t unwelcome on Poe’s lips, and if she was honest with herself, hearing him say it lessened the ache of the memories that still lingered in the back of her mind. A soft sigh fell from her lips with the smallest of smiles as she looked up into her friend and lover’s face.

“Me too,” she hummed, leaning her head against the wall as his touch lingered.

“Do you mind if I say a proper hello?”

Rey chuckled, lifting her fingers to tuck a stray curl from his forehead back into his always impossibly coiffed hair, “Please do. I could use the distraction.”

Poe answered her with an infectious smile and, for a moment, Rey allowed herself a single moment of minute joy to help hold her steady in the storm that was her heart, meeting him with her own as he leaned down and pressed his forehead to hers.

Slowly and oh so gently, as Poe always was with her, he twined his fingers in her hair and brought his lips to hers. Rey wanted to linger there, with the softness and welcome warmth of his mouth on hers. It filled her heart with a much needed comfort that always came when he was near, filling the void in her heart and helping her forget her woes, even if only for a moment or two.

Poe pressed in softly, parting her lips with a slow swipe of his tongue along the seam. Rey could feel the smile on his mouth when she answered his kiss with a quiet whimper, unable to keep her hands from coiling themselves in the thatch of thick curls on his head.

He wrapped his arms around her waist, pulling her flush against his body, deepening the kiss as his hands dipped downwards with each moment they lost themselves to their insatiable chemistry - neither of them ready to come up for air from the delectable distraction they’d found in each other to help pass the time and ease their shared pain of the lost boy.
All too soon, they tore themselves away, breathless and smiling until reality settled back over them and Rey’s smile faded away with a sigh. Poe could read her like a book and, like the friend he was to her, he hooked his fingers between hers and led her further down the hall.

“Come on, Min Laurel,” he murmured in Old Corellian again, “Let me distract you properly. There’s no use arguing with The General, and I have a good way we can waste some time.”

Poe always had a way of being able to carry her in more ways than one. He had been the one to offer an easy smile or a helping hand when they were young... younger. They’d been fast friends when she was still a little girl, and she found herself as a shadow to two older boys who could never refuse the freckle-faced little girl.

They naturally grew apart as boys turned into men and Rey busied herself with her own Jedi training when her closest friends were away.

It had been years since the destruction of the Praxeum on Yavin IV before they saw each other again. Rey had only just begun to feel somewhat whole when she had met Poe again on D’Qar and they’d shared a bottle of Corellian whiskey in his quarters - telling tales of the past and commiserating over their shared loss.

Not long after, Poe started showing up with supplies for Rey and her son wherever they’d found their home at the time. She couldn’t deny it. Her life was so achingly lonely at times, and having another adult to talk to - someone who knew and understood the broader strokes of her past - was an unexpected blessing in the best kind of way. It was only natural when their friendship began to progress into more.

Home had always been an abstract idea to Rey, always more of a feeling than a place. Something that she’d really only ever found in one person before. While a life with Poe wasn’t something she’d pictured, she couldn’t deny how at home she felt in his arms, tucked snugly against his bare chest in the muted light of his quarters on D’Qar.

He slowly traced the tips of his fingers up and down the length of her arm as she absentmindedly fiddled with the golden ring that hung from a silver chain around his neck.

“I’ve never told you how beautiful this is,” Rey whispered, turning her head to press a soft kiss against his caramel skin.
Poe hummed from the simple gesture, leaning in to let his nose linger in her hair with a brush of his fingers along her jaw.

“Thanks, it was my mother’s. I’ve been saving it since I was a kid.”

“For what?” Rey tilted her gaze to meet his.

“For the right person,” Poe answered with a soft smile, closing the distance between them to leave a lingering kiss upon her lips. Like he was savoring the taste of her, he dawdled for a moment, never hesitating to deepen his kisses, to draw the moment out further - even if it was only for a split second.

She was positively breathless afterwards, chewing on the inside of her lip when he blinked slowly at her as his smile faded away.

“I was hoping to give it to you.”

Rey opened her mouth to speak, but Poe silenced her with another delectable kiss that stole her breath in an instant. When he pulled away, she swiped her tongue over her bottom lip, capturing it between her teeth, practically buzzing with the heady mixture of pleasure and the subsequent guilt that swarmed her because of it.

The thought of him - how things had been and what they were to each other - was never far from her mind. Rey felt like, some days, she lived her life in the past, reliving the best days during her waking moments, and the worst while she was asleep. The moment she’d let the present carry her too far away from the constant reminder of what had transpired - her heart would twinge with the very thought of him, and the picture of his face would ground her in the harsh reality of what could have been.

Poe - impossibly attuned to what she was thinking, even without a sliver of Force sensitivity - stilled her racing thoughts and brought her back down from the stratosphere with a touch of his hand against her cheek. He skimmed his thumb across her cheek and pressed a simple and sincere kiss to her lips.

“I love you, Rey,” his voice was quiet, and his brow furrowed as he gave his declaration. Her eyes darted back and forth across his face, and her mind flew away on the wings of her memories all over again.
I wish I never picked you up off the floor that night. Then I wouldn’t…I wouldn’t love you like I do. I wouldn’t have fallen in love with you.

His voice echoed through her mind like it had happened only the day before, and Rey couldn’t help the painful ache in her heart from the first time he’d confessed that he loved her - and how much it terrified him.

I’m afraid. I’m afraid of everything. I’m afraid of what will happen to me. I’m afraid of what will happen to us...I’m afraid of how much I love you.

Determined to find and cherish the joy she had right in front of her - eager to move on from what had already come and gone, no matter how badly her heart ached to do it - Rey turned her eyes to Poe with an unconvincing smile.

“....I love you too.”

Poe’s face melted into a wistful smile, reaching up to tuck a stray strand of her hair behind her ear with a quiet huff of laughter.

“You hesitated.”

“I...I didn’t,” Rey mumbled, chewing on her lip to try and ease the wild thumping of her heart.

“It’s okay, Min Laurel ,” he breathed a kiss on her forehead, “I understand. I can’t imagine the loss you’ve suffered. He’s all around you, all the time. I know that no one is ever really gone. So...I can love you enough for the both of us.”

Before her guilt could swarm her again, Poe gathered her against his chest and drew her back to their shared moment with a lingering kiss. Rey moaned softly when he rolled her to her back and turned his attention to the supple skin between her neck and her shoulder, grazing his jaw along the curve of her collar bone with a series of delectable kisses that took her breath away.

She didn’t deserve him and his love, not for a second - not when she’d always love one man above any other. And, as Poe mapped her freckled flesh with his mouth, all Rey could see when she
closed her eyes was *him*.

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Kylo Ren stood on the edge of the room, resisting the urge to pace back and forth across the perimeter of the empty officer’s quarters on Starkiller Base. The space was quiet, softly lit, with only the sound of soft breathing amongst the steady thrum of the millions of systems that ran through the core of the First Orders flagship weapon.

He’d been watching the boy with a steadfast and careful eye, eager to not have any prying eyes see him who didn’t need to.

There was something about him. Something unexpected. Something so eerily familiar. Perhaps it was in the smattering of freckles that dusted his long nose, the way each sleepy breath rushed past his lips as he slept, or the thatch of raven curls that drew Kylo in, but more than anything - he merely had a feeling.

A feeling that the Force was trying to show him something about the boy.

He’d felt it as soon as he’d glimpse the flicker of his face in the mind of the Resistance pilot they’d captured on Jakku. Poe Dameron wasn’t someone he ever expected to see in his lifetime, let alone in an interrogation chamber in the custody of the First Order. It had been a lifetime since he’d laid eyes on him, and Dameron had long since abandoned his childhood life - and his childhood friends - on Yavin IV for a career in running spice on Kajimi.

The boy he was before would have felt a twinge of guilt for rifling through Poe’s mind and causing him indisputable amounts of pain in the process, but Kylo Ren didn’t have time for such dabblings in the light. He got what he needed to know, and that was what mattered.

Except, in the process, Kylo got more than he bargained for, and wasn’t quite convinced it was a bad thing. The sight of the boy - even just a glimpse - was something that intrigued him from the start, and he knew that he needed to know more, but didn’t have the faintest idea where to start once the pilot had been broken out of custody by a traitorous stormtrooper.

Even after they’d lost track of the escapee and his counterpart on Jakku, Kylo couldn’t get the
image of the boy out of his mind.

The Force was trying to show him something, and that became so much clearer to him upon his arrival to Takodana. They’d followed a comm from a First Order loyalist on the backwater planet who’d reported that the droid they sought - the droid that Kylo was bound to be punished for losing track of - was loitering with Resistance sympathizers at Maz Kanata’s.

He’d been there more times than he could count, but the memories of another life were far from his mind once he stepped foot on the forested world and followed the thread of that feeling when his troops alerted him to the fact that a boy had run into the forest - with a droid.

Coming face-to-face with the boy wasn’t what he expected either. In his mind, Kylo Ren knew he was something to be feared, and he reveled in it. He enjoyed watching his enemies and First Order officers alike scurry away when he thundered through the corridors of a star destroyer. But the boy. Oh, the boy. Seeing the fear in his eyes and the way he ran from him like his life depended on it affected Kylo in a way he never would have thought.

Exploration into the boy’s mind was the next natural step. He was gentle - something he wasn’t sure he was even capable of, not during his lifetime in darkness - and the boy barely flinched as Kylo brushed up against his signature.

All at once, they were awash with images, and at that moment - Kylo knew for sure that the boy was a message from the Force.

He saw flashes of what felt like memories, some unfamiliar to him that must have belonged to the boy and some, amazingly, that belonged - in some version or another - to him.

*Just for once, let me look on you with my own eyes.*

The last gasps of life from his grandfather filled his ears, something that had merely been told to him through the Force and never by his own family. Just another in a series of lies that made up a lifetime’s worth of a twisted web.

Things shifted, allowing the briefest glimpse of what Kylo had known to be the Death Star - something the First Order had tried to emulate with Starkiller - with the echo of a voice he swore he’d heard before in his dreams, of one Ben Kenobi - his namesake.

The memories shifted again, and Kylo could feel the boy begin to bend from the weight of it, and the dark knight began to wonder who this boy was to him...and why he was seeing flashes of his family’s history in his mind.

He let out an inaudible gasp when the image of his parents flashed through his mind before the shadow of Darth Vader - the only one who’d been truthful in showing him who he was meant to be - blotted out the light with a single breath from his respirator.

No, I am your father. Search your feelings. You know it to be true.

It changed again in a flash, and for a moment, Kylo saw a flicker of a young man - himself as he used to be. He was so angry and afraid...and he was still both of those things, he’d merely been taught how to twist it to his advantage, but it didn’t stop the twist of his heart when his own memory - and the voice of his master - echoed through his mind.

We’ll see, my boy. We’ll see. The path that will lead you to fulfilling your destiny, to finishing what your Grandfather couldn’t, will be revealed to you soon. She either walks that path with you...Or she dies.

The world within the boy’s mind shifted on its axis again, and Kylo’s resolve to learn about the boy began to crumble as an image flickered through his mind for only a moment. He saw himself again, but so much different than before. The picture faded as quickly as it had arrived, blinking in a rapid series. Red. Blue. Cold. A pair of hazel eyes he knew by heart, but it was a memory that hadn’t happened yet.

You can’t go back to her now. Just like I can’t.

The small boy had begun to tremble under the gravity of the memories, and Kylo’s heart began to ache from the guilt that weighed on him from causing his pain. The force of the visions he was seeing was unlike anything he’d ever experienced in so long, but as the dark knight tried to release the boy, wonder of wonders - the boy held on - pressing harder and further into the vision to see more of what the Force would show them together.

Things shifted again, flinging them across space and time to a place that surely had to be a dream. A cavernous cathedral and a voice like poison that filled Kylo with a cold sense of dread. It
washed over his skin and made him shiver beneath the guise of his mask. Something *terrible* was going to happen there, he could feel it in his bones - a feeling that was further cemented when it spoke oddly familiar words that Kylo Ren would never forget as long as he lived.

*A power like life itself. Unseen for generations. What the Force has rendered within you both, not even death can tear asunder.*

It was too much for the boy. Too heavy for his untrained mind. Too much of a burden to bear, and Kylo feared for the boy’s life if he held on too long. The last thing Kylo saw before the boy began to slip into darkness was a fleeting image of a family.

The boy had crumpled soon after and, by sheer instinct, Kylo had reached for him and cradled him to his chest before his small frame met the ground. He weighed nearly nothing, and yet the gravity of the mysteriously precious cargo was something that nearly overwhelmed the dark knight.

His head lolled against the knight’s broad shoulder, and the boy hummed softly as his small fingers twined into the woven zeyd cloth cowl as Kylo balanced him against his chest and lifted him effortlessly into the air.

He’d never held a child before. He’d never met one since he was one himself. The feeling was so gloriously foreign, and *so right,* he found himself reaching up to press a gloved hand to the boy’s back as he carried him away from the smoldering bits of bracken and bramble towards his waiting ship.

After barking out a swift order to pull the unit out, Kylo quickly made his way to the Upsilon-Class command shuttle - eager to get him off world and to Starkiller to further his investigation of the boy. He was sure, with what could be a burgeoning Force-sensitive child in his hands, the boy would be of great importance to his master and their cause.

From the moment he held him in his arms, Kylo didn’t let the boy out of his sight - not for a moment. As soon as they’d made planetfall on Starkiller, he’d purposefully strode from the belly of the ship and to a quiet corridor where no one would think twice to look for a child. The weapon was new, and not yet staffed to full capacity, so the dark knight used it to his advantage.

Tucked in the quiet of an empty dormitory, Kylo watched the boy as he slept. The Force-fueled visions - and the astonishing way he’d held onto them after Ren tried to pull them free - had taken a toll on the little boy. He knew he would have to answer to Snoke for his abandonment of the droid with the map the Skywalker, but something told him that he needed to stay by his side.
A feeling.

His curiosity about the boy only grew as the time passed, but Kylo held strong to the same values he’d long since abandoned when he took up his true name.

Patience.

It would be a lie to say that he didn’t want to see more of what was in the boy’s mind - that was the darkness talking, eager to take whatever he wanted, no matter the cost - but Kylo couldn’t bring himself to bring any sort of harm upon him. All he wanted to do was talk.

His perseverance was rewarded when, after hours had passed with Kylo vigilantly standing guard over him, the boy began to stir.

A soft rush of panic and thrilling anticipation washed over him briefly when the boy’s dark lashes parted and he blinked slowly to take in the room around him. He sat up quickly, scrambling out from under the blanket Kylo had laid across him and pressing himself into the corner of the bunk with a wide-eyed stare.

“Where am I?”

The boy’s voice was as clear as a bell, with a crispness to his childlike, rounded vowels, and a hint of a Coruscanti accent. Kylo chuckled softly when his brows puckered and he gave the dark knight a scathing look that was achingly familiar to him.

“You’re my guest,” Kylo cocked his head to the side, watching the tiniest flicker of curiosity and fear flicker across the boy’s freckled face, “You’re still afraid of me.”

The child tucked his bottom lip between his teeth with a swipe of his tongue, curling his knees to his chest with a small dip of his chin.

“That’s ‘cause you're the monster from my dreams,” he murmured softly, looking over Kylo as he remained crouched at the foot of the narrow bunk.
“I’m not that kind of monster,” Kylo answered, sucking in a slow breath as he reached up to press his gloved hands to either side of his mask as the echo of the memory he’d heard flickered through his mind.

*Just for once, let me look on you with my own eyes.*

The faceplate over his mouth snapped open with a metallic *hiss*, and Kylo slowly rose to his feet as he pulled the mask free.

Kylo let out a trembling breath as his eyes adjusted to the muted light in the room, but never let his gaze waver from the boy’s.

Upon the dark knight’s removal of his mask, the young one released the hold on his knees and leaned forward with a slow parting of his lips. Kylo took a tentative step closer, brushing gently against the boy’s signature and felt his fear fade away - leaving only curiosity behind.

“I know your face,” the boy whispered, pressing his palms to the mattress as Kylo drew closer, “She said you died.”

“Who?” Kylo’s tone was unintentionally clipped, letting his curiosity pull him forward to gingerly sit beside the boy. The more he looked upon him with his own eyes, the more he knew that there was so much more that he didn’t know, “Who are you?”

“I can show you whatever you want,” the boy rose to his knees and moved closer to the dark knight, who watched him with fervent curiosity, “She wouldn’t teach me, so I hide it. But I know things. I can do things.”

Kylo warily watched the boy as he drew closer, reaching out with his small hands and an imploring look in his hazel eyes.

“Show me,” Ren nodded, sucking in a slow breath when the boy closed his eyes and cupped Kylo’s face between his palms.

*In the blink of an eye, an entire world opened up in front of him, and Kylo was no longer in the*
cold, impersonal quarters that would belong to a First Order officer. Instead, he stood in a brightly lit sitting room, looking upon the shape of a young woman who stared out at the busy traffic that weaved in and out of towering spires just outside the transparisteel window.

“ My Tin’mi. She’s lived in lots of places. We were here a long time, and I don’t know of any other place before here. When she tells me stories, this is where I was born. ”

“ Tin’mi ,” Kylo echoed, looking down to the boy who stood beside him in the vision he’d projected into his mind. He knew many languages, but the elegant syllables of Cheunh always held a special place in his heart - in Ben’s heart - as a way to communicate with the girl he loved.

His chin trembled as he took a step forward to try and get a closer glimpse of the woman in the window, sighing softly when she palmed the curve of her belly and the garbled voice of a comm spoke.

“Are you sure you want to do this? You can be here with us. You don’t have to be alone.”

“I’m sure,” she answered in a whisper as a solitary tear rolled down the length of her nose, illuminated like a glittering diamond by the light that streamed in through the window, “I’m not alone. Not anymore.”

Things shifted again, and Kylo’s mind reeled at the rapid pace of it. He sucked in a gulp of air, lifting his hand to shield his eyes from the bright white light that filled the room they suddenly found themselves in.

“ In the forest, you asked where I came from. I am from everywhere . Tin’mi might not teach me, but she shows me the galaxy...as long as it’s safe ,” the boy murmured from beside him, watching with a smile of his own as a much smaller version of him bolted past them in the plush sitting room and leapt into the wide-open arms of the man who strode through the door.

“Unca Wanwo!” the boy hurtled himself into them with a scream.

“ There’s my little buddy!” the man beamed, giving the boy a spin with a flutter of his blue and gold cape, lifting his gaze to the woman who stood by the window - always watching the world outside, like she was perpetually waiting for someone to arrive, “Well...you look absolutely beautiful, my dear. You truly belong amongst us in the clouds. Leia told me...you two can stay as long as you want. Whatever you need, just tell the Baron Administrator, and he’ll get it for you.”
In the blink of an eye and a rush of white that turned into muted darkness, Kylo allowed himself only a moment to catch his breath. Tucked into a narrow bunk on a starship was the little boy who was showing him his memories, trapped in a fitful sleep. His small face was contorted in terror as a flash of lightning illuminated every freckle in the darkened room.

“Sometimes, I have bad dreams, but Tin’mi always makes it better,” Kylo listened to the boy, reaching out a hand to try and soothe him from the night terrors he was all too familiar with, when - in a cold rush of energy through his chest - the woman he’d seen watching out the window passed through him like he was a ghost. Dressed in white, she gathered the boy in her arms and rocked him gently as she ran her fingers through his dark hair.

“Mama...” the desolate sound of the boy’s small voice nearly broke Kylo’s heart, and he wanted nothing more than to be there beside the boy’s mother and ease his pain in the way Rey had always done for him.

“Shh, euhn in’a, you’re alright. It’s only a dream.”

“...the knight with the fire sword. I can hear his voice calling to me. He knows my name, Tin’mi.”

“As long as you live, Ch’eo Visahot, I swear I will protect you from your dreams,” the woman answered him, holding him firmly to her chest. The boy lifted his face to the storm that raged on outside of the transparisteel viewport. Kylo’s mind reeled at the thought that he was the one who plagued the boy’s dreams in the same way the vision of his future self had plagued his own.

“But what if they come true...what then?”

Kylo’s heart lurched when he felt her stiffen and suck in a slow breath - her own heartache permeated everything else, and suddenly, things became a little clearer.

“I would protect you from him, then, too.”

“That voice,” Kylo murmured, lifting his hand to reach out and brush his fingers against her shoulder but, in a flash of lightning, things shifted again.
It was raining again.

A soft drizzle hung in the air, coating the black soil and the emerald greens that grew in neat rows. Kylo swore that, if he lifted his face to the cloud-filled sky, he might be able to feel it upon his skin, but then again - this wasn’t his memory, no matter how badly he ached for it to be.

With the years that had passed with him living his life under his true name, Kylo had been successful at marinating in the power that the darkness fed him on a steady stream. So intoxicating was it, that he never truly stopped to think about what he could have had, not until a lithe brunette stood with her back to him, crying softly as she leaned against an evaporator.

“She cries, my Tin’mi. Not all the time. Sometimes we are happy, but I can see it in her eyes and I can feel it in her heart. She doesn’t say, but I know she is sad.”

“Tin’mi, look!” the boy in the memory called out, and Kylo turned his attention away from the woman for only a moment to see his beaming, freckled face lifted to the sky, “He’s back!”

“Who’s back?” Kylo looked to the boy beside him, who merely beamed at the memory before giving his answer.

“He makes her smile,” he nodded with a broad grin as the sound of fusial thrust engines thundered in the air around them as a black X-Wing came in to land a few paces away, “...and he lets me fly.”

Kylo let out a soft huff of air, pressing his lips together with a slow work of his jaw as the woman dashed away her tears and bound forward to greet the pilot. He knew his face in an instant, and felt the familiar curls of unsanctioned jealousy furl up in his chest, even though he hadn’t even seen her face.

He stepped forward, eager to see more, to know more, mindlessly seeking his own answers within the boy’s memories.

“Be careful, Tis’mi, you might not like what you find there. I told you... she told me you died.”

The boy’s words rang in his ears, and Kylo found himself breathless and reeling as a burning sensation ripped through his very soul.
His eyes narrowed as the pilot - a man he’d seen only a few days prior, whose mind he’d recklessly tore through and found intimate memories of the woman in the vision he was watching. A woman whose voice he recognized and whose face he saw in the boy beside him. - Poe Dameron took her in his arms and pressed a lingering kiss to her lips with a smile. A smile that was equally matched on the face of the woman beside him.

What the Force has rendered between you, not even death can tear asunder.

Kylo staggered back, drawing his breath in sharp gasps when - for a split second - she looked straight at him, and suddenly, he was a young man again. Hopelessly in love with a girl who he would burn down the galaxy for. For that’s what he’d done, wasn’t it? Become the unruly guard dog for the Supreme Leader, leaving a trail of fire and blood in his wake? All for her. All to save her.

Six years had passed since he felt the lives tucked inside the Praxeum be snuffed out - and no sign of Rey. Six years since the dyad had been cut off, their bond severed, and his heart torn to pieces as he cried out to the darkness for help. Oh, and help it did.

The wounds that festered from her absence never really healed. They’d only been corrupted over time, poisoned with anger and pain until it could be twisted into something useful. Until he’d forget and lose himself to the delectable feeling of it.

It had all been a lie. A lie like everything else - a lie to make him a tool and use him for everyone else’s gain.

“Ch’eo k’tusah,” Kylo murmured before tearing himself away from the visage of her face. He blinked rapidly in the muted light of the officer’s quarters on Starkiller Base. His breathing was still strained, and his mind raced wildly with the memories of her...but one thing stood out most of all.

The boy.

The boy was his. His son. The Force had brought them together, and the boy had shown him the truth.

His son, who still had his small hands pressed against the sides of his face. He blinked slowly before reaching out to wrap his small arms around Kylo’s shoulders.
Ren reacted instinctually, flinching at the close contact at first, until - with a slow release of the breath he wasn’t aware he’d been holding - Kylo wrapped his arms around him in return.

He closed his eyes with a trembling sigh, leaning his cheek against the downy softness of the boy’s dark curls - memorizing the feeling before, like all the other good things in his life, it was inevitably taken away.

With his free hand, Kylo pulled his leather gloves from his hands and wrapped the boy up tighter, eager to hold onto him and protect him with everything he had when a sudden rush of molten guilt came over him.

*What had he done?*

In the rush of his piqued curiosity, he’d taken the boy. *Snatched him.* Not just from anyone, *but from Rey.*

Rey, who was *alive* and would surely hate him all the more now that he’d kidnapped her child - *their child* - and brought him to the most dangerous place in the entire galaxy for a Force-sensitive child. Now Kylo would have to find a way to keep him from the Supreme Leader.

But, *oh*, how the old him longed to see her. To ask her *why* she stayed hidden from him. *Why* she lied. *Why* she kept his son from him.

Vicious memories of his own family keeping the truth from him about his bloodline - about his grandfather - tore through his mind, and the echoes of the voice who had guided him to his truest self soon followed.

His master had taught him how to *embrace* the darkness, not run from it. And now, because of who he was, *because of Kylo Ren*, he now had his own heir. A boy who’d learned the truth before it was too late.

Perhaps, with him, they had a chance to start something new - to let the past die and start over from the very beginning. Without the Sith or the Jedi. Without the pressure of someone else's legacy weighing on their shoulders. But how?
Kylo breathed out a sigh as he slowly pressed his fingers into the boy’s hair, “You said she calls you Ch’eo Visahot? My darling…” he mused softly with the boy in his arms, “What’s your Tin’mi’s name, kid?”

The little boy shifted in his arms, tired once more after what he’d shown Kylo. He stifled a wide yawn as his hazel eyes slipped closed.

“Rey Skywalker.”

....

“You fail me, again, my boy. Such a disappointment. My teachings have meant nothing, apparently, if you let the map get away once more. Your failure has cost us precious time, time with which the Resistance is using to get to Skywalker.”

Snoke’s visage towered over him as Kylo knelt on one knee before him, his helmet tucked away under his arm. Kylo tried to mask his thoughts, at war with himself mentally to stay calm, not show anything was amiss. His Master surged forward, brushing against his mind and gripping for his thoughts when a voice rang out into the chamber.

Kylo Ren had never been more thankful to hear Armitage Hux’s voice.

“Ren here,” Hux strode forward in the chamber, his eyes never leaving the Supreme Leaders until he came to a stop on the platform next to Kylo. “Let the droid escape so he could capture a child.” Hux turned his green eyes to Kylo now, narrowing them as he let acid drip from his next words. “We believe the enemy has taken the droid and now has the map, Supreme Leader.”

Kylo could feel his Master’s fury through the Force, the oily, inky tendrils of his Force signature turning even darker, somehow. Kylo closed his eyes for a moment as Snoke sent out a strike with the Force, pummeling against his mind without mercy. Gritting his teeth, Kylo tried not to think about his mother - no, the General - finding her twin brother because of his failures.

Snoke glared at him for a moment before focusing his attention on General Hux, before stating, “The Resistance must be crushed before they get to Skywalker.”

His Master’s voice rang into his head, his vitriol bleeding through as he remarked, Your failures.
cost us greatly, Kylo Ren. Apparently you are still showing affection for those scum that were once your family. Remember how they abandoned you, how I took you in and trained you? Believed in you? Made you powerful?

**Yes Master. I remember.** Kylo answered, and he felt a squeeze on his mind, pain surging through him briefly before the hold was released and Snoke focused his attention completely on Hux as he spoke once more.

“We have their location. We tracked their reconnaissance ship to the Ileenium system.” Hux looked over at Kylo once more, the slightest tick of his lips upward indicating his pleasure in making the Supreme Leader happy.

Kylo did his best to close his mind off, starting to grow unsettled. *Rey has to be with them. I told her it would be so. I told her we would be enemies. Why didn’t she believe me? Why did she promise to love me always, yet she ran straight into the pilot’s arms?* Kylo took a breath, trying to keep his shield up as he let a thought settle into his brain. *Let the past die. I have all I need. I can bring my son under my tutelage, and he will be powerful - like his father.*

“Good,” Snoke said, his tone still low and dangerous sounding. “Then we will crush them once and for all. Prepare the weapon.”

“Yes, Supreme Leader.” Hux gave Kylo one final knowing look before turning and leaving the room.

As soon as Hux stepped through the door, lightning crackled from Snoke’s fingertips, striking Kylo in the chest and throwing him backwards to the floor, his head bouncing hard off the duracrete floor. Pain, raw and grating, flowed through his body, and Kylo grit his teeth and waited for the pain to stop, trying to remember that pain was a conduit for the Force.

Pain made him stronger, made him more powerful.

The lightning stopped, and Kylo pulled himself up until he was kneeling once more before his Master.

“‘You’ve hidden something from me,’ Snoke intoned, and Kylo felt the Force pushing into his head, even though he felt his shield stay in place for now. ‘You know you can't resist me, my boy! Do you not remember who taught you how to enter someone’s mind?’ Kylo felt the oily fingers of the Force in his mind, shifting through his memories and battering the shield until it fell to pieces, withdrawing when he had seen what he wanted. Kylo could do nothing but close his eyes and try to
keep himself from screaming, and when he opened his eyes, he could feel the coppery taste of blood in his mouth from where he had bitten his tongue. A small trickle of blood also ran from his nose to his upper lip, and he used one gloved finger to wipe it away.

“Supreme Leader, with your guidance, the child can be of use to us.” Kylo said, looking up at Snoke’s towering visage.

“You tried to keep his presence from me. Why? Is it because you still long for the desert scum that grew him in her putrid womb?”

“She means nothing to me,” Kylo said, “But the boy… he is strong in the Force. Let me train him, Master. He can be of use to us.”

“We shall see,” Snoke said, standing from his throne and making him seem gargantuan now as Kylo still remained kneeling. “If what you say about this boy is true, then bring him to me.”

Snoke’s holo faded away, and Kylo remained kneeling for a few moments, his heart pounding in his chest as he pondered what he could do to protect the child. He needed to keep him safe as he trained him and keep him away from Snoke.

“Yes, Supreme Leader,” he whispered before standing and, with a quick flip of his helmet back onto his head, he strode out of the room and into the dark corridors of the Finalizer.

Chapter End Notes

ekaybohls here,
Thank you so much for all the continued love of our baby! It is a joy to write and we are loving every second of it!!
xoxo kb
Rey suckered in a deep breath as she looked up over the green-blue hologram at the center of the holotable. Poe reached out and squeezed her hand, drawing her gaze to him to see the reflection of the weapon in his dark eyes.
“So what is it? Another Death Star?” Rey asked, looking across the meeting of Resistance officers to Leia and Han.

“The scan data from Snap’s reconnaissance flight confirms Finn’s report. They’ve somehow built a hyper-light speed weapon in the core of the planet itself,” Poe stated, pressing a series of buttons to turn the image and show them the eye of the weapon.

“So, another Death Star,” Rey nodded with a frown, watching Leia turn away to a Lieutenant, murmuring into her ear.

“I wish that were true. This is the Death Star…” the Resistance’s star pilot pressed a switch and projected the image of the legendary Imperial battle station in front of them. A series of gasps rang out when they saw the devastating size difference between the two, “And this is Starkiller base.”

“Okay, so what? It’s big.” Rey shrugged, pressing her palms to the console with a sigh, eager to get off the ground and on the way to the base to fetch her son.

“It’s more than big,” Finn answered her from a few steps away, “It uses the power of the sun. They charge it by sucking a star dry.”

“The First Order,” The General’s voice rang out over the quiet chitter of the officers around them, “They’re charging the weapon again. Our system is the next target.”

“What are we supposed to do without the Republic fleet?” Rey countered, shifting her gaze from Leia to Poe and back again, “Do we blow it up?”

“I like where her head’s at,” Han chimed in, “There’s always a way to do that.”

“He’s right,” Leia added with a nod towards her husband.

Rey stepped around the gathering of officers and inspected the hologram, looking over every detail, running the tip of her fingers over the seam of her mouth with a slow sigh.
“With a weapon this size, the power has to be contained with a...a...thermal oscillator of some sort.”

“There is one!” Finn answered her excitedly, pointing towards the scan, “Over here in Precinct 47.”

“What do you want to bet that, if we destroy the oscillator, we can disrupt the core and destroy the station?” Rey met Poe’s gaze with a gleam in her eye, unable to keep the excited flutter that rebellion had sparked in her heart.

“We’ll hit it with everything we got,” Poe nodded, reaching for her hand again.

“It’ll have defensive shields. They always do. We gotta disable ‘em.” Han grumbled, looking to the former stormtrooper beside Rey, “You worked there, kid. Whatdoya got?”

“I can do it,” Finn nodded confidently, “But you gotta get me there.”

“Us. You need to get us there,” Rey chimed in.

“Don’t worry, Sweetheart. You know I will,” Han gave Rey a secret, wry smile.

“Han, how?” Leia’s face was concerned.

“If he told you, you wouldn’t like it,” Rey answered for him.

“So, disable the shield. Take out the oscillator and blow up their big gun,” Poe declared, sweeping the room with a confident breath. He let out a laugh when Chewie answered with a resounding roar that shook the room. “Alright, Rebels. Let’s go - and Godspeed.”

The group scattered like birds in the wind, each one tasked with their own charge, their own contribution to the cause that was so dear to them all. Rey finally had a stake in it all, in the thing she had avoided for so long, the thing she felt so passionately about when she was a young woman.
She’d promised to defend the Galaxy against terrors and tyrants, and with her son at the center, she had no choice but to join.

In the flurry of activity following the gathering, Rey lost track of her sometimes, always lover, keeping her focus on the back of Han’s familiar brown leather jacket as they made their way out to the rag tag collection of star fighters that made up the Resistance fleet.

Rey could smell the excitement in the air, filled to the brim with a crackle of their passion and eagerness, ready and willing to dive headfirst into danger if it meant the chance to hurt the First Order.

The former Jedi ducked around the landing gear of the Falcon, giving Finn a look when he fumbled with the heavy crate he was carrying.

“Hey, be careful with that, there’s explosives in there,” she laughed when his dark eyes grew wide with a scowl.

“Now you tell me…”

Rey patted Chewie on the back, who answered her with a quiet, hopeful yeowl.

*We get cub back soon. You not worry, friend.*

“I know, Chewie,” Rey smiled, taking the crate from his arms to carry it into the back hold compartments. When she emerged, she kept her hands busy like everyone else in the Resistance, unlatching one of the fuel ducts from the bottom of the ship when she heard Leia’s familiar alto call her name.

“Rey.”

The General’s face was stern, but kind, as she stood just outside the shadow of the ship. Rey strode to her side with a sigh, knowing in her heart of hearts that they, as mothers, were both worried about the same thing.
When Rey opened her mouth to speak, the former Princess of Alderaan held up a bejeweled hand to silence her.

“*I know,*” she sighed with a nod.

Rey stepped forward and took Leia’s hand in her own, “I have to face him, Leia. He has him, and I just know...I know that he’s going to find out the truth. I know he won’t understand.”

“Ben will understand when he’s ready, Rey. It isn’t something we can do for him. The priority is the boy.”

“I know that, I do,” Rey nodded, leaning down as Leia pulled her into a hug. It wasn’t something she’d done often, usually in the background as the General spent time with her grandchild, always a little out of place in the grand scheme of their family, always wondering where she belonged... who she belonged to.

Leia was like a mother to her after she’d hidden herself away from the world - *from him* - always looking in on Rey from afar as her belly swelled with life. Part of Rey wondered if it was because the Princess of Alderaan felt some sort of moral obligation to step in where her son wasn’t able to, and wasn’t welcome to. She’d made her own family along the way, with a small group of friends and acquaintances - Poe too - but had never felt as home as she had been at the Praxeum with *him* by her side.

It didn’t stop her from wondering about her own mother, if anything, it *fueled* her desire to know. The memory of her life on Jakku, isolated and alone, working to the bone as a lost, lonely little girl, still lingered in her mind. There were times when she could still picture herself there, growing up into adulthood without anyone to depend on but herself, waiting for her family to come back to her.

Where had they gone? She *had* to have had a mother, and a father, too. Babies weren’t born from nothing, Rey knew as much now, and with her own son so far out of reach, the desire to know burned all the more with the quiet buzzing in her mind.

Leia held her firmly, weaving her worn and weathered fingers into her short hair with a sigh.

“*Rey, can you do something for me?*” the Resistance leader murmured into her shoulder.
“Anything,” Rey answered, unwilling to let go of her motherly embrace just yet.

“If you see my son…” Leia lifted her chin to give Rey a heartbreaking look of a mother who only ever wanted the best for her son, just like Rey, “Bring him home.”

Chewing the inside of her lip, Rey merely nodded, letting her fingertips linger on the smooth surface of Leia’s golden cuff as she pulled away, letting the guise of the Resistance General come back over her face.

“Godspeed, Rebel.”

Rey’s heart ached as she watched Leia’s retreating form fade into the blustering flurry of activity on the long stretch of duracrete, unsure if she’d be able to deliver on her promise, no matter how badly she wished she could. Leia was right. He needed to know the truth, but making him understand was something that she wasn’t sure she’d be able to do. Ben Solo was stubborn all on his own, but with the way he’d been blinded by the dark side, Rey was unsure she’d ever be able to convince him of the truth.

Brushing the thought of him from her mind, Rey welcomed the warmth that bloomed in her heart, and the smile that spread across her face when she saw Poe Dameron standing in his orange flight suit a few paces away.

He loved her. He loved her in a way that she deserved to be loved. Cherished for who she was, and who she chose to be outside of the Jedi Order. Without him. He tried his best to understand what she had been through, and her heart ached when she thought of the truth that she withheld from him. The truth about Kylo Ren.

The guilt would swarm her when she’d emerge from their most intimate moments, heart full and body satiated. Happy. Happy with Poe. But then she’d remember…

“What the Force wills is...no matter time nor place. Through light and dark. What the Force has brought into being, shall never be torn apart. No matter the time nor place, we are bound. The Force binds us together for all time, as does our love for each other. This...is the will of the Force.”

In the muted light of a long-abandoned dwelling on Zeffo, they’d made promises to each other, promises that Rey was sure that Ben knew he was bound to break. The thought of it sent an angry
lance through her heart, thinking of the depths of his betrayal in her name. And yet, she was the one who was left behind, just like she had feared.

He was the one who’d broken a hundred promises to her. The promise to love her always. The promise that he wasn’t being tempted by the dark. The promise that he would tell her everything. The promise that he would always come home.

She was the one who was left behind, broken from the inside out, left to live an empty life without the other half of their poisoned dyad...so why did she feel so much guilt for finding happiness amongst the pain?

Rey pushed the thought to the side and allowed herself a moment a peace, a moment without the memory of what was and the forsaken dreams of what would have been haunting her, and just let herself be with Poe. Happy and loved, like she deserved.

“Hey Min Laurel ,” he grinned at her, gathering her up in his arms in an instant as he pressed his nose into her hair, “You ready?”

“As ready as I’ll ever be,” Rey sighed, leaning in him to linger a little longer in the comfort of his spicy scent, twining her fingers together at his back as he let out a sigh of his own.

“We’ve got a plan. It’s going to work, I know it.” Poe moved to cup her face in his hands, tilting her face to bring her eyes to his, “We’re gonna get the kid and we’re gonna blow up their big gun. The First Order is going to pay for taking him, I promise you.”

“I know,” Rey tucked her bottom lip between her teeth as a wistful smile tugged at the corners of her mouth. She wanted so badly to let the past die and embrace the good things in her life to the fullest, like Poe deserved. With a slow blink, Rey lingered in the warmth of his loving gaze, hoping that they would be successful, and maybe they could find some peace together afterwards. Maybe.

“Be careful, okay?” Rey murmured, unable to keep the smile from her face when Poe answered her with a playful look of mock-hurt.

“I’m always careful, Rey. When have I ever not been careful ?”
Rey punched the center of his chest with a laugh, but quickly found herself caught up in the sweetness of his kiss, smiling against the curve of his mouth as he curled his arms around her and oh so slowly, lowered her into a romantic dip for the whole of the Resistance to see.

Breathless in the best way, Rey let out a girlish giggle when Poe pressed one more kiss to her lips with a whisper in Old Corellian before jogging away at the insistence of Beebeeate from the cockpit of Black One. “Minmin Laurel Valle.”

I love you

He called out to her from the boarding ladder as she climbed up the ramp into the Falcon, offering her one last wave and a smile as he dropped into his cockpit.

“Don’t forget about me, okay?”

“I could never!” Rey answered back with a smile before turning away, striding into the main hold of the Falcon. Letting out a sigh, she focused back on the task at hand, making her way down the curved main passageway to the side-mounted cockpit, where she plopped herself straight into the Captain’s seat.

“That’s my chair,” Han’s gruff voice rang out from behind her. His sentiments were echoed a second later by a growl from Chewie.

“What he said,” Rey laughed as she busied her hands and plugged the coordinates into the navicomputer.

“You are a good pilot, sure. A great one, even,” Han conceded as he settled into the chair at her four-o’clock, “But a better pilot than me? I resent that, pal.”

“Leave now, resent him later, yeah?” Rey chimed in, looking to Chewie with a smile as she pulled back on the yoke and lifted the old girl into the air.

Before long, they were thundering along at lightspeed, with the stars stretched out into infinite lines of blue. Finn sat forward and stuck his head between the seats.
“So.”

“So?” Rey echoed with a lift of her brows.

“How are we getting in?”

“Into what?” Han groused with a frown from the corner.

“You know,” he waved his hand towards the viewport, “Into the base.”

“Their shields have a fractional refresh rate,” Rey answered plainly, lifting her eyes to the controls, flipping a switch here, throwing a toggle there as they prepared to come out of hyperspace.

“I don’t speak that.”

Rey let out a laugh with a roll of her eyes, “It means that it keeps anything travelling slower than lightspeed from getting through.”

She glanced over her shoulder for a moment, watching with a hint of amusement as Finn’s eyes grew wide with concern.

“So, what you’re saying is...is that we...we’re…”

“Going to make our landing approach at lightspeed?” Han growled from the corner.

“Yes!” Rey answered, giving Chewie a grin when she gave her a loud, resounding yowl of agreement.

“You better buckle up, Big Deal,” Han groused, pushing Finn back into his seat as Rey and Chewie worked in an effortless tandem, flipping a switch that made them jolt abruptly from hyperspace.
The environment outside of the viewport shifted in an instant from the stretched out lines of lightspeed, to a snow covered forest. They flew so close to the ground that Rey wasn’t sure if they were bound to skid along the belly and make a pitstop to an early grave before they ever truly began their mission.

Chewie groaned loudly at Rey.

“Yeah, what he said!” Han yelled from behind her.

“I am pulling up!” Rey answered, frantically pulling at toggles as she held the yoke steady as they plowed headlong into the trees. Alarms blared as they thundered through the splinters of the trees they obliterated. She held on with a vice-like grip, face burning as both Han and Chewie yelled and groaned through the madness.

“If I get any higher, they’ll see us!” The Falcon lurched again as they hurtled out of the forest, going into a spin as they slid down a snowy embankment. Rey’s eyes grew wide as the ship whirled around, heading straight for the edge of a cliff until, thankfully, they came to a canted stop.

Rey let out a relieved laugh, brushing the hair from her eyes as she looked through the viewport that was half-buried in snow.

“Well, that was fun, wasn’t it boys?”

“Sure was,” Han frowned as he lifted himself from his seat, “Now, let’s get to work. We have a kid to fetch and a shield to disable.”

***

If what you say about this boy is true, then bring him to me.

The memory of the Supreme Leader’s voice twisted through Kylo’s mind as the taste of his own blood remained behind long after he’d stepped away from his visitation of Snoke. He had tried to
mask the boy, to hide him from his thoughts and keep the truth away, but it was no use against the claws that scraped against his mental shields.

He returned to the boy, back to the place where he had hidden him away, after fetching a set of clothing from the laundry on Level 22. What he had arrived in had been torn and singed from the battle on Takodana, and no son of his was going to remain in soiled clothing. Not when he could provide for him.

The boy seemed fearful all over again when the dark knight stepped into the quarters, but all of it melted away the instant Kylo removed his mask. Kylo was afraid that the boy could feel his roiling emotions, all of them complicated and more twisted the longer he thought of it. What had happened. What would happen. And how he could stop it.

He was angry. Angrier than he ever thought he would ever be with a dead woman. But she wasn’t dead. Rey was alive. Rey was alive, and had chosen to hide herself from him. To hide the existence of his son.

His son, who was strong with the Force, untrained, but stronger than he knew, and Kylo was eager to start teaching the boy, but he had to find a way to do it without interference from the Supreme Leader. There was no way that he was going to allow the same things to happen to his son. Kylo would find another way to escape the claws of his master, he had to.

“It will work, you know,” the little boy’s voice rang out from behind him. Kylo kept his back turned as he changed from the threadbare tunic he’d arrived in, clearing his voice before responding.

“What will work?”

“The thing you need to get rid of. It’ll work. You’ll do it.” He spoke plainly, as if he already knew how all of their stories were written, “You can turn around, I’m finished.”

Kylo ambled forward and knelt down in front of the boy, reaching out with his gloved hand to straighten the collar on the tiny black First Order uniform he’d stolen, relieved to see that it fit the boy quite nicely.

“This suits you,” Kylo rumbled, dusting off the boy’s shoulders before lifting the boy from the floor and placing him on the narrow bunk he’d slept on a few hours prior. Kylo settled in beside
the boy, placing his helm between them as they sat in silence. He was curious about the boy. *More than curious*. He wanted to know him.

Rey had told him that he’d died, and Kylo’s stomach turned at the thought of it. Maybe he did die that day, at least, part of him did. The weak part. But that didn’t change the odd feeling in his chest that Kylo would be able to build his own story with the boy without the influence of outside sources and their lies. He was five years old, and the lie that he’d been dead was more than enough.

Kylo lifted an eyebrow, peering out of the corner of his eye as the boy reached out with his small hands, and took the dark, metallic helmet into his lap. With the tip of his finger, he traced the silver inlay around the viewer, pursing his lips in the same way Kylo knew he did when he was deep in thought.

“Why?” He looked up with *so* many questions in his hazel eyes. Kylo squared his shoulders with a deep sigh as he tried to think of an answer.

“It...it makes me strong.”

“I see you, Tis’mi, I *know* that you’re strong. So, what is *this* for? Tin’mi says everything should have a purpose. The only purpose of this is...to be scary, I suppose.”

A lull fell between them as the truth of the boy’s observation weighed on Kylo’s shoulders. With a sigh, he reached out and tugged one of his gloves from his hand before reaching into his pocket to hold out a small parcel to the boy.

His hazel eyes lit up in an instant as he excitedly took the object from Kylo’s hand. The dark knight’s heart did a flip as the boy looked up at him and gazed at him with a beamingly bright smile that echoed the memory of a little girl he used to know.

“A Corellian aircake?! These are my *favorite* things!”

“I thought they might be,” Kylo chuckled, leaning back against the wall as the little boy enthusiastically devoured the sweet little morsel. He closed his eyes for a moment, taking in a slow breath as he mulled over the boy’s question, wanting to be able to tell him the truth of who he was. *The whole truth.*
“My grandfather wore a mask, too.”

The little boy stilled, looking up at his father with a questioning gaze, “Was he a warrior too?”

“He was,” Kylo nodded, “He wore the mask for a different reason, one that kept him alive, but it was the mask that people feared. It made them respect him. I wanted to be like him, to be powerful like him.”

“To be feared like him?”

“Yes,” he answered truthfully, “It’s something I needed to do. It was important then. It’s still important now.”

“Tin’mi said that you died for her,” the little boy picked at the last bite of aircake that he held in his small hands, mashing his mouth together in that all-too-familiar way, “Is that true?”

“Yes,” his answer fell from his lips without thinking, remembering back to the memory of her dead eyes and limp body that haunted his dreams. Kylo twisted his glove in his hand, chewing on the inside of his lip as he found himself wholly overwhelmed by the unimaginable light in the boy beside him.

“I still feel it, you know,” Kylo looked to the boy with the smallest hint of a smile he could manage on his serious face. “The pull to the light. It’s intoxicating, and almost as hard to resist as the darkness.”

“But?”

“But…” Kylo pulled his glove back onto his hand, flexing his long fingers into his palm as he rose to stand, “I know that, if I am to have the strength to finish what my grandfather started, then I must remain vigilant. I must remain strong. Everything depends on that.”

As Kylo had expected, as soon as he stood from the bunk, the durasteel door slid open and a breathless Lieutenant Mitaka dashed inside as an alarm began to blare through the corridor and the walls shook from a concussion blast from the surface.
“Sir, there seems to be a group of Resistance fighters that have infiltrated the base and...and have disabled our shields,” the mousy man winced as Kylo spun around and lifted his helmet from the little boy’s lap.

“And?” he barked as he deposited it on his head with a hiss of the latch.

“And, a squadron of Resistance starfighters has begun an assault upon the thermal oscillator. We believe that they are trying to disable the base.”

Kylo curled his fingers into his palms, silently seething at the thought of Poe Dameron amongst those who thought that they could defeat the might that was the First Order.

“She’s here.” The boy’s voice cut through Kylo’s fury in an instant. He turned on his heel to look upon the boy who’d stood from the bunk and held out his small hand. “My Tin’mi is here. She is looking for...for us. I can feel it.

“Gather a squadron of troops and find them. They can’t be far.” Kylo barked as he reached out and took the boy’s hand in his, leading him out into the corridor as his heart hammered away in his broad chest.

Faced with the thought of her being so close by - alive - was more than Kylo had ever dreamed of, even in his darkest of nights. Now that she was here, so tantalizingly close, all he could think about was his anger. They followed the long, zig-zagging corridors towards the belly of the thermal oscillator, hoping that, along the way, they’d stumble across the miscreants who thought they could take them on and win, and with each step, the angrier Kylo became. Filled with his rage, all he wanted to know was why.

He held firmly onto his son’s hand, mindful to keep his steps shorter so that the boy could keep up, and unwilling to let him go.

Turning on his heel, their squadron entered the mammoth chamber that led to the oscillator, and the narrow bridge that connected the two. The dark knight halted his steps, looking to the boy as they stood on the edge of the abyss.

“Find them,” he barked at the stormtroopers, waiting a moment for them to peel off in different directions before leaning down to lift the small boy into his strong arms, intent on keeping him safe as they crossed the precarious catwalk that connected the two platforms.
His heavy footfalls rang out and reverberated against the walls, sure-footed and steady, unwilling to stop for anything, until Kylo heard a familiar voice call out his name.

“BEN!”

***

Rey stepped forward, curling the fingers of her trembling hand on the railing as she peered down into the cavernous pit that stood between her and the thermal oscillator. A quick tap on her shoulder drew her attention away from the narrow walkway that connected the two sides of the seemingly bottomless hole. With a pounding heart, she looked to Han, who mouthed to her that she should place bombs on the lower deck, and he and Chewie would take care of the upper levels.

Sucking in a deep breath, the image of her son’s precious face darted through her mind as she burst into action. Rey slid down the narrow ladder, balancing her feet on the railings as she sped to the bottom. Not willing to waste a single moment, she worked as silently and as quickly as she could, placing charges on each durasteel girder with a press of her finger at the center to arm them all with a blinking red light.

Rey could hear them before she saw them.

As she moved to climb back up to the other platforms with her now-empty bag, the former Jedi stopped in her tracks, ducking behind a broad piling as a group of stormtroopers stepped in unison into the gargantuan room. Their boots on the shining duracrete floors and their plastoid armor clattered with each step, moving together with blasters in hand as they followed the rasped order that barked out from a gravelly modulator.

“Find them.”

Her lips parted with a soundless gasp when the collection of stormtroopers split off into two different groups, revealing their leader at the center - and the little boy’s hand he held.
A vice squeezed around her heart, sending an odd jolt of pain ricocheting through her bones as she looked upon her boy - and his father. It wasn’t at all what she expected, but it was everything she feared, watching, completely frozen as Kylo Ren lifted the small boy in his arms and began to carry him across the narrow walkway.

Rey couldn’t help it. Her feet worked of their own accord as her heart hammered in her ears, but she didn’t have any other choice. She couldn’t hide, not anymore. Not when her boy depended on her. Not when she had made a promise to him to protect him from the monster in his dreams.

Was that what he was to her now? Another nightmare in a series of many? She’d always hoped that the memory of him in her mind would hold fast, preserving the boy who was, but now that she was so close to him, Rey couldn’t help but be reminded of the pain.

*I’m doing it for you. To protect you. Don’t you turn against me...not after everything I’ve done for you.*

He’d insisted over and over that he’d always be there for her. That he’d always come home, but as the darkness twisted his soul, Rey wondered if it twisted his mind, tricking him into falling for a darker purpose, and making him believe that the terrible things he did were for the right reasons.

*If you’re not with me, then you’re my enemy.*

Maybe he was her enemy. She had always tried to protect her from the thought, to keep it from bleeding into the memory of him. It had been one of the reasons she’d kept herself cut off from the Force, and as she recalled the horrifying sight of the First Order exterminating worlds in a single blow, Rey started to believe that he truly was.

*My name is Kylo Ren.*

A monster. A murderer. The Jedi Killer who had been responsible for the creation of Kylo Ren, and for the destruction and death of what was the last of the Jedi. The ancient order that, at one point in time, Rey believed in with her whole heart. That they had believed in together.

Now, he was something else entirely. Something she had to stop. She had sworn to her son that she’d never let him fall into the hands of the thing that haunted his dreams, and unlike his father, Rey didn’t take broken promises lightly.
She’d make it right, and she was willing to do anything.

Moving silently across the floor as the stormtroopers all filed into the different nooks and crannies that the First Order’s weapon was made of, Rey tried to silence the thunderous beating of her heart as she watched his broad, retreating back, and the gentle bob of the little boy’s curls with each of Kylo Ren’s heavy step. Before she knew what she was doing, Rey placed a foot upon the bridge and called out his name.

“BEN!”

Her voice reverberated into the shadows, ringing out louder than the rumble of the battle outside - stopping the dark knight in his tracks. The little boy in his arms looked up in an instant, his round face lighting up like it was the sun as he exclaimed:

“Tin’mi!”

The metallic hum of an armed blaster rang out as a handful of troopers on the other side of the bridge came to attention with their weapons drawn on her. Rey took another step towards her son with trembling hands as Kylo Ren slowly lowered the little boy to his feet and gave him a gentle nudge on the back towards the waiting squadron.

“Take the boy and go,” he commanded, the tainted reminder of what his voice used to be cutting through the tension.

Rey followed her feet, one after the other like she was sneaking up on a wild Mudhorn, letting her gaze flicker from Kylo Ren’s back to the boy - who looked back at her with a fear-filled gaze - and back again.

The dark knight drew himself up to his full height, gloved hands balled into tight fists as he pivoted around to face her.

“That’s not my name anymore.”

“I wasn’t talking to you,” Rey answered, hands trembling as she ached to have something to hold onto.
“You honor the dead, do you, Rey Skywalker?” His voice was tinged with acid, making Rey flinch, sure that her bearing his family’s name would surely incense him. “I never thought I would see you again. You were dead. What a relief to be wrong.”

“Take off that mask,” Rey stated, trying as hard as she could to keep her voice unwavering, drawing upon every ounce of strength she had inside her for the coming fight. Well, almost all of it, but she couldn’t bring herself to reach out. Not yet. “You don’t need it.”

“What do you think you’ll see if I do?” Kylo barked back, fists clenched as he stood his ground.

“The man I love.” Rey could feel the lance in her heart as the words came from her mouth, aching for the past that she knew they could never return to. Back when things were easier. Back when there was no war, and before the darkness came and took him from her.

Before she had time to react, Kylo Ren lifted his hands and, with a metallic hiss, pulled the black mask from his head. He held it to his side, gripping it as firmly as he had kept his fingertips tucked into his palms as he turned his cold gaze upon her.

And, oh, it was cold. Rey had hoped that there would still be a flicker of Ben left in Kylo Ren’s eyes but, from where she stood, he was gone - just as she’d feared. He was so different, and so achingly the same in other ways, from the subtle curl of his dark hair, to the proud lift of his chin, and the way he subtly worked his jaw back and forth - chewing on his emotions in the way that always gave Ben away.

Part of her preened to see even the slightest flicker in his movements, proud to know that she was having some effect on him.

“That man...is dead.” The curve of his jaw twitched with his every word, and Rey swore she spied the slightest tremble of his chin. He could hide from everyone else in the First Order, shield himself with his mask, but Rey knew better. “He was weak and foolish, like his father. So I destroyed him.”

“No,” Rey shook her head, drawing in a slow breath, keeping her gaze twined with his as she stepped up beside him, close enough that she had to lift her chin to meet his eye. He was taller than she remembered, and so much... more...more man, but she couldn’t think about that. She had much more important things to think about. She had Poe. “That’s what Snoke wants you to believe, but it isn’t true. Ben Solo is alive.”
Kylo jolted backwards, like the sound of his true name had scalded him. He rebounded in an instant, lifting his chin with a proud sense of defiance, holding fast to the lie.

“No. The Supreme Leader is wise.”

Behind her, Rey could hear the hiss of a door sliding open, but kept her face impassive to not alert the dark knight that her friends - and his father - were close by. She took another step forward.

“Snoke is using you for your power. It’s all a lie, just like you said. When he gets what he wants, he’ll crush you,” her voice wavered, blinking back the shine of her unwanted tears. She couldn’t break, she had to stay strong - for Ben, “You know it’s true.”

Rey watched his face as his dark eyes flickered away from her. He chewed on the inside of his lip for a moment, and for a split second, she could see him again.

“It’s too late,” he whispered with a tremble of his chin.

“No, it’s not. Leave here with me. With us. Come home.” Rey could feel the sting of her lie, unable to ignore the ache in her heart when she knew the inevitability of what was coming. “We miss you.”

“I want to know why.”

Kylo’s words were simple, and Rey couldn’t deny that the truth needed said at some point, but the clock was ticking, and the thermal oscillator beneath their feet was bound to blow, and she needed to get her and Ben off the planet as quickly as she could, without the truth, if she had to.

Rey’s eyes drifted to the toes of her boots before blinking back up at him.

“I’m being torn apart,” her voice was small, like it had been so many of the times when she’d tearfully shared her fears with him, “I know what I have to do, but I don’t know if I have the strength to do it. Will you help me?”
“For the boy, anything.” Kylo’s voice was firm and wholly unexpected, and Rey shook as she inched closer, slowly lifting her fingers towards him. He flinched at first, reluctant to accept her touch, like he was afraid that it would burn him.

Rey pressed on, blinking softly as she brushed her fingertips against his cheek.

All at once, it all came rushing back. All of it, without even trying, it was like the Force knew. It knew they were together, and with the single brush of a finger, the dyad burst to life all over again.

Rey trembled beneath the weight of it all as a series of images flickered through her newly-awakened mind in the blink of an eye.

An island, flush with life. Lightning. Milky-white eyes. Herself, swathed in black, and sitting on a dark throne that reached out for her with sharp claws as if to snatch her.

Her body thrummed from the return of her connection to the web of life that spun and twined around her. She looked up at an alarmed Kylo, whose dark eyes had blown open wide upon her touch.

“I’m sorry,” she whispered as she blindly reached out behind her, waiting on bated breath to see if it would come when she called.

The tiniest flicker of victory flashed across her freckled face for a moment when the durasteel hilt landed in her palm with a smack. She ignited the lightsaber like it was second nature, washing their faces with a pale blue - and crackling red - when Kylo answered her call with his own blade.

“So, this is how it’s going to be?”

“If you’re not with me, then you’re my enemy,” Rey spat, sliding her blade out from beneath his in a flash.

Rey had fought him before, more times that she should count. But things were different. He was different. She should have known, she should have thought ahead, because the depths of his fury, and how he channeled every ounce of it into his parrys were overwhelming from the start.
Stumbling over her feet, Rey blocked attack after brutal attack with a cry, for once, truly fearful of what he had become. She’d been wrong to underestimate his darkness fueled power, and how unpracticed she’d become from the years she’d spent away.

She was proficient with a blaster, true, but lightsaber combat was something else entirely.

“That lightsaber,” Kylo spat, lifting his crackling, crimson blade to point it at her, “It belongs to me.”

“Come get it,” she retorted with a determined glint in her eye. It had come to her when she called, and she could feel it. The lightsaber was hers, now.

Turning on the heel of her boot, Rey depended on her speed over his size, bounding to the end of the bridge, too afraid that she would fall if she stayed.

_I would have caught you, you know._

Rey’s breath came in sharp, fearful gasps as she stepped into a narrow corridor, with the shrieking sizzle of his broken kyber crystal not far behind her. She turned back to face him as she stepped up against the massive, durasteel door that led to the snow outside, holding the Skywalker saber at the ready as Kylo sauntered towards her in slow, sure-footed steps.

_I always will._

The memory of his broken promise echoed through her mind, filling her with a wild sense of rage all her own. With a slow blink, she channeled it into her movements, hammering down on him with her own attacks, one after the other. Each one, expertly pushed away with an easy flick of his wrist.

Kylo tutted, pushing her out into the cold as the heavy durasteel door slid open at her back.

“You’ve gone soft. You cut yourself off from the Force. All to keep yourself from me. Why?” He gave her a moment to catch her balance as her boots slid on the surface of the snow, giving his lightsaber a cocky twirl. The sound of it hung in the air between them as the distant sound of the starfighter battle echoed through the shadow of the trees.
“I had to,” she rasped, stepping further away with one foot at a time, “I had to keep him safe.”

“From who? From the traitors, murderers, and thieves you call friends?” Kylo spat with a sneer.

“From you,” she snapped, unable to keep her tears of anger from slipping down her cheeks. She was already so tired, so worn down, so unequipped to confront him, but left with no other choice, Rey wondered if - in his fury - Kylo Ren might finally end her for real.

“Me?”

“Yes,” she hissed, every syllable laced with poison, “You’re a monster.”

With a surge of power, Rey lunged forward with a yell, holding him in place with a spiraling parry, coming at him from the right, then the left, then overhead. Her anger only grew when he batted away each one, like he was still that sullen teenager and she was the little girl who pried herself into his space at his darkest moments.

“Yes I am ,” Kylo retorted, taking the upper hand back with a powerful strike from his left. He drove Rey further back into the darkness of the forest with each one, pummeling her with blow after blow until she had no choice but to run .

If it didn’t feel like her entire world was falling apart around her, with turbolaser fire floating on the wind as Kylo Ren’s lightsaber shrieked with every minute movement, the forest would almost be beautiful.

Rey turned around, her hazel eyes wide as the snow fell in soft flakes, drifting to the ground in an elegant dance as the slightest breeze fluttered the hairs around her face. Everything was awash in flashes of blue and red, painting a pretty picture of their pain, and the hurt of the broken promises that had poisoned the well of their memories.

For a split second, painted in the combined violet light of their weapons, Rey thought back to their orchid grove, a place where secrets had been spoken, love confessed, and promises broken. What she wouldn’t give to go back to that time, just for a moment, to try and remember the boy who was.
The man he had become surged forward, bringing a punishing series of strikes down upon her, pushing her further into the forest with each one.

“You said you loved me. Was that a lie?” Kylo gave his lightsaber a slow spin before reaching out to strike her again, cleaving a tree in two in the process.

“You said you’d always come home to me. *That* was a lie,” Rey retorted, blocking him yet again as she stumbled away, stumbling over her feet before leaping over a crevice with a fluid somersault. Kylo lumbered after her, growing angrier by the second as their strange game of cat and mouse raged on.

“I never lied to you,” he rumbled, black eyes sharp as he lifted his saber for another brutal series of strikes.

“The darkness?” she whispered, overwhelmed by the sweet sound of his voice and his close proximity to her, so deliciously close that every part of her ached to reach out and touch him - lightsabers be damned.

“You need a teacher. I can show you the ways of the Force. *Let me help you,*” Kylo leaned forward, nearly close enough to touch. Rey could feel it, she wanted to surrender to it. It would be so easy, just a taste, like she had in their grove before everything went to hell.

A blast of energy shook the ground, drawing Rey’s attention away from Kylo’s scorching gaze to the sky, where a transport was lifting into the air and away from the fight. On it, Rey could feel a squadron of First Order troops, and one completely unmistakable signature that could only belong to one person.

*Ben.*

All at once, a fresh wash of power came over her. It was different than she’d ever felt before, delectable and dangerous as she let her anger coil around her, spurring on the darkness in her own her, igniting the dark flame of her own inner rage - unstoppable and pure from the moment her son was taken from her.

“No!” Rey pulled her blade out from his with a twist of her body, shifting the dynamic in an instant. Her anger was palpable as she pushed him back, striking blow after blow. She revelled in his grunts of alarm as he tried to block each one. Kylo stumbled over his feet in the snow as he
struggled to keep up with the ferocious speed of her attacks, letting out an animalistic cry when she reached out and singed his shoulder with the tip of her lightsaber.

A flash of pain seeped through their newly ignited bond, but Rey only felt her rage. She only felt the delicious curls of her power wrapping around her arms as she struck him again, sending him to his knees.

Kylo scrambled to pull himself up from the snow after Rey had deftly cut a burning line through his black surcoat, leaving a scrap of the smoldering fabric in the snow as she circled him like a loth-wolf rounding in on her prey.

Rey watched him with a cold zing of delight while he pulled his heavy body up from the snow, his lightsaber sizzling and crackling in the snow as he dragged it back upwards.

She lunged for him again, but Kylo reacted quickly, holding firmly to her wrist as she grabbed his in an odd synchronicity. They found themselves trapped there, straining against each other’s strength while they tried to pull themselves free.

With her fingers circled firmly around the hilt of his lightsaber, Rey pushed it to the ground, holding it with all her might, gritting her teeth to try and hold him steady. Then, with a final push, Rey let him free, and with a twirl of her blade, she struck him down.

Her heart hammered in her chest as Kylo Ren looked up at her from the snow. She’d marked him, slicing him from the curve of his shoulder, up the length of his neck, and marred his beautiful face.

She should have been horrified. She should have been ashamed. She should have fallen to her knees and taken the face of her husband in her hands and fixed the horrific thing she had done...but a seductive voice in her head told her to do something else.

Yes, good. You have done well, my girl. Now...kill him.

Like someone else entirely had taken over her, pulling the trees from an unknown place, Rey lifted her lightsaber with a grimace, ready to strike, ready to end him and take back what was hers, but the Force had other plans.
The earth shifted beneath her feet, shaking her from the dark spell she’d been caught up in. Chunks of rocks and stone fell in large chunks as the crust of the planet split open to its core, taking the trees and snow with them as they fell victim to gravity’s pull. Before she knew it, Rey was blinking at Kylo from across a massive gorge.

Everything around her shook again as a massive fireball burst from where Rey and Kylo had been only moments before. Rey’s heart flared with a spark of hope, knowing in an instant that Poe had been successful and, with the destruction of the thermal oscillator, triggered the collapse of the planet.

Disengaging her saber, Rey hooked it to her belt, taking one last glimpse of Kylo lying where she’d felled him, wounded in the snow, before darting in the opposite direction. If the Resistance’s plan had worked, she needed to get off the surface - and fast.

Rey stopped in her tracks, sliding across the snow, lifting her hand to shield her eyes from the bright beam of light that streamed through the trees. She blinked against the flurry of snow that stuck to her eyelashes, letting out a relieved sigh when she glimpsed the tell-tale silhouette of the Millennium Falcon through the trees.

She surged forward, darting through the trees as they began to teeter and fall with a crash, reaching out with the tips of her fingers for Finn, who was waiting for her at the end of the ramp.

“Rey, come on! Hurry, we gotta get out of here!”

With one last stretch, her fingers grasped firmly around his wrist, “I got her!” Finn swung her around to the top of the ramp, collapsing backward as the Falcon lifted away and into the atmosphere.

Her breath came in sharp waves and her pulse thundered in her ears as she dashed to the cockpit and made quick eye contact with Chewie as she jumped into the Captain’s seat.

“I failed. They have him,” she murmured between breathless gasps.

_Not failure, little bird. We find cub._

Chewie said with a low roar as he reached up to charge the ship in preparation for their jump into
Rey shifted to input the coordinates for the Ileenium System into the navicomputer, but paused with a quiet gasp as she looked out of the transparisteel viewport, watching in horror as what used to be Starkiller Base - and the sacred Jedi world, Ilum, before that - collapsed in on itself with a blinding flash of light.

Rey closed her eyes as the ship shuddered out of hyperspace over D'Qar. Ever since opening herself up to the Force again, it had been swimming through her, making up for lost time by reminding her of how it felt to be bathed in it once more, to feel the power she could use if she chose to. It was almost frightening, how good it made her feel - because the Dark side was there too, whispering in her ears, making her promises that Rey knew it would never make good on.

*Long have I waited.*

The voice in her head caused shivers to course through her, and Rey squeezed her eyes shut, hoping to somehow shut out the voice as well.

*The dark side of the Force is a pathway to many abilities some consider to be unnatural. Rey of Jakku… I can help you get your son back…there’s so much you don’t know. I know who you are.*

“No,” Rey whispered, causing Han to look at her sideways, raising an eyebrow in concern. “I’m alright,” Rey mumbled. “Just… a feeling.”

*My girl. You can have everything you have ever wanted. Open yourself to the power of the Dark side, and you and Kylo Ren can rule the galaxy together, raising your son to be the most powerful Force user ever.*

“No!” Rey said again, slamming her fist down on the panel in front of her as she shoved the voice out of her mind, looking over at Chewie and trying to force a smile on her face as she shrugged. “Sorry. Are you okay?” She asked, looking at where his injury was. He had taken a bolt from a blaster, and while she knew Wookiees were tough, she didn’t like the thought of a friend being injured. He gave her a low growl in return.
Rey was the last off the Falcon and her eyes met Leia's immediately. Striding towards her mentor, Rey reached her, hugging her close for a moment before pulling away, tears pooling in her eyes as she delivered her news.

"He… he still has him, Leia. Ben is fine, and appeared to be well cared for… but Kylo… the light is gone, Leia. He's so steeped in the dark. Ben - our Ben - is gone. I hoped… I hoped to see some light left. Even a spark. There’s nothing."

"Oh Rey… no one is ever really gone. Let's regroup and make our next plan, alright? Besides, there is a hotshot pilot waiting to say hello over there." Leia lifted her chin, and Rey turned to see Poe watching them, his helmet tucked under his arm.

“Poe…” Rey looked at her sometimes lover over Leia’s shoulder, feeling guilty and conflicted inside.

“Go to him. You’ll both need your strength soon.” Leia smiled and cupped Rey’s cheek with one hand before her eyes went to her husband. “Guess this is one way to keep him home…”

“We made it!” Poe’s smile was brilliant as Rey finally made it to him, his arms enfolding her and pulling her close. He pressed his lips to the top of her head, in a gesture that Rey would normally take comfort in - but all she felt was guilt, because she knew, deep inside, that she would never love Poe the way he deserved… not when Ben Solo was still alive - even as buried in the dark as he currently was. She had loved him her whole life, practically, and she knew she would love him desperately the rest of her life. Nothing would change that, no matter how, sometimes, she wished she could.

“We did,” Rey murmured, Poe’s tanned finger reaching under her chin to lift her face up so that he could plant a kiss to her lips. “Poe… we need to talk.” Rey pulled away slightly, watching as Poe’s eyes softened and he leaned back in for another kiss.

“Later, min laurel . Later. Right now I just want to hold you and remind you how happy I am to have you here with me. Where’s the kid, by the way? I want to give him a huge hug.” Poe looked over her shoulder for her son, and Rey felt the tears come unbidden into her eyes once more.

“He… we didn’t get him, Poe. He’s still with… him.”
Poe leaned in, resting his forehead gently against hers, reaching out to twine the fingers of both his hands through hers. “I’m sorry. I still believe we’ll get him back from that monster.”

*Her face was buried against Ben’s as they lay together after waking from another nightmare, and Rey could feel it building inside him. Day after day, the darkness grew inside him, and all she could do was watch and hope that it didn’t win in the end. Because if it did, it would tear them apart, no matter how much they loved each other.*

“It won’t get us, Ch’eo k’tusah. I will always come back to you. I promise.”

“I’m sorry, what?” Rey came back to herself, realizing that Poe was waiting for an answer to something he had asked her. His eyes were on hers, his thumb tracing over her bottom lip as a small smile came to his own.

“Leia said we should regroup. Your room or mine?” Poe leaned in again, kissing her sweetly, but Rey stepped back, her eyes narrowing slightly as she tilted her head to one side to look at her sometimes lover.

“What did you just say about him? What did you just call him?” Rey poked a finger in his chest, unbidden anger flaring inside her in a way she had never felt before.

*Yes, my girl. Give in to your anger. This pilot has been using your body for his own needs, never caring about your feelings. Use that anger, strike him down. Hurt him like he has wounded you by speaking ill of the man you love - then come be with him and your son. You could be a family again… Feel your anger, coursing through you! Feel the power!*

“Whoa, whoa, Rey! I get it… you’re stressed. Listen, we are all stressed, okay? Maybe we should just go get something to eat and then go grab some sleep, okay?” Poe took a step backward, and Rey came back to herself, the anger she had felt ebbing away like sand in a Jakku breeze.

Rey nodded, her face flushing as she realized she had let darkness take over for a moment. It wasn’t like her - she would never act in such a fashion towards Poe. Something was inside her now, a beast that had awakened - and she was scared. “Yes, let’s go get something to eat,” Rey said, offering up the best smile she could to try and put his unease to rest.

“So, there I was, my blaster at the ready, when - Rey? Are you even listening?” Poe stopped his
It was raining again, and somehow Rey knew this was the last time she would ever be with her husband like this. The orchids cast a blue light on their skin as they joined together, in a hurried, frantic way they had never experienced before.

She tried to tell herself that he would follow behind her, just like he promised, even though she knew she was lying to herself. She’d never see him again, because Ben - her Ben - was fading away moment by moment, right before her eyes, being replaced by a monster that Rey didn’t know if she could ever defeat.

“Ch’eo vust’i cart veo.” My body is yours. “Ch’eo ch’an’eci cart veo.” My soul is yours.

“Veo ch’acuzah viz csabun can nen, nah cas ch’usci tuzir ler ch’at’ist.” What the Force has rendered within us, not even death can tear asunder.

Rey shook her head as the memory faded, looking up to see Poe, Rose, Finn and Snap all gazing at her curiously. Pushing her tray aside, she stood, giving everyone a forced smile. “I… I have to go. I have something to look into.” Without another moment’s thought, Rey turned and marched out of the mess hall, not having a real destination in mind. She just needed to put distance between her and everyone else.

“Rey!” Poe’s voice rang out behind her, and Rey walked faster, stopping just outside the command room. As Poe reached her side, Rey looked up at him. “Poe, I need to talk to you about something.”

Just then BB-8 rolled up to them, chirping excitedly, and Rey’s eyes widened as she looked up at Poe as R2D2 made his appearance, followed by C3PO before disappearing into the doorway to the command room. Speechless, Rey turned back towards the doorway, putting off the talk she needed to have with Poe regarding her feelings for him until they saw what had woken R2D2 from his low power cycle induced slumber.

As R2 rolled towards Leia, beeping at her, Leia gasped and listened as C3PO exclaimed, “General? Excuse me, General, but R2D2 may contain some much needed good news.”

“Tell me,” Leia said, gasping as R2D2 cast a holographic projection of a starmap into the center of the room, with a small portion of it missing. BB-8 chirped excitedly, rolling towards Poe, who leaned down before remarking, “Yeah, all right buddy! Hold on!” Moving towards a computer,
Poe reached out, removing the device that Lor San Tekka had given his life for before moving back to BB-8 and inserting it into him. BB-8 immediately rolled up to R2, projecting another holographic image, which he immediately shrunk to size, rolling closer to R2D2 so that his holograph fit into perfect alignment with the whole in his map - completing the map as a collective gasp went through the room.

Leia threw a hand up to her heart, her voice soft as she exclaimed, “Luke …”

....

She hadn’t had time to talk with Poe, Rey realized the next morning as she strode towards the waiting loading ramp of the Falcon. Her heart twinged with the guilt of leaving him without saying a proper goodbye, but the thought was interrupted when someone spoke her name.

“Rey!” Leia’s voice rang out, and Rey turned, giving her mentor a smile as she strode back towards the General. “May the Force be with you.”

Rey hugged Leia gently before whispering, “Don’t be too hard on Han when he is grumpy that you didn’t let him come along, okay?” Rey tried to hold back a chuckle at the thought of the old smuggler’s reaction when Leia had told him she was sending Rey and Chewie to get Luke instead of him.

They could hear the shouting from three corridors away - but Leia had been insistent that Han stay to recover from the injuries he had received on Starkiller. It had taken Chewie intervening for Han to finally calm down enough.

**Friend hurt. Friend stay here. Little bird and I go get Jedi.**

“I make no promises,” Leia answered before squeezing her, finally releasing her and watching as Rey made her way onto the Falcon.

As Rey got the Falcon into the proper hyperspace lane a few moments later, watching as the green of D’Qar faded rapidly into the white and blue streaks of hyperspace, she realized she never said goodbye to Poe. Chewie gave her a soft growl from the co-pilot’s seat.

**Go rest, little bird. I watch over ship.**
“Thanks, Chewie,” Rey said with a tired smile before she headed back towards the bunk she always used. As she settled onto it, she thought about Ben, and how Kylo - his father - had looked at him in the most unexpected way...almost tenderly.

The orchids, in combination with the fiery red of his lightsaber turned the world to purple as Rey looked into Ben’s eyes, frightened at the darkness she saw within them. He disengaged his saber, leaving behind the blue hue of the orchids on his face. “No, you’re Ben. You’ve been him since the day you were born. And I have loved him...I have loved you for longer than I can remember. Don’t do this. Don’t take him away from me. Let me get some help. It isn’t too late!”

His voice trembled as he spoke again, “I won’t lose you, Rey. I’ve done what I could to prevent your death. I saw it. And...I can’t...I can’t lose you. I wouldn’t survive.”

A sinister laugh echoed through her head as another scene flashed in her head, causing her to sit up with a sharp gasp.

A throne made of stone, with strange points like sharp petals of a flower. She and Ben were sitting on it, dressed in black with crowns perched on their heads. Their son sat between them, a smug smile on his face as he reached out with one hand, force lightning shooting from it as a nameless person shrieked in pain.

She was clad in black, a cloak partially obscuring her face. Red lit her face as she ignited a double-bladed saber staff, her eyes yellow and angry as she pulled the hood off, baring her sharp teeth at some unseen enemy.

The laugh echoed through her brain once more as the scene faded away.

Such power inside you, my girl. You and Kylo Ren are a dyad, with power unlike anything seen before. Go to him, and together you will rule the galaxy, and train your son to be your heir, as strong in the Force as his parents.

Don’t go… and Kylo Ren will bring him to me… and I will kill him.

The voice withdrew, leaving Rey with tears streaming down her face, breathing heavily as fear gripped her once more. She needed Master Skywalker more than ever now, needed to know her place in things. She needed more training that only he could offer.
She was jolted awake a few hours later by a loud growl from Chewie.

**Come little bird. We are here.**

Rey pulled her hand over her face, trying to wipe the sleep from her face as she sat up and made her way to the cockpit, where she slid into the pilot’s seat. She peered down at the rocky outcropping, wrinkling her nose in confusion for a moment. This was the island she had been dreaming about her entire life - and this had been the place her Master had chosen to hide upon?

Sometimes the Force had a sense of humor, it seemed.

After landing the Falcon on the only patch of rock that would hold it safely, Rey told Chewie to wait with the ship while she attempted to contact Luke. As she swept outwards with the Force, trying to sense her old Master, Rey found herself confused once again when she found nothing.

She found lifeforms - but not the one she recognized as Master Skywalker. With a sigh, Rey set out, using the Force to guide her as she started climbing a set of rocky stairs. After a long climb, Rey found herself at the top, several small stone huts coming into view. A slight movement caught her eye, and Rey turned to see a cloak clad man standing in a small grassy area, looking out over the ocean.

Rey knew it was Luke simply from the way he was standing, and so she approached him, waiting respectfully for him to acknowledge her. After a few long minutes, he turned, and Rey gave him a small smile before reaching into her bag and withdrawing his lightsaber, holding it out to him with a trembling hand.

*Please… I need your help.* Rey thought into the Force, hoping he might hear her and take his old weapon. Everything else could be worked out from there.

She hoped.

End Notes
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