School Spirit
by midnightbluefox

Summary

Rey thinks her biggest concerns of the night are making it through chaperoning the Halloween Dance and avoiding her competition for the principal position, snobby Ben Solo—until a ghost shows up to crash the dance. Trapped in the empty school with her unfairly attractive rival, Rey hunts for answers and a way to defeat the malicious spirit, discovering something along the way... that an unplanned ghost hunt with the object of her frustratingly repressed desires isn’t a terrible way to spend her Halloween night.

Notes

For Ria, who is one of the biggest sweethearts in the Reylo fandom! Thank you for letting me add some ghostly fun to your amazing prompt, I hope you like what I did with it! I tried to make it fun and silly, but still have some festive Halloween spookiness.

To my beta, words cannot describe how amazing you are and how much you helped me with this. Endless hugs and thanks to you!
Chapter 1

Even all the way across the gym, Rey could feel the heat of Ben Solo’s glare.

She pointedly ignored him, focusing instead of the mass of writhing students and the heavy beat of the music pulsing through the room. The orange and purple lights strung from wall to wall flashed hypnotically, and she could already feel a headache blooming just behind her eyes. Every minute or two, someone shrieked as the movement-triggered clown by the dessert table lunged at them. She was already sweating from the stuffy air and the massive amount of kids crammed into one room—it was going to be a long night.

A young man in a glow-in-the-dark skeleton onesie was grinding on a scantily clad witch a few feet away, and Rey gave him a warning look, motioning for him to put some space between them. One of the many strobing lights lit up his face just in time for her to see his exaggerated eye roll, but he did as she asked, giving her a sarcastic thumbs up.

Something about school dances made all these high schoolers act like they could get away with murder. The ones in her classes seemed to forget that come Monday, Rey was still in charge of their grades—and if she was lucky, soon enough she’d be in charge of the entire school.

That incentive was the only thing that would ever make her crazy and desperate enough to volunteer as a chaperone for the Halloween dance. Unfortunately, Ben Solo clearly had the same idea.

It was just her damned luck.

Rey caught sight of him sauntering over, his plaid button-up straining across his broad chest, and she internally braced herself. She had a really annoying habit of getting flushed when he was around, no doubt from the rage he always managed to conjure up in her.

“I didn’t expect to see you here,” he said without preamble, having to lean in closely so she could hear him over the music. He looked her up and down, a muscle in his jaw twitching—he was obviously restraining himself from making a rude comment about her outfit. Her red dress, even with the bit of cleavage it was showing off, was still classy enough for work, and she refused to let him make her feel self-conscious.

“You know me,” she responded dryly, “I couldn’t pass up on some Halloween fun.”

He scoffed, his dark hair shining beneath the festive jack o’ lantern lights strung above them. “I wouldn’t be surprised if you had nothing better to do tonight, but I know why you’re here. The sucking up to my mother just never ends, does it?”

Rey gave him a dirty look, crossing her arms. “And what exactly is it that you’re doing? Don’t act like you’re better than me when we’re both here for the same reason.”

He scowled but didn’t deny it because he couldn’t. The principal position would easily be hers if it wasn’t for him and his determination to deprive her of any achievement at this school. It didn’t help that the current principal, who would be retiring and choosing someone to take over her position, was his mother.

Rey got along really well with Leia Organa-Solo, and wanted to believe that she’d be fair and choose the person who really deserved the position and would make the most of it—but she wasn’t naive enough to think that Ben didn’t already have a leg up over her. She wouldn’t put it past him to threaten his mother with skipping holiday dinners unless she gave the position to him, or something
similarly manipulative and evil.

“Why don’t we just agree to stay out of each other’s way tonight?” she suggested. “I’m just here to do my job and make sure none of these kids start a fire or sneak off together.”

“I was already planning on it,” Ben responded shortly. Like being around her was painful or something.

She bit back an inappropriate name, knowing he wasn’t worth it. “You’re the one who came over here. Why don’t you go back to your side of the gym and glower at some poor students?”

“Let me know if you need any help,” he said snidely, “these many students are a lot to handle.”

Another jab at the fact he didn’t think she was good enough to run the school. Asshole.

He strode away just as arrogantly as he’d come over, and Rey couldn’t help but watch him leave. Damn him for being so attractive, with his dark, soft looking hair and expressive eyes. She’d probably resent him at least a little for being perfectly her type, even if he wasn’t an insufferable jerk.

It wasn’t that she hadn’t given him a chance, because she definitely did. Ben Solo just happened to be a pompous, stuck up man who thought he was better than her because he knew big words and constantly had his nose in a book. As head of the English department, he always looked down on her and made passive-aggressive comments about her going too easy on her students or her classes not being real subjects—computer science and woodshop were both valid and important, he was just a biased imbecile.

Imbecile. Maybe he’d appreciate her out of the box word choice with that one.

Rey was laughing to herself, enjoying the thought of the scowl on his face, when the lights flickered for a second, and something strange moved out of the corner of her eye by the back of the gym. As she whirled around, the hairs on the back of her neck prickling, all of the lights went out at once, plunging the whole room into darkness.

Cursing under her breath, Rey dug her cell phone from her dress pocket as the students started screaming and laughing, overexaggerated ghost noises filling the room from a few who thought they were funny. She needed to find Ben so they could escort the kids out and —

The lights came back on.

She blinked in surprise, relief crashing over her. She would’ve been hearing about it for weeks if they had to shut down the dance early, and Leia wouldn’t be pleased after all of the money they’d put into it. It must have just been a power surge or something.

The DJ on the stage wavered for a second, shrugged, then started the music back up, and within seconds, everyone was dancing again.

“Hey.” Ben appeared next to her, his face serious. “Are we okay to keep going?”

Ha! She let herself savor the fact that he’d come running over to her at the first sign of a problem. It was clear who was in charge here.

“I think so—the lights are back on, so I don’t see any reason to stop. If it happens again though, we might have to shut it down early.”
He grimaced. “We’ll have a riot on our hands.”

Rey shrugged, knowing he was right but— “We’d have an even bigger riot if parents thought we were intentionally endangering their kids. I think we’re good though, I doubt it will happen again.”

Before he could respond, two girls shoved their way out of the crowd and rushed over, nearly crashing into them in their haste. Rey didn’t know either of them from her classes, but Ben’s eyes lit up with recognition.

“Is everything okay?” he asked, and she thought she witnessed actual concern on his face.

The two girls looked anxious, faces pale and arms crossed. The shorter blonde who was dressed like a princess kept glancing around nervously, and Rey immediately knew that something was wrong.

“What happened?” she questioned gently. “Are either of you hurt?”

They shook their heads, looking at each other in a way that was clear neither of them wanted to be the first to speak.

“We saw a ghost!” the second girl, a taller redhead in a cat costume blurted out, then looked like she was going to be sick. Her ears were lopsided and her painted on whiskers were smudged across her cheeks.

Rey didn’t say anything for a long second, trying to make sure she’d heard her right. It sounded like she said they’d seen a ghost. As in, a spirit or apparition, which obviously did not exist.

“I’m sorry, did you say a ghost?”

They were both nodding furiously and Rey just gaped at them. She looked at Ben for help but he shook his head, eyebrows raised.

Fine then.

“Do you mean, you saw someone here dressed like a ghost? A ghost costume?”

“No, a real life ghost! Or, I don’t know, a real dead ghost, whatever!” The blonde looked like she was on the verge of tears, her lower lip suspiciously wobbly. “We were going to get punch when the lights went out and we both saw it, right over there.” She pointed an accusing finger at the back wall. It was the same spot that Rey had thought she saw something out of the corner of her eye before they lost power.

She immediately dismissed the thought—it was just a coincidence; these girls had obviously either taken something or been drinking, or they saw something else and freaked each other out.

“Listen, girls,” Rey said, trying to keep her voice as gentle and non-accusing as possible, “have you had anything to drink tonight? You’re not in trouble, but we should probably get you somewhere quiet to sit down with some water, and—”

Ben snorted softly, clearly trying not to laugh next to her. He was obviously enjoying himself and when she saw the amusement on his face, things became clear.

“What?” she demanded, anger sparking in her chest as she turned to face him, hands fisted at her sides. “Did you set this up?”

“What?” He had to gall to actually try and look shocked, lips parting as he gaped at her.
She gestured to the girls. “This! Is this some ridiculous thing you set up? What, are you trying to scare me into leaving so you can get all the credit for tonight? Or, were you just hoping a ghost sighting would make me shut down the dance and make a fool of myself? Do you really think I would be so idiotic?”

Ben’s eyebrows came together, his mouth tight. “I don’t know what you’re talking about. I didn’t have anything to do with this.”

What a liar. This was low, even for him.

“Just you wait until I tell Leia you brought students into this,” she threatened, lifting up on her tiptoes to really get in his face. “You should be ashamed of yourself, this is so—”

The room plunged into darkness.

Rey gasped in surprise, goosebumps breaking out across her skin. It was suddenly freezing, her fingertips tingling from the unexpected dip in temperature.

A blood-curdling scream rose above the laughter and cheering from the lights going out again, a sound of genuine terror that stopped her heart in her chest. Someone—she thought it might be Ben from the size of the hand—grabbed her arm as she spun towards the sound.

It was pitch black in the room, but up on the stage, a ghostly figure was glowing slightly. Rey was near the back of the dancefloor so she couldn’t see very well, but it was definitely person shaped, tall and slender. Gasps of shock and fear rushed through the gym as the figure glided to the end of the stage, then vanished without a trace.

Rey’s breath stuttered in her throat.

What the—

The screaming was immediate, shrill and terrified as the lights came back on. Seconds later, all of the bulbs started popping, shards of glass raining down on the crowd. The punch bowls suddenly exploded on the tables, splatters of red and pink flying through the air and splashing across the ground. Huge speakers went flying off of the stage, crashing into the walls and tables, kids diving out of the way so they didn’t get hit.

It was absolute chaos.

The hand on her arm yanked her back roughly, pulling her out of the frenzy as students ran for the door in a panicked rush. She ended up falling into Ben, her knees weak as her brain scrambled to understand what had just happened.

“Ben—” she gasped, letting him steady her while she tried to collect herself. “What—what—”

His eyes were wide, and she could see that he was just as shocked as her. “I don’t know, but we need to get the kids out of here.”

The kids.

His words snapped her out of her daze, her focus coming back in a rush. She could freak out later, but right now they had a gym full of students to worry about.

They were all just bottlenecking at the door, screaming and shoving in an attempt to get out, and a few were still on the dancefloor—one who was helping another who had been hit by a flying
speaker, and a group of crying girls huddled together on the floor.

“Go help with the doors,” she told Ben, making herself pull away from him. “I’ll grab them.”

He looked like he was going to protest, but she turned and ran over to the girls before he could.

*Don’t think about ghosts, don’t think about ghosts.*

“Come on ladies, get up!” She grabbed two of them, hauling them to their feet as they sobbed and shrieked. “You need to get out of here, pull it together. Look at me!” A few of them were bleeding a little, small cuts on their face from the shattering bulbs. “Run to the door, Mr. Solo is there and he’ll get you out of here, okay? Okay?”

They finally did as she said, running as a group to where it looked like Ben was managing the flood of students somewhat. At the very least, they were moving through the doors a little quicker now.

She ran over to the last two kids, nearly slipping on spilled punch and catching herself at the last second. Glass littered the ground, sparkling like scattered diamonds and crunching beneath her feet, feedback shrieking through the air from the busted speakers.

The kid who had been hit by a speaker was dazed, eyes unfocused as his friend tried to help him to the exit. Rey hurried over and slung his arm over her shoulder, helping him stumble to the now empty doorway.

Nothing moved behind them, not a single sound echoing through the gym aside from their footsteps and harsh breathing. But she had this awful feeling like something was watching them go.

They followed the alarmed voices of the other students down the main hallway to where Ben had directed everyone out through the main doors and into the parking lot. He was a head taller than everyone else and easy to spot as they made their way over.

Kids were huddled together, crying and panicked, shrill voices filling the night air. Headlights bounced around the crowd as some just got in their cars and left, tires screeching on the damp pavement.

“Rey!” The relief in Ben’s voice when he saw her made her nearly trip. For a second, it sounded almost like he cared.

This night just got more and more unbelievable.

“We’re okay,” she got out between panting breaths—this kid had to be a football player or something, he felt like he was made of bricks.

“Here, I’ve got him.”

Ben took her place, helping him over to a nearby bench while his friend hovered anxiously. He seemed okay, but he needed to get to the hospital and checked out just in case—if the speaker hit him in the head, there was a good chance he had a concussion.

Rey wavered for a long second, taking half a step toward where the students were huddled in the parking lot. The panic and fear were palpable in the air and she knew she should really go over and try to calm everyone down, make sure there were no serious injuries. Instead, she turned back to where the dark doorway of the school gaped like the maw of a huge beast.

Heart pounding in her chest, she strode back up the walkway. She didn’t know what she saw in the
gym, but she couldn’t stop to let herself think about it, not when there might still be kids in the school—if she did, she knew that terror wouldn’t let her take another step. In the confusion and rush, some of the students could have easily run in a different direction and become separated from the group. They would need help.

From behind her, Ben called her name in alarm.

“Get an ambulance here,” she called over her shoulder. “I need to make sure there’s no one left inside.”

“Wait, Rey! Don’t—it’s not safe.”

Stepping back into the school was like submerging herself in a cold bath, the chill freezing the breath in her lungs and aching in her teeth. She didn’t want to go any farther, but she had to. If there was anyone still in here, she couldn’t leave them.

She could hear Ben’s heavy footsteps coming up the outside stairs, so she whirled around. “Someone needs to stay here and make sure everyone’s okay,” she stated firmly. His face was pale as he stopped on the top step, concern and indecision heavy in his eyes. “I’ll just be a minute, don’t—”

The doors slammed closed between them with a loud bang that she felt down to her bones.

Pulse pounding in her throat, Rey lunged at the door, yanking on the handle, but it wouldn’t budge. She could hear Ben yelling her name and pounding on the door, the handle shaking beneath her grip from the force of his hits. It wasn’t locked, but she couldn’t get it open. Whatever was in here, it had trapped her and clearly had no intention of letting her go.

“Ben! The door, it’s stuck, I can’t—“

Suddenly, something grabbed her around the middle and threw her back into the darkness of the hallway. All she could do was let out a scream before her head hit something and it all went black.
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

Ria, I’m so thrilled you enjoyed the first chapter and like the supernatural ghost goodness I added to your prompt. I hope you enjoy this second chapter too!

And, of course, endless love to my wonderful beta who worked her magic on this chapter.

With Rey’s terrified scream still echoing in his ears, Ben shook the front doors of the school with all the strength he had, but they wouldn’t budge. There was no way he was getting in through them and he was just wasting time by trying.

“Mr. Solo, what’s happening?” a girl asked from the bottom of the school steps, her voice high-pitched with fear. A small crowd was gathering behind her, students looking for answers.

He didn’t have any. What happened earlier in the gym—he didn’t have time to dissect it but he was sure there was a logical explanation. Just like there had to be one for why the unlocked front doors refused to open.

Ben’s mind was racing—if he couldn’t get through the doors, he’d have to find another way in. Despite how irritatingly brave and stupid she’d been to rush back into there and not just listen to him when he’d told her to stop, she was in trouble and he couldn’t just leave her. Not Rey.

He ran down the stairs, taking them two at a time. “All of you get out of here,” he called, trying to get everyone’s attention. “It’s not safe, go home! Anyone still here in the next minute is getting detention for the rest of the year.”
It didn’t take more than a few seconds for the students to start moving, the ones who hadn’t already fled rushing to their cars. The growl of engines and screeching of tires filled the night as Ben rushed around the school, aiming for the nearest side door. He plowed into it, the metal deflecting effortlessly him like he was a bug.

“Son of a bitch!” he swore viciously, clutching his throbbing shoulder. He kicked it, but just like the front doors, it refused to open. He knew for a fact that he had left this door unlocked during the dance.

He tried two more doors before accepting that it just wasn’t going to happen. Whatever was in there was determined to make sure he couldn’t get in. The thought made his blood run cold because it meant that it didn’t want anyone coming to save Rey.

Fuck that.

“Sorry, Mom,” Ben muttered, grabbing a heavy flower pot that was sitting next to the door.

One big heave sent it flying through the nearest window, shattering the glass easily. He ripped a banner from above the door, wrapped it around his hand, and knocked out the rest of the glass from the frame, brushing the shards onto the classroom floor. It was a tight squeeze but a minute later and he was finally inside of the school.

He froze, holding his breath, but all was silent—even the clock on the wall was frozen. It was the same in the hallway, the only sound his careful footsteps and breathing that sounded too loud in the quiet of the empty space.

Ben had practically been raised in this school, gone here as a teenager, and now taught here as an adult. Not once in his life had he ever felt unwelcome or afraid to be here—until now.

Something about it just felt off. The shadowed hallways and dark classrooms had a sinister edge to them, like something was lurking around, watching him. The hair on the back of his neck prickled.

When he finally made it back to the front doors and there was no sign of Rey, fear clenched its cold fist around his heart, turning his blood to ice in his veins.

“Rey!” he yelled, spinning back to the empty hall, stealth be damned. “Rey, where are you?” His voice echoed through the school, mocking him.

There was no answer, just rows of lockers and closed doors staring back at him. He needed to find her but he had no idea of where to start. The school was huge, full of empty classrooms and closets, and it would take him forever to search them all.

The smart move would be to call the police, let them come in and sweep the place. But the time it would take them to get here—Rey was in trouble now.

Suddenly, a sound came from down the hallway to the left—it sounded almost like a locker closing, the clang of metal on metal. Ben stilled, every muscle tensed as he listened.

Would it be more stupid to go towards the sound, or head in the opposite direction as quickly as he could?

His mind immediately went to Rey, probably alone and terrified, maybe even hurt. Maybe the noise was her trying to get his attention, to let him know where she was. She could be locked in a room, kicking the door for help. Or tied to a chair, banging the legs into the floor as she struggled to free herself. She’d be so grateful when he rescued her, beaming up at him with that bright smile of hers—
Okay, okay, he was going towards the sound.

As he crept down the hall, his mind wandered back to what they’d seen in the gym before all hell had broken loose. He didn’t believe in ghosts—he liked to think that he was more rational than that—but he didn’t know how to explain what he’d seen. Maybe it was a Halloween prank of some sort, one of the kids thinking they’d have a good laugh. But if that was the case, why destroy so many things and hurt people? And how, for that matter? He’d watched as heavy speakers flew off the stage, seemingly by themselves, as fountains of punch exploded into the air.

And even if someone had managed to do all of that, why take Rey? And how did they manage to lock all of the doors in the school like that? Ben and Rey were the only teachers here, the only people on campus with keys, and he’d seen the front doors swing closed by themselves.

He was so distracted by trying to come up with an explanation that when he stepped around the corner and saw a flash of red and something swinging towards him, all that saved him from getting a pipe to the head was a split second instinct to duck.

“Oh my god!” Rey’s free hand flew to her mouth in horror as she stumbled backward, the force of her swing nearly knocking her over. “Ben! I’m so sorry, I can’t believe I almost hit you. Are you okay? What the hell are you doing in here?”

He straightened, his heart racing, and he braced himself against the nearest locker. “I was looking for you! What happened? Are you hurt?”

She didn’t look injured, though her hair was falling out of its updo, brown waves brushing her shoulders, and her dress was rumpled and a bit dirty looking in a few spots. It looked like she’d rolled around on the ground a bit, at most.

Not exactly the damsel in distress that he’d been imagining. Which made this much less of a daring rescue than he’d intended.

“What?” Her face creased in surprise, lips parting. “You came in here for me? But it’s dangerous!”

_Ouch_. Her complete shock at the thought that he’d wanted to help her stung a bit. Maybe more than a bit. It was clear that she thought so little of him, she’d probably just expected he’d go home like all of the students and leave her trapped here.

“Yeah, well, saving my co-worker would look pretty good on my application for the principal position, wouldn’t it?”

The second the words left his mouth and her face fell, hurt flashing through her pretty hazel eyes, he wished he could take them back.

“I guess it would,” she muttered, looking away, her disappointment wounding him more deeply than her initial surprise. “Sorry to deprive you of that, but I’m fine, no saving needed. You can actually just leave, it’s really—”

“Leave?” Ben interrupted, confused by what she was saying. “We’re both leaving, right now. Come on, I broke out a window, we can get out through there.”

But she shook her head, taking a small step back—Ben recognized the stubborn set of her jaw and his stomach sank.

“I’m not leaving,” she told him matter-of-factly. “There’s something in this school, Ben, and it wants to hurt people. This ghost needs to be taken care of.”
He couldn’t believe what she was saying, how ridiculous she sounded. “Are you even hearing yourself right now? Ghosts aren’t real, Rey, you know that. And even if they were, what makes you think you could do anything about them? Unless you’ve got a secret degree in ghost hunting that I don’t know about—”

Rey’s cheeks went bright red, the flush spreading down her neck and across her chest. He tried not to look and failed.

“You think I don’t know that?” she demanded, her grip tightening around the pipe still in her hand. Ben was nervous she was going to take another swing at him, when she took a deep breath and rubbed her eyes wearily, shoulders slumping. “Listen… I saw it. You don’t have to believe me, but I know what I saw. It’s a real ghost, Ben, and I know that no one will believe me. They’re going to let all the students back in on Monday like nothing’s wrong and if one of them got hurt, if I didn’t try to do something to help—”

She was really serious, eyes welling up with tears. Rey was many things, many things that drove him crazy, but he never knew her to be irrational or a liar. He would be willing to accept the possibility of a ghost existing over her randomly deciding to make this up.

And he knew she was right—no one would believe her. Even Leia, who treated her like a second child, and favorite child at that, would never consider that she was telling the truth. More likely, they’d blame it on a mental break of some sort, ask her to take an indefinite vacation, and she’d be lucky to ever come back.

This job meant everything to Rey, this school and its students. She would never put that in jeopardy unless she meant it.

And hadn’t he just been trying to rationalize what he’d seen to no avail? It was like Arthur Conan Doyle said, “Once you eliminate the impossible, whatever remains, no matter how improbable, must be the truth.”

“Okay,” he said gently, “tell me what happened.”

Apprehension and relief warred on her face as she bit her lip. “I know how it sounds, but when the doors slammed closed between us, something grabbed me. It physically picked me up and threw me, knocking me out. When I woke up, I was laying in the hallway outside of B3.”

B3 was the wing of the school that was currently blocked off due to renovations. It was where the newer school sections had started being added onto the original building, and as far as Ben knew, no one besides the renovation team has been inside of it for years.

“I was trying to get up when it appeared again,” Rey continued. “It was real, Ben. It was floating off the ground and I could kind of see through it, like it was cloudy, you know? And when it reached for me, I saw its face. I—I recognized him.”

A minute later and they stood next to the main office, in front of a glass display case. Rey had told Ben that she’d show him who she’d recognized, then led the way, her pipe up and at the ready.

“Right there.” She pointed at a picture under the display titled ‘Your School’s History,’ a grainy
“That’s who I saw.”

He wasn’t sure what he’d expected but it certainly wasn’t this.

“You’re telling me that the ghost you saw was James Snoke, founder of the school?”

Rey nodded, pulling a jingling ring of keys from her dress pocket and opening the case. She unpinned the photograph and handed it to him. Snoke was an older man in a suit, his mouth twisted into a scowl, his eyes hard and cold—if looking like a mean bastard in life meant you stuck around to be a ghost and terrorize people, he was definitely their guy.

“It was him for sure,” she said confidently. “Except for his face, one side of it was all sunken in, like a skeleton.” She shuddered, crossing her arms over her chest protectively.

Ben folded the picture up, tucking it into his pants pocket for safekeeping. “Okay, so you saw the ghost and realized it was Snoke—then what? How did you get away?”

She brought the pipe up between them, giving it a fond look. “He reached for me and I panicked. I was right next to a pile of these pipes that the renovation team probably ripped out of the walls and dumped there, so I grabbed one and swung it at him. It was just pure instinct, I don’t think I expected it to actually do anything except…well, he kind of—poofed?”

“He poofed?”

“Yeah, I don’t know what the technical term is! He poofed and vanished, so I got up and ran for it.”

Interesting. Ben eyed the pipe in her hands—it looked normal, just some dirty old pipe that was probably part of the original building’s plumbing system. “What’s so special about this thing that it would make a ghost poof?”

She pulled it to her chest protectively, giving him a dirty look. “Don’t even think about it, find your own.”

Really, he should probably be the one holding onto the weapon, since that thing was nearly as tall as she was and looked heavy. But, she’d made it this far and he wasn’t about to argue.

In the distance, something groaned lowly, the haunting sound echoing through the building.

Ben reacted without thinking, pushing Rey back into the wall and shielding her with his own body. Her eyes went wide, mouth dropping open, but he quickly covered it with his hand, shushing her softly.

The ghostly moaning noise stretched on as Ben waited tensely, ready to snatch up the pipe and start swinging at the first sign of this spirit. If he had to, he’d throw Rey over his shoulder and carry her out of here.

After a second, he realized Rey was shaking against him, and when he glanced down in concern, he saw it was with laughter rather than fear. He pulled his hand away from her mouth, watching as she bit her lip to try and hold back her giggles, chest heaving attractively with the effort.

“What the hell is so funny?” he whispered harshly. “That could be the ghost.”

She shook her head, taking a second to collect herself. “It’s the heating system turning on,” she told him, a grin stretched across her face. “It always sounds like someone dying when it first starts up.”
He felt the tips of his ears heat up, thankful that his hair covered them. Talk about an overreaction, but he wasn’t about to apologize for trying to be cautious.

“It’s okay, it startled me for a second too.” She was gazing up at him, their faces only inches apart, her eyes glinting with mirth. She was beautiful.

His eyes dipped down to her pink lips, and he noticed the way her body was curved away from the wall slightly, arching into him. He couldn’t help but move a little closer, drawn in by the faint scent of her floral perfume and the warmth of her freckled skin.

Her breath hitched, their gazes locking once more.

“Ben,” she whispered, her voice breaking him free of the spell he was under.

Taking a quick step back, he cleared his throat. “Sorry,” he muttered, turning away under the pretense of closing the glass display case back up.

He was annoyed with himself, hot frustration twisting in his gut. He knew better and had been very careful to keep Rey safely out of his thoughts and in the off-limits section. Making a move on a co-worker, especially one as outspoken and fierce as her, would be a terrible mistake. Even with his attempts to drive a very firm wedge between them, it scared him how much power she had over him, how desperately he found himself wanting her attention throughout the day.

“So, what’s the plan then?” he asked, voice rough and he hoped Rey didn’t notice.

“What?”

“The plan…if you’re going to stay here and fight this ghost, you must have a plan, right?”

She just stared at him.

Ben felt the irrational urge to laugh—this was crazy. If someone had told him that he’d end up spending his night ghost hunting, with Rey Jackson of all people, he would have asked if they’d hit their head. But, here he was, and if she wasn’t leaving, neither was he. He knew better than to argue with her—he usually came out on the bottom when they had their frequent heated spats—so the only thing he could do was stay here to protect her and try to keep her safe.

“Okay then, first thing’s first; we need to get somewhere that’s out of the open and not so exposed.” Ben glanced around the cavernous space, feeling his neck prickle at the thought of being watched.

He could see the second Rey realized that he wasn’t leaving her. The smallest of smiles curled at the corners of her pretty mouth, her eyes going warm enough that his spine felt weak.

“Ben, you don’t have to—“

“Come on,” he interrupted, not wanting to explain why he was staying. “Your computer classroom is the closest.”

She nodded, then hesitated for a second, reaching into her pocket and pulling out her cellphone. A triumphant looking grin spread across her face as she gazed at it.

“I might not know the first thing about ghosts or how to fight them...but I know someone who does.”
They made it to Rey’s computer classroom without being jumped, which she ultimately considered a success. Ben gave her an amused look when she carefully locked the door behind them, but she ignored him—it was silly but it made her feel a little safer, more secure.

Ben was giving the rows of black computer screens an uneasy look. “So, what’s the plan? Do we even have a plan?”

Crossing the room, Rey sank into her chair, letting out a sigh of relief. Her head was aching from getting knocked out earlier and she felt like she was running on rapidly depleting fumes. This whole thing was insane, so insane, but she was happy Ben was here with her.

“Research,” she told him firmly, opening her drawer and pulling out a pen and notepad. “Neither of us knows anything about ghosts, which is going to be an issue if we want to—” She paused, looking for the word.

“Permanently poof him?” Ben offered, his voice tinged with tired amusement. He was obviously out of his depth here, they both were, but he was trying really hard to hide it.

“Exactly. I’m guessing you can’t kill a ghost but there has to be a way to get rid of him, some banishing chant or something.”

His eyebrows flew up. “A banishing chant?”

God, he was infuriating. He knew exactly what she meant.

“Like, an exorcism or something. I don’t know, I feel like they do that in movies—actually, that might be demons. But look, that’s the point; we have no idea what we’re doing or how to get rid of this thing, so we need to do some research. And I happen to know someone who’s obsessed with ghosts.” She held up her phone, wiggling it triumphantly. “Poe.”

Ben immediately frowned like he smelled something bad. “Poe Dameron? The chemistry teacher? You’re going to call him? He’s a total tool.”

Did he have a single friend in this school? Rey highly doubted it.

“He’s actually really smart and he watches those paranormal investigation shows religiously. I can guarantee he knows way more about ghosts than anyone else we know.”

He rolled his eyes but grabbed a chair, sitting next to her and watching as she scrolled through her contacts. “You’ve got him saved on your phone? What, are you guys dating or something?” His tone implied that he couldn’t think of anything more repulsive.
Rey resisted the urge to smack her head into the desk—were they really discussing her love life right now?

“We’re friends; you know, that thing everyone besides you seems to have?” She paused, finger hovering over the call button. “And, not that it’s any of your business, but he’s dating Finn.”

The look of surprise on Ben’s face was almost comical and undeniably satisfying.

She put her phone on speaker as it rang, nervously glancing at the door. Hopefully, they’d be safe and hidden in here for at least a while.

“Hey, hey,” Poe answered, and she could hear that he was grinning. “You’d better not be calling to ask me to come help with the dance—you brought that one on yourself.”

Rey gestured for Ben to keep quiet, putting the phone on her desk. “Hey, Poe. No, I’m uhm, actually calling about something else.” She floundered for a second, realizing she hadn’t thought about what she was going to tell him. “I’ve uh, got some students here asking about ghost hunting stuff. I guess they’re playing some game, like a haunted school scenario and the challenge is to see who lives the longest.” She shrugged at Ben, hoping she sounded convincing. “They’ve asked me to judge for them, but I don’t know anything about ghosts so I was hoping you’d help me out.”

There was a long pause and Rey bit her lip anxiously. If she ended up having to tell him, he’d either believe her and try to rush over here, or he’d think she was crazy and rush over here. Either way, he’d come to the school and the last thing she wanted was more people who could potentially be hurt.

“So, you decided to call the expert, huh?” Poe finally said, his voice smug. “Okay, give me a second, Finn and I are in the middle of a movie.”

There was a brief muffled conversation before he sighed into the phone. “Finn is pouting and said you’re messing up the flow of the movie, but he’s taking a break to go make some popcorn. So, what do you need help with?”

She grabbed her notepad, pen at the ready. “Well, there’s been a lot of debate about if they can kill the ghost or if they just need to survive the night. I figured you can’t kill something that’s already dead but—”

“Yeah, no,” Poe interrupted. “Ghosts can’t be killed, but they can be removed. They’re usually here for a reason, like unfinished business, they haven’t been laid to rest, vengeance, revenge, stuff like that. So if you want to get rid of it, you either need to help it find peace and move on, or force it out of the space it’s occupying. Cast it back to hell, or whatever.”

Ben was rubbing his eyes, looking like he was on the verge of losing it, so Rey reached over and put what she hoped was a comforting hand on his arm.

“It’s okay,” she mouthed at him, the heat of his skin noticeable even through his sleeve. “We’ll figure it out.”

He nodded, a faint smile on his face as she pulled her hand back.

“How would you do that?” Rey asked Poe. “And, I forgot to mention, but they can only use things they could find in the school. It’s supposed to be as realistic as possible.”

Poe hummed thoughtfully. “Well, I can’t say for sure what works because I’ve never gone up against a ghost, but there are a few things that most people agree on. Cleansing the space is always a good
one, with sage and herbs and stuff, while demanding the ghost leave and making it clear it’s not welcome. That’s about as peaceful as it gets.”

Finn’s voice suddenly chimed in. “Don’t forget the iron and salt! Ghost hunting one-oh-one.”

Rey scribbled them down. “Do those actually work?”

“If you’re watching the dorky shows Finn is, then yes.” Poe laughed at Finn’s indignant sound. “I’m kidding! I mean, supposedly. Iron against supernatural creatures is old lore that’s been around forever. And salt, that’s been referenced in blessings and healing through history, and lots of people think it purifies. So yeah, those could both probably work.”

Ben was studying the old pipe Rey grabbed. It must be iron then—it was torn out of the old part of the school, so that would make sense. If that worked, there was a good chance salt would too.

“So, if I was trapped in the school with a ghost,” Poe continued, “I’d probably head to my lab and grab all the sodium chloride, then go find something iron. I bet your shop has some old iron tools laying around. Those two things would probably be enough to get me through the night.”

“And what if they wanted to get rid of the ghost, not just survive the night?”

Poe laughed. “They wouldn’t have a chance. I mean, the school is huge, you can’t exactly cleanse it. I have a stash of sage in my desk for clearing out all the nasty energies these kids leave in my classroom and it wouldn’t be enough for half of the school. So, unless they found what the ghost was tethered to, which again, giant school, they should just stick to hiding.”

A helpless look crossed Ben’s face but Rey paused. “What do you mean, the thing it’s tethered to?”

“You know, like it needs to have something keeping it here. Its body is a pretty big one, or an object of significance. Their favorite stuffed animal or coffee mug or a locket with a piece of their hair, shit like that.”

Well, at least that gave them a place to start.

“Thank you,” she told him, writing down a few more things on her notepad. “I’ll let you get back to your movie—”

“Wait! Rey, this is Finn.” He was obviously holding back laughter and sounded like he’d had a bit to drink. “Is Solo there with you? I heard he was working the dance too.”

She gave Ben a nervous glance, praying that Finn wasn’t about to say something awful. “Yeah, he’s here. He’s actually coming over so I’d better—”

“You know, I was thinking he might be stalking you.” Poe’s laughter could be heard and him trying to take the phone back. “No, no, I mean it,” Finn insisted. “I think he’s into you, like, wants to get you alone in his classroom and seduce you. Read you dirty poems or something until your underwear combusts.”

She could feel heat spreading across her face and she couldn’t bring herself to look at Ben. If she made it out of this school alive, the first thing she was doing was marching over to his house and kicking Finn.

“I’m just saying, be careful. And use protection! And—”

Rey hit the end call button before he could say anything else.
“Oh my god,” she groaned, covering her face. “I’m so sorry, he’s an idiot. He has this weird obsession with like, people who don’t get along actually being into each other—I don’t know, he watches a lot of romantic drama trash TV.”

Ben nodded, but he wouldn’t look at her. She was going to murder Finn—for the first time, she was managing to be around Ben without wanting to strangle him, and her dumb drunk friend had to swoop in.

“Let’s just focus on the task at hand,” she muttered. She’d made the mistake of mentioning once, just one time, that she thought Ben wasn’t the worst to look at, and Finn had never let it go.

They looked over her notes, Ben leaning a little too close for comfort, the heat of his body making her want to press against him.

“This is insane,” he muttered after a second, shaking his head. “We’re actually trying to figure out how to get rid of a fucking ghost. I don’t even believe in the afterlife—though I suppose I’ll need to re-evaluate that after tonight.”

“You don’t?” The words slipped for her mouth before she could think about them, but really, she wasn’t surprised—Ben probably thought he was too logical and smart for something like faith.

“You do?” he challenged.

Rey hesitated, debating whether being honest was worth the potential that he would mock her. Then again, Ben had surprised her more than once tonight already—if anything, she owed him the benefit of the doubt.

“I didn’t,” she told him, “until my foster mother, Maz, appeared to me in a dream after she passed. I know, I know, doesn’t mean anything, right? Except, she told me about some money she had been putting aside for me to go to school, something I had no idea about. And the next day, the bank contacted me to tell me about this savings account she’d had, all this money she’d been saving for me.”

Ben had an incredulous look on his face, and she understood, she really did. It sounded crazy, but…

“In the dream, she also quoted this poem that I’d heard before but I couldn’t remember where. I looked it up and found the book it was in, then found it on the bookshelf. I flipped through until I found the poem and in the pages was a letter from her to me. She had cancer, and she knew she didn’t have long left…” Rey swallowed heavily, something hot and tight in her throat. “I know it could be explained through subconscious noticings and coincidences, but I do believe it was her in my dream. And since then—I don’t know, I don’t nor believe in an afterlife…I just think it if she could have visited me, she would have found a way.”

Shocking her, Ben’s eyes went soft and he reached over to hesitantly place his hand on hers, like he was trying to comfort her.

“If you want to believe she was real, then that’s all that matters,” he said.

Rey had never seen him so understanding, so kind and vulnerable, at least not towards her. Something jittery was racing through her veins and on their own accord, her gaze dipped down to his plush lips.

It was a mouth that really, no man should be allowed to have. Pink and full-lipped, it made her just want to lean over and—
She cleared her throat, forcing herself to look away. “Anyway, we should probably get back to this.”

He hesitated but she made herself focus on the notepad rather than looking at him to see if he’d noticed her staring. After a few seconds, he leaned back in to do the same.

“How are we supposed to figure out what’s tethering him here?” he asked, pointing to where she underlined that. “He was alive around one hundred and fifty years ago or something.”

“I don’t know. He founded the school and was the headmaster until he died—that’s the extent of my knowledge, so I couldn’t even begin to guess.”

Ben shook his head. “Well, we can’t just wander around the school until we find something that looks haunted. And what are we even supposed to do with it if we found it?”

That was a very good question. Maybe destroying it would release the spirit?

But he was right; the bigger problem right now was figuring out how to even know what they were looking for.

“I have someone else we can call,” she offered hesitantly. “I don’t know if you know Rose but she teaches history here and runs the after school local history and heritage club. There’s a good chance she knows more about Snoke and might be able to give us an idea of where to look.”

“Are you sure you want to risk telling another person? You’re lucky Dameron is an idiot.”

She bit her lip, ignoring his snide insult towards Poe. “I think Rose will trust me when I tell her it’s important and hopefully that’s all I’ll have to say.”

Ben didn’t look convinced, but what choice did they have? They didn’t have time to dig through websites or books in an attempt to find out more about Snoke. Especially since Rose had the information they’d need right off the top of her head—she was a local history buff and spent most of her free time researching.

So, for the second time, she pulled up her contacts, pressing the call button once she found Rose and putting it on speaker.

She answered after just two rings. “Hey, Rey, I thought you were working the dance tonight?”

“Yeah, I am, I was just hoping you could help me with something really quick.”

“Of course,” she answered with no hesitation, “what do you need?”

Rey took a deep breath. “This is a weird question, but what do you know about James Snoke?”

“Like, founder of the school, James Snoke?” The confusion was evident in her voice. “I know lots about him, but why are you asking? What do you need to know specifically?”

God, where did she even start? It’s not like she could be honest.

“Mostly about anything to do with him while he was here at the school. I can’t tell you why I need to know, but it’s important.”

Silence stretched past the point of comfort.

“Are you okay?” Rose finally asked. “You sound…” She trailed off, her words lingering in the air.
Ben glanced at Rey, giving her a meaningful look, just on the verge of ‘I told you so.’ It was easy for him to criticize but she had yet to hear him offer any solutions.

“I’m fine,” she responded, trying to sound like she meant it. “I just—I really need to know about Snoke; anything weird or strange about him, maybe?”

Rose, the amazing friend that she was, didn’t push it—just like Rey knew she wouldn’t.

“Weird? Yeah, you could say that. That guy was may have founded this school but he was about as awful as you could get; racist, sexist, oh and did I mention, almost certainly a murderer?”

Rey and Ben’s eyes met over the phone.

“What do you mean, he was a murderer?”

“It was never officially confirmed, but yeah, the police were pretty sure. He started the school back in the 1860’s as like, some elitist boarding school for rich kids, right? Well not too long after it got up and running, servants would vanish without a trace. There were rumors of a hidden room he had added into the school when it was built, and he would take them there to murder them. They never found any bodies so they had to just write them off as vanishings, but supposedly, he was a pretty messed up guy and people thought he was behind it.”

If Rey didn’t know that Rose had a good heart, she’d be a little concerned at just how excited she sounded about the whole thing.

“That’s crazy,” she said, giving Ben a meaningful look and he nodded. This was exactly what they needed. “Any idea where this hidden room was?”

Rose sighed wistfully. “I wish—I tried to get the school to let me into the original area to have a peek around, but after it was deemed structurally unsafe, it was a no-go. They’ve had it blocked off for years until they finally got the funding a few months ago. I’m still hoping I’ll hear something since they’re remodeling; skeletons in the walls or whatever. But I was thinking it would have to be near his office—that’s where I’d put a secret room if I had one.”

Now they had a place to start. If Snoke left behind an item he was tethered to when he died, it would make sense that it had been hidden away and untouched. Maybe the workers had stumbled upon the secret room and unintentionally released his spirit.

“Thanks, Rose, you’re a lifesaver.”

“I have no clue what I possibly could have just helped you with, but you’re welcome, I guess.”

Rey felt terrible and wanted to reassure her that everything was okay, but...she didn’t want to lie to her friend more than she already had.

She just mumbled out a passable goodbye and hung up the phone, staring at it. She knew she was being emotional as the result of everything that had happened tonight, but she felt the urge to cry and scream and throw something.

“This will be a fun story for later,” Ben told her softly, “once this is over and done with. I’m sure they’ll all get a good laugh.”

Though she appreciated it, they both knew they were never going to be able to tell anyone about this. Tonight, it was their secret and theirs alone. It was strange to think of sharing something with Ben, trusting him with something.
“Let’s just get going,” she said, standing up from her chair. “We need to go get some supplies, then it’s time to hunt down this ghost.”

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