Rey knows Kylo by now. And she knows Ben and almost everything in between. But when Poe Dameron kisses her, she learns something she hadn't known before. They are bound by the Force and this alone would be difficult enough - with love of all things added to the mix, the universe could as well come apart under the weight of their minds.

(Formerly "I Know", now a multi-chapter fic.)
Thank you again, so much!

I drew the picture on the bottom there, please, please, please don't steal :) Thank you!
And thank you for kudos and comments, they make my heart sing!
There are two sets of battlefields for Kylo Ren and Rey to compete on.

The first are the ever-changing fighting grounds where they just keep meeting. It’s power plays and clashing laser beams. Learning his moves becomes second nature and when he does something unforeseen, Rey tugs at the Force to anticipate his actions. He is usually trying to gain ground on her using Ataru but fails again and again because he adamantly ignores that the control of his over-long limbs is severely lacking. He falls into Niman, but he doesn’t use force blasts, not unless absolutely necessary. It somewhat escapes her why, but when she searches the borders of his mind, she can taste a sour defiance. He thinks she thinks using forced-based attacks is cheating. She does, but it puzzles her why he would care.

The second is much more dangerous duelling ground, and it’s far more exhausting because it never really ends. There is no definitive starting point where someone gives a signal and two swarms of opposing allegiances clash and try to tear each other limb from limb, and neither is there a clear-cut defeat or retreat. Their minds are at war and as long as they live, they’re on equal ground, powers evened out by equal resilience and rigorous stubbornness. They cannot best each other, only test and test patience and endurance.

Sometimes it seems like she cannot get a second’s respite of this mind-bending war. As if he is always lurking around the edges of her mind, waiting to disrupt and to disturb and throw her off whatever she is doing. Half the time, she wonders if he has nothing better to do and the other half she wonders if he maybe can’t help himself at all. There is of course another possibility, which is that she is merely imagining his presence but that is too disconcerting a thought to linger on.

Physical proximity is a factor in their mind games. When they are further apart from each other, their bond becomes less defined. It never quite snaps entirely but from lightyears and lightyears away, she feels only the strongest of emotions and can’t make out his location precisely. If they are on the same planet, though — or in the same system alone — she can feel his presence as if he was standing right beside her. A consequence of this is that they can’t hide from each other once they’re close enough.

At times he finds her, at times she finds him. Their endless tug-of-war is played with many a scar on bodies and minds to show for it. And out in the field wounds and bruises are straight-forward things, in the truest sense of the word, clear-cut. He lands a blow or she does, one of them or both shedding some blood. They fight toe to toe, attack to parry and then some, until something always tears them apart. It was an endless promenade of re-matches and hells to be paid next time. And the next and the next. It was reliable. Unchanging as the sea.

Within their other realm of conflict, however, nothing at all is ever straight-forward. And that makes all the difference.

Rey could’ve gone on despising Kylo Ren for as long as she lived for all the horrible, despicable things he’d done. She would probably have killed him several times over if it weren’t for everything she’s come to learn about the human behind his unflinching mask thanks to their connection. Hells and heavens, she probably would have pushed through to killing him eventually anyway. Things being what they are though, no matter what that says about her, she can’t kill Ben Solo. And no matter how hard he's tried to, even Kylo Ren can not kill him. And thus the problem persists.
In her involuntary learning of who her brooding nemesis is, she has come to know one from the other and also know the most unstable, most unpredictable hybrid of the both of them. She knows when Kylo speaks to her and she knows when it’s Ben. When she catches glimpses of the world through his eyes, she knows which of them is looking through the visor.

Rey knows the various and very many things that strain Kylo’s patience to the point of dissolving. She can even tell which of the two souls eternally at odds in his body throws a tantrum.

Kylo lashing out is weirdly **systematic**. When he extends his fury by use of his lightsaber, his gashes and cuts into any given surface are precise and almost geometric. The destruction he causes is a tool to calm his nerves and each slash brings a bit of his composure back.

Ben is a whirlwind of excess, blindly thrashing at everything remotely in reach. When it’s really bad, he can spiral into minutes of mindless violence. But that’s when he’s upset with something someone else did. When Ben is upset with Ben, or worse, when Kylo is upset with Ben, he lashes out inward and turns his pain and anger on himself. That’s maybe the worst of it and Rey gets headaches from it. Because he runs his head against walls. **Literally.**

Sometimes she tries to will him from doing it and it works but once. As it happens, she offers a wall of her own, force-fueled and made of thoughts. He runs and runs against it until he is spent and breathless and the hate and confusion in his head ebbs. It leaves an emotion bordering on gratitude and this in itself is enough to make Rey break the connection, if not for long.

Ben, she finds, is strongest and most prominent when Kylo Ren sleeps. She even catches glimpses of memories sometimes.

The happier ones are a deep crimson, tarnished with regret and a sense of loss that brings tears to her eyes. She can see the world through the eyes of a little boy who believes he will never be good enough. Not for his father who thinks he is wimpy, hysterical and squeamish and not for his mother who, as time passes and he grows stronger, is downright **afraid** of him. Her unwavering love for him is what hurts most because he cannot seem to stop disappointing her.

Ben, growing leaner, more lanky and taller by the day, wants nothing more than to disappear if he can not seem to change one bit and Rey does not have to see it to know that this was where Snoke had him in his crushing, alien grasp. He’d offered just that; to make Ben Solo disappear, replace him with something else entirely. He’d failed in this, if not in little else. Ben is still there, unrelenting, a little voice in the back of Kylo’s head he’s trying his hardest to subdue.

Sometimes when they sleep and irrevocably dream together, Rey feels overwhelmed with compassion, with pity for him. He is so broken and deems himself so beyond repair. It’s worse when, in very weak moments, Ben — always Ben — reaches back for her.

Kylo only tugs at his side of the bond when he wants something; to confuse her or learn her moves and attacks before she makes them. Sometimes he taunts her and sometimes he tries to tempt her. When he is especially tapped into the Dark Side and feels a seemingly endless pool of power to feed from, he tries to make her feel the sensation. That’s when she usually shuts him out. Ironically, she can do that precisely because his drawn strength fuels her own.

But oh, when Ben reaches for her, it’s a different thing entirely. He is craving contact and the way his mind softly edges in on hers is almost tender. Underneath, he is demanding like a child but prominently, it’s just a pathetic grasp for sympathy, for just something other than hate from her. Weak in sleep, sometimes she gives him what he wants.
If she is honest, Rey feels completely out of her depth to put a name or a concept to their bond. She resents Kylo and she pities Ben and it’s difficult to keep the two of them apart. It’s easiest when he is actually there. In front of her. There’s just one of her and one of him and she can handle that.

When they face-off, Kylo Ren usually starts out with feet apart, the left one behind the other so it can push him forward into an attack, his lightsaber burning and sizzling in front of his face, ready to pounce. It drenches the pink, pale flesh of the scar she gave him in hues of red and he sees her as a target, trying to foresee her moves. That always does the job of letting her forget all he is when he isn’t this. It’s simpler, in a lot of ways. Out in the open, with sharp edges and a distinct black and white, when otherwise it’s all greys with him.

The first time she kisses Poe is when the already jumbled mess that is her link to Kylo Ren becomes laced with an even more disconcerting layer of unforeseeable depth.

Poe Dameron is, much like Finn, a most startling opposite to Kylo and even to Ben. But unlike Finn, who feels decidedly brotherly to Rey, Poe is anything but. He’s so steadfast and confident, while disarmingly charming and enticing. Under his gaze, she never feels like the scrawny desert-rat she’d been as far back as she remembered. She feels like she’s never been one in the first place.

When it happens, they’re stuffed in a tiny, stolen First Order shuttle and Poe has just, once again, saved them both in a piloting manoeuvre that was both daring and reckless. But Rey isn’t scared anymore — too many brushes with death do that to a person — instead, she is just exhilarated and grateful and what was meant to be a hug, becomes a kiss in an imperceptible change of trajectory.

The first couple of seconds are all hers. Poe is startled for an instant and then embraces it with a fire she only suspected he had and everything is easy and weightless for a while. Poe catches her lips and it’s the first time since she’s known him that his sure grip on the craft he is piloting falters.

But then Kylo rears his head inside her, a raging beast, and the fierceness of his anger makes her jump away from Poe in a painful jolt. She is hit against her seat and feels the knuckles of her right hand burn and throb where Kylo has undoubtedly just punched a hole in whatever wall was closest to him.

Poe looks at her, puzzled but satisfied, thinking her startled expression comes from what a gifted kisser he is. And he is. But Rey can’t even see him behind the red curtain Kylo has drawn over both their eyes. He is furious and what’s worse; hurt. It’s also not just Ben there, it’s Kylo, as certain as she’s ever been of anything. It rattles her to the core to find possessiveness in his outburst and, irrevocable and immeasurable in its consequences, jealousy.

Kylo and Ben both, wherever they are, have thumbed their lightsaber to life and are slashing a corridor into bits and pieces. Their force connection flares up like a jolt and she can hear him hissing, as if multiplied by the ripples of their brains.

Mine, he thinks, sharp like a knife, you’re mine. And Rey is livid.

How dare he? She is no one’s. And least of all his. Her own fury fuels enough of what she’s always tapped into of the force to shut him out with a bang. The void he leaves inside her mind is at first almost crushing in its blankness but then quickly filled with rage all her own. He can’t be serious. He can’t honestly think that this was ever, ever a possibility. He is insane, completely over the edge. If he hadn’t been before, now he has completely lost it. She, his? In what world? In what universe?
They are foes, opposed for eternity. Until, and she only realises now that this has always been a given, one of them kills the other. It was always going to be this way. Their story only ends one way. One would be the other’s demise. It’s as certain as death. It is certain death.

And she loathes him, hates him and can feel the echo of Ben that had nestled into her brain cringe under her scrutiny. Out, she thinks, angry at herself for having her own set of Kylo and Ben that exist within her without him even being around. That she would have beings to contend with, within her, conjured up in her own mind to take into consideration. Out! You mean nothing to me!

“Sweetheart,” Poe says and it barely makes it through, “are you okay? It’s fine, you know, heat of the moment, I get it.”

He is still on about the kiss. Rey resists the urge to roll her eyes. It isn’t about this now. And then the anger is back when she looks at Poe for the first time since Kylo Ren has blown her brain apart. Because Poe is perfect. Mature and brave, capable and good. And now Kylo has tainted even that for her with his selfish, petty, inconsiderate longing.

“I’m going to kill you,” she thinks. And she’s never meant it more. And she’s never meant it less.

Day and night circles past as she maintains hold of her own head. She is a fortress armed with disgust and reproach and whenever she feels him tug at her barriers, she makes him flinch back. He is getting nothing from her. Poe and Finn hover, sensing a darkness gnawing at her neither of them fully understand but know has something to do with Kylo Ren. Yet, they don’t pry and maybe that’s worse. Rey feels like she can’t take a step or put a cup of caf down on a counter without the two of them measuring it for force. As if they want to will her to lose her patience.

On a rainy day, the Falcon wedged between huge trees for another useless observation of one or the other planet-based First Order operations, Rey has enough of Finn’s sideway glances and Poe’s attempts to diffuse her tension by flirting with her.

“I’m going to meditate,” she declares and heads into the jungle.

The air around her is sickeningly humid and she walks and walks until she spots a ceiba tree with enough dents to climb and then she works her way to the branches until she finds one to hold her weight.

The tree-crowns are still a ways above her, so she sees only greenery. It should be calming, especially along with the soft breeze that hits her cheeks up there. But it does nothing to quench her restlessness. In her mind, she plays back the kiss with Poe, willing it to be a memory in and of itself but Kylo Ren’s voice rings in her head defiantly. Mine, mine, mine, it says, all hollering intensity and she can feel him there, at the edge of her consciousness, knowing that she is thinking about him. When his voice rises to a deafening crescendo that makes her throat close up, she screams in frustration and opens the floodgates to him.

Get. Out. Of. My. Head. She orders him, a strange drawback to the first time he tried to creep into her.

I can’t, he provides but there is a disgusting triumph in his entrance, his return to her mind. As if he knew the separation wouldn’t last.

Well then get this stupid idea out of yours at least. She pushes him. He pushes back.

Do you think I like this? He sounds incredulous and weirdly condescending, which is enough alone
to put her on edge.

*Seems like you have to deal with it, she thinks defiantly. I thought you were so kripping superior with all your training. Can’t you just turn it off?*

*Oh, believe me, scavenger, I’ve tried.*

*How long has this been going on?* She barks at him after a moment, trying to dial down her anger. He’ll get the better of her if she’s unraveling like this.

*A while*, he admits freely, but he sort of likes it, provoking her. It is so like Kylo Ren to turn his own twisted desires into a way to torment her. *I had it under control, as best as I could but you had to go around kissing inconsequential scum. He’s not half worthy of you.*

*Poe is not inconsequential*, she shoots back, ignoring his last words and could slap herself for how childish it sounds, even in her own head. He snickers, the bastard. *And he’s worthy enough. At least he isn’t some sad excuse for a man who thinks repeatedly trying to slash someone into pieces counts as courtship.*

Kylo is angry, Ben flinches at the ridicule.

*You’re a petulant child*, he wants it to be a dagger but she can feel the hurt, making it spiteful at best.

*And you don’t know how to take no for an answer.* And she shuts him out again. *Deep breaths*, she thinks, *focus.* He isn’t trying to get back inside.

That night, she fights sleep for as long as she can but eventually, without really noticing, she slips and they find each other. Her rage has tired her and when he materialises in her mind’s eye, he seems equally exhausted.

She tries to get enough self-control to keep up a minimum level of hostility but finds nothing in him to latch onto. He is hollow. Ben is strong in him and he is somber. She thinks he wants to see her about as much as she wants to see him.

So she sits down, finding that they’re back in a quiet meadow they once fought on, when lines had still been somewhat drawn. Easier times. She folds herself into a cross-legged meditation pose and tries to breathe evenly. Maybe he’ll just go away.

Instead, he sits down as well, trying to mirror her pose. This is the part where she would close her eyes but she doesn’t. He reluctantly locks eyes with her.

“Why?” she asks and, despite herself, attempts some humour, “I thought we had a good thing going here.”

He is not laughing. “I don’t know.”

She thinks this is more Ben than Kylo, but she could be wrong, there is enough resignation for the first and enough self-loathing for the latter.

“Is fighting to near death every other week not a clear enough sign that whatever you feel for me is a tad misplaced?” She doesn’t mean for it to sound cutting but she feels the ripple of a stifled wince —
Ben’s, decidedly — wading over from his mind to hers.

“If I could do anything about it, I’d have done it already,” he says, without a discernible cadence, “And I’m not in love with you. It’s just…”

“You just don’t want me to kiss anyone,” she jumps in and can’t help but wonder at the absurdity of this conversation. They’re being so civil. Chalk it up to exhaustion. If anything, it’s very unlike them.

“You can kiss the whole entire galaxy for all I care,” Kylo says but Ben adds a moment later, “I’d just like to not have to see it.”

“It’s never gonna happen,” she says, almost all the way sure of it.

“Don’t you think I know that?” Ben’s exasperated and so utterly defeated.

“We hate each other,” she goes on, more for his benefit than hers, “I’ve tried to kill you a dozen times.”

“And you’re the only friend I have,” he says, “whatever that says about me. You’re the only one who...matters. The only one who cares.”

Friend. Huh, now that’s a new word in the mostly unflattering vocabulary he uses to describe her. This is bordering on ridiculous but she can’t find anything remotely funny about it.

Rey tries to read in his face what she can’t make out from too many welling emotions. His filters are off, it all ebbs and flows from him and she has to tap out before she drowns in it.

He is so lonely. He’s like she’d been, back on Jakku. Only where she was surrounded by rubble and sand, he is surrounded by people. Underlings even, that follow his every order. Minions, both afraid of him and in awe of his powers. And yet. Nobody cares. Of course. There’s no love lost on the Dark Side. She wonders when someone last gave him a hug. He sure looks like he could use one. And then, something hits her, square in the chest like a blaster bolt. She can see it in his head, as he follows her train of thought. He can’t even remember.

He can remember the last time a human had touched him though, skin on skin. Han Solo. It seems a lifetime ago but Rey still winces at the thought. Ben flinches with her.

“You thought that’d be the end of it,” she blurts into the silence between them, “I could feel it. You thought if you could do it and kill him, you’d be so far gone that it would keep you tethered to the Dark Side. You wanted to throw Ben right after him. But after, you just felt ten times worse than before.”

He doesn’t argue with her, only his brow furrows as he looks away. A moment passes that could as well have been an eternity.

“I’m sorry,” Rey doesn’t know why she keeps talking, “for what happened to you. You know, you would’ve been enough.”

Her words, which were meant to be some sort of consolation, have exactly the opposite effect and she jumps like a kid that accidentally set something on fire. Kylo, Ben, whoever he is, coughs up a heart-wrenching sob that breaks from his mouth and nose and just like that he is crying.
Rey is suddenly lost. Her arms twitch uselessly at her side and she tumbles out of her lotus seat into a half crouch. Her body has twisted itself into a kneeling-like position and she can feel her arms burn with the desire to reach out. But how can she? He is a monster. He has done so many horrendous things, more than she can count. But he’s right there and he is crying, with his head in his hands, for kriff’s sake, and she doesn’t know what to do.

She tries to find the answer in his head, even though a part of her cringes to go there. She is afraid of what she’ll find and she is, on a more subtle level, wary of breaching this very private moment. But what else can she do? Leaving is out of the question. She couldn’t if she tried.

So she pushes against his mind, softly, as softly as she can. It’s an ocean of sadness in him and while she suspected it would’ve been made out of regret, it’s something else. She can hear her own words played back and forth to him. You would’ve been enough.

He is crying for what could’ve been and she can see it so clearly. A dream in a dream. He is imagining himself, wholesome and sane. Grown. A man who feels like a man, not an overgrown boy trapped in a suit of darkness, everything he is hidden by a mask. He dreams he’d believed he was enough, gotten stronger and braver in the light of that certainty. And he dreams of her. He believes she could want him like that. Whole and stable, reliable and good.

There’s an image, fuzzy around the edges, of a life that he can never have. They are a tangled mess of limbs and the feeling of warmth is in such striking contrast to their reality, it makes her chest constrict as it’s being decompressed. He traces her faint freckles, all the way across the bridge of her nose, while her fingers comb lazily through his wild black hair and then he smiles. He imagines himself smiling like that, as if it was the height of his fantasies. He looks so at peace, so happy, her stomach churns.

She recoils from the image and leaves his head. She knows why he’s crying now and she wants nothing more than to join him in his weeping. But she can’t. One of them has to keep a grip. He is fighting to stop, trying frantically to reel himself in but he fails and she can’t even help rocking forward, on hands and knees.

She hesitates when he is in arms reach, and again when she extends her hand but then… Did she ever really have a choice? She overcomes the distance and puts a soft hand on his forearm. He doesn’t even seem to register it at first. Then she applies more pressure and she doesn’t know if it’s her tugging, or his sudden pull but he uncoils his long limbs in a snap and wraps himself around her before she can take half a breath.

They sit awkwardly on the ground, both on their knees, though he is so tall he is lifting her kneecaps up so she’s really just on her shins. His hair brushes the entire right side of her face, tickling her nose. Ben and Kylo, both, shudder against her body and he holds her impossibly tight, nose and lips buried in her neck.

This is by far the most bizarre thing he’s ever done. And she’s trying to decipher why she doesn’t have the slightest urge to run. He is so sad, it’s crushing and despite herself, and despite what they are, she wants to make it better. Awkwardly, she finally folds her arms around his broad frame and rubs circles over his shirt, the way you would comfort a crying babe.

There is a sigh beneath all the crying and he becomes less rigid suddenly, and if possible, sinks even more into her. He has been so parched for this, she knows. It kills her. And she resents him because how can she hate him now?
How can she kill him now?

There were times when she lay awake just wanting to know what lay beneath all his cunning rage and those polished features and now that she does, she just wants to un-know it.

Slowly but surely, she can feel his heartbeat calm against her. Though it seems like his heart can’t really decide who’s it is. Kylo’s is always more evenly paced, only racing when severely rattled but then quickly reigned in by stern discipline, while Ben’s is a hummingbird in flight. Now it stutters, neither both nor none of them, but at least it stutters slower. It dawns on her that once this is over, he will be deathly ashamed. And dangerous, because he is still himself and nothing is more dangerous than an ashamed Kylo Ren.

So she does not give him time to calm down entirely and frees herself gently but purposefully from his grip. She thinks he’s stopped crying but she can’t be sure the way he’s looking down at his knees as he sinks back into a kneel, one hand steadying him against the ground.

With nothing else she can think of doing, Rey gets up and resolves to just leave and wake up without another word. But then he grabs her wrist just as she takes the first step away. He doesn’t need to say anything, she knows what he wants now.

“I can’t,” she says, her voice a broken little thing, raspy from tears he’s cried.
“I know,” he replies, it’s barely a whisper, and lets go of her hand.

Rey wills herself to wake but she can’t muster the strength to even lift her head. She stares at the ceiling above her cot and a single tear runs from the corner of her eye into her ear. Damn him. Damn him and the force and damn this whole entire galaxy.

She wishes she could just crawl back into her AT-AT on Jakku and forget everything. But he is burnt into her and his misery singes a hole into her very soul.
I can't...

I know.
Bound To You

Chapter Summary

From the ashes of Kylo Ren’s confession rises a whole new battlefield.

Chapter Notes

So I wrote another chapter. So far I am not sure where this is going but I feel it going on. Do you have any suggestions or wishes what these rascals could get into. I could maybe even work in a couple of prompts? If you like, you can leave some in the comments :)

Thank you for reading!

The section within the *** marks more explicit scenes. If you are reading with children, cover their eyes at the stars.

This was beta'd by the most wonderful ViciousRhythm (http://archiveofourown.org/users/ViciousRhythm/profile).

For longer than Rey can remember since their whole force bond sparked to life, Kylo keeps firmly out of her head. She still gets the glimpses of scenery around him and still feels the stronger emotions he runs through. But he does not push or pull at her end of the link. He makes himself sparse and Rey would know why even if she couldn’t feel his shame burning as if it was her own.

Kylo Ren is struggling with two things. The first is hiding everything that had transpired between Rey and himself from his master Snoke and the second is hiding everything the transpired things did to him from Rey. While he has apparently been successful in the first, going from Snoke not killing him yet, he fails miserably in the latter. Rey is well aware of the aggression boiling beneath his humiliation and misery, fuelled by anger at himself, at her and Ben’s weakness. He is very clear on that in his rage. She can tell because it’s both directed at himself and then not, which usually meant Kylo looked for blame within the Light. And the light was always Ben.

Thus, Kylo tries to keep Ben reeled in as much as he can, even when they dream. This results in almost twelve night cycles of nearly undisturbed sleep for Rey. On the thirteenth night however, she tumbles head first into one of Ben’s reveries.

She senses the change in atmosphere immediately once she crosses over from her own dream into his. Her chest always feels slightly smaller in his head, thanks to a certain claustrophobic quality to everything Ben experiences from years of being shoved into the very back of Kylo Ren’s consciousness. None the less, the dream itself is neither scary nor repressed. Or, at least it isn’t scary for Ben. For Rey, it’s scary enough and a number of other things.

It’s a variation on the scene she’s already seen once in his head, that fateful night when she learnt that her biggest enemy fashioned himself as her lover at his rawest.
They are lying side by side in a bed, him and a dream version of her he controls, and it’s the first time Rey registers that Ben, Kylo — that he is naked in this fantasy. A sand-coloured sheet covers him from the waist down as it does her. It’s weird seeing herself lying there and she feels somewhat violated that he would imagine her in such a state of undress. Still, while his body is all harsh lines, pale skin, freckles and sharp edges, hers is shifting, blurry and covered by her arms most of the time.

Of course. He doesn’t know how she looks with no clothes on, has not seen it yet despite their link. Maybe he hasn’t even tried to. Though that would go against everything Rey wants to believe of him. A tiny detail as it is, but she still feels too uncomfortable imagining a respectful, non-gawking Kylo Ren who left her this privacy while inserting himself into almost everything else going on inside of her. She focuses on his naked form instead.

The irony of her doing so, where he obviously hasn’t yet, escapes her. Not that it doesn’t occur to her — but it’s different, isn’t it? She isn’t lurking, she doesn’t want to see how he looks like beyond all that black because she fancies him. Absolutely not. But if she has the chance to see that vulnerable, undeniably human body carrying his twisted soul, she will take it and not think twice. And, oh, is he ever human. His body is much like his face, it reads like a book. She can see scars from battles, can tell where his muscles have hardened from continually revisited training routines. His shoulders are broad, as she knew them to be, and his toned chest is rising and falling slowly. He looks peaceful and non-threatening despite his tall frame. Splayed out as he is, he looks even more gangly and younger than his years.

Rey knows that he is older than her, ten and a half years almost exactly. And while Kylo’s at times impatient with her naiveté, which speaks to that age difference, Ben has never quite stopped being that sixteen-year-old boy who fell prey to Snoke. Bare as he lies before her now, he looks closer to sixteen than to thirty-one in any case. Kylo and Ben even each other out like that and his tantrums do the rest of making him feel very equal to her. Of all the intimidating things that make up Kylo Ren, the years he has on her have never held much weight. Now, he is smiling again as well, freed and wholesome in his fantasy, and it takes away another year or two. Ben looks almost serene, long limbs entangled with hers.

Rey herself, in this version of her he imagines, is drenched in light. It’s weird seeing herself like that, as if she’s absolutely flawless — there is no hair out of place, her skin is pure and soft, smooth as porcelain. She is perfect in his mind and it feels like a slap in the face. It astounds her how he is able to picture someone who’s repeatedly tried to kill him quite this way. She doesn’t want to try and understand it either, so she watches as the dream unfolds, and tries to focus only on that.

Dream-Rey turns around in place and comes face to face with him. His face is split with that gut-wrenching smile that is damn near impossible to look at and keep her head. She knows exactly why. Because it’s equal parts painfully beautiful and disarming. It bypasses all of her inherent defences and makes her feel weak. This smile could unravel her completely and the fear of this is real and biting. Even in her bodiless state of dreaming, the very essence of her is rattled to the core. She knows, right this second, that this smile of his has taken root inside of her heart and will live there forever. Mortified by this, she has to look away. His hands are a welcome distraction as they move about her dream-version’s body. Watching this is weird as well, but it isn’t half as bad as the smile she can still see from the corner of her eye.

His long, elegant fingers ghost over her jawline and Rey’s hairs stand up from a phantom sensation. Then his thumb lingers on her lips, while her parted mouth breathes against his hand. His Rey is smiling back at him. The real one swallows hard and tries even harder to ignore the shudder that’s coursing though her entire being, making her aware of her body again, in all places. This is unwelcome. Unforeseen and unprecedented. She pushes the notion as far from her mind as she can. If she were smart, she would make herself wake up and go for a run around the Resistance base.
.and run and run until she forgot that she ever witnessed whatever this was. But these two bodies winding around each other in their delicate intimacy are mesmerising and she can’t leave. Not yet.

There’s still something happening there, something coming that she feels like static in the air. She has to stick around to see what it is. Of course, she shouldn’t. But she has to. When it happens, she knows instantly that she should have run and never looked back.

Kylo’s, no, no! — Ben’s hand moves from her mouth and face, he drags it down the side of her body, shifts beside her and then pulls her so close that no leaf would fit between their bodies. The other Rey rolls her body into his almost obscenely, and exposed chests touch as her arms fall on his. Her hand looks impossibly small and delicate grabbing at his shoulder. They hover like that for a long while and their breathing becomes one, heaves and accelerates as tension builds up the real Rey can feel pool in her groin. His smile falters and makes way for hunger to take over his face.

Rey, the real one, now dares to look at it again and immediately regrets it, because as it is, she can’t look away anymore. His eyes are clouded with something that must be desire and appraisal. She feels his gaze deep inside her, crawling under her skin and leaving fire in its wake. And then it happens, they breathe in almost lazy unison and sink into a slow kiss. And watching it is like nothing Rey has ever seen or felt. She tries to remember her kiss with Poe, the first one she ever had that mattered, and tries to imagine if it could have looked like this. She cannot tell.

This kiss is infuriatingly undemanding, and unnervingly slow to unfold, as if they have all the time in the world. As if they can take days and days devoting lavish kisses to any given part of the other’s body. She is transfixed by it and it feels like something inside her dies and comes alive again and then Ben, or Kylo, she isn’t sure anymore, sighs. It’s so quiet and it shouldn’t matter, shouldn’t have any effect at all, but it ripples through her and becomes an avalanche before she even knows what’s happening. Because she suddenly wants this sigh more than life itself, wants it again, wants it for herself, wants it to be hers and only hers, wants to hear nothing else ever again.

In her spectators position, Rey suddenly crashes into a solid body where before she could’ve just as well been a pair of eyes, and it immediately yearns, craves. Her arms fly from her in a stretch and she wants to touch him so badly that Kylo rattles to awareness of what has happened while he was away. Or not paying attention.

Now he surely is. She can feel him as if he too, had a body, searing, singing. Neither of them is quite sure with what, but her name resounding in their heads, whispered by his low, rumbling voice jolts Rey awake violently. He’d thought her name as if it was life and love in and of itself.

Rey has never been so terrified of him and never half as terrified of herself.

She spends the rest of the night trying to rationalise and reason with herself over the unspeakable things she felt and won’t allow herself to feel ever again. It was a mistake engaging this vision. Her curiosity about Kylo Ren’s humanity is a folly and evidently dangerous. A part of her is still, and had better be, wary of his motives, half suspecting him of having planted this dream in vicious manipulation. And she can’t fall for it, won’t fall for it. Ben and his fever dreams aren’t enough to lure her in, or to draw her out. Ben is a sad, trapped little shadow of a thing. He isn’t the humanity that could redeem Kylo Ren. He will not be redeemed. Never, she says to herself, like a chant or a prayer. Never, never.

The word carries her through the night and the next day and resounds harsher each time he tugs at their bond. It seems like her reprieve from their war is over. Kylo is gnawing at her like a menace again and she is straining to keep him out. She has given him too much. Her unbelievably stupid and unfathomable reaction to what he wants to do to her has obliterated his shame for wanting it in the first place. And has replaced it with a need, a thirst. Kylo wants answers and Ben is a little light
flickering along in there, a stunted flame but a flame nonetheless it’s bright, white hope. It makes Rey sick.

Kylo himself has traded the raw, crippling desperation she’d already known not to last long, for dark triumph. He is trying to make them both believe that he’d been sure all along that she wanted him too. In consequence, Ben’s sincere elation and boyish hope is tainted by Kylo’s heightened sense of self and delusions of grandeur. Rey is half thankful for this because it makes it easier to despise him. As she should.

She can handle that Kylo. The Kylo that cries and just wants to be held is the one that renders her useless and drowning in her own misplaced compassion. Arrogant, evil and self-indulgent kriff-bag Kylo is far less frightening. She lets him try and probe her and lets him flood her system with ideas of his superiority and focuses on that and not the fear of rejection that is still there, despite his over-zealous thoughts. She eats it up, all of his pride and his inflated sense of allure until she feels strong enough in her resentment to let him at her thoughts again.

His mind slithers into hers like a snake and takes back the room in her brain that he’s carved out for himself with ease. Rey quickly mutes the sense of completeness she feels when he does.

Care to tell me why you sneak into my dreams and stick your little nose into things you so adamantly want nothing to do with?

Kylo has obviously chosen to cut right to the chase.

Fine, you bastard, she thinks, let’s have it out.

Kylo feels a wicked joy at her defiance, she can feel it tickle down to his toes.

I don’t recall you thinking I’m such a bastard last time you were in my head. I recall yearning, Rey. And hunger.

I was sleeping, I wasn’t in my right mind, she thinks with spiteful venom in her heart, and if anything it was for Ben, not for you.

We’re one and the same, Kylo shoots back, not missing a beat.

“Oh, of course you are, right when it suits you,” she snickers sarcastically and out loud, and a couple of heads turn from their monitors in the command centre of the base to look at her. She waves them off with a shake of her head, “Nevermind.”

You want me, Kylo thinks, something dark and unnervingly tempting surges through both of them as his mind rattles through the onslaught of implications. It’s flashes of his imagination, Kylo’s this time, not Ben’s. It’s all wrong. His kisses are fire, dancing around an abyss, and his grasp on her is tight, desperate. He bites. And he doesn’t sigh, he growls and groans, guttural and feral. Rey shifts in her chair and crosses her legs.

Go to hell, she thinks. I want nothing from you. Except to stop breathing.

There’s only his menacing chuckle in her head before he fills it with only one vivid, overflowing image. The scene is ludicrous and illicit; he has her pinned against a wall, one arm shoved under her bottom and the other holding her wrist above her head. His mouth is firmly attached to her neck and she can practically feel his hot breath on her, his tongue sweeping over her pulse point and something else, hard and throbbing, wedged between her thighs. Rey’s lungs empty and her blood rushes south. For a second she forgets how to breathe.
And then he’s gone, his laugh still echoing in the back of her head. Rey is in the pilot seat of the Falcon en route to Luke Skywaker within the hour.

In her mind, Kylo Ren is doing the mental equivalent of banging relentlessly on a locked door and it’s draining her patience until she is raw and on edge. She pushes back every so often but his resistance and defences are toughened up by his wholly unpleasant smugness. She can’t fight him like this. So she hopes that Luke’s hide-y-hole planet ACHC-2 is further away from Kylo’s current position than Gniam, where their new Resistance base sits, carved into the secrecy of a coarse mountainous landscape. To her great satisfaction, she finds that it is. When she breaches the atmosphere of her Jedi master’s exile planet, Kylo is fainter in his attempts. She can still feel him and a lot still gets through, but it’s manageable.

Luke awaits her at the bottom of his little island. He undoubtedly felt her coming from miles away. The old man looks at her as if he is not at all surprised to see her when she walks down the hatch to meet him. Rey just shrugs awkwardly, unsure of how to lead into the conversation she must have. Still, better to have it with Master Luke than with anybody else. It’s why she left in the first place; he is the only one who will know what to do. Finn and Poe wouldn’t have been able to understand and she does not have the patience to explain her and Kylo’s unique circumstances. Finn would’ve just given one of his awkward little head-shakes and asked if she couldn’t just turn it off. And Poe…Poe would’ve probably looked at her like a kicked puppy and she can’t deal with that.

And as for General Organa, well, she couldn’t just have dropped by her bay in command and say: “Hey, so your maniac patricidal Darksider-Son has a pretty aggressive crush on me which makes me feel really funny and things are getting kind of messed up.” No, this had been out of the question. So Luke it is. And he waits at the bottom of the hatch and in saying nothing, grants her the time to find words.

“I need help,” she says, “I need to break a force bond.”

And Luke winces with something that seems almost like recognition — something that feels like he had expected this to happen. He quickly catches hold of his features again and swallows once, to collect himself.

“Ben,” he says and it’s not a question, “I knew I felt him on you.”

This sounds so wrong to Rey’s ears that she takes an instinctive step backwards.

“Oh, Rey you should’ve told me when we were training,” he says regretfully, “Why didn’t you?” “Because I had it under control,” she tells him, an edge of defiance in her voice, “I could handle it.” “And now you can’t,” Luke is grievous but accepting and he tilts his head toward the sharp inclining stone steps behind him, “Come.”

Rey is somewhat proud to find that she can still keep pace with him until they are all the way up by his little cavernous living quarters and she half expects him to run her through some kind of meditation drill immediately but instead he leads her inside, starts a fire and has her sit down while he dunks an assortment of leaves into a boiling kettle.

He sits down opposite of her and she can see his face, set aglow by the fire, unmoved in his reclaimed and unnerving composure.

“What do you know of force bonds?” He asks her evenly. “I know they can happen between force-sensitives,” Rey says, “Most commonly between a Jedi and their teacher.” “And you know what it entails?” “A connection,” she offers and lets her mind wander, “you’re tethered to the other, even over great
distances. You feel what they feel, not always but often, and if you both let it, you can talk to each other, make the other see things...feel things.”

Rey shifts uneasily and watches a flicker of worry distort Master Luke’s features ever so fleetingly and then waits for him to go on. He takes a moment.

“And you are positive that you and Ben share a bond such as this?”

“I’m certain,” she says and then adds and raises her hand to hit her palm hard against her forehead in a motion she’s felt Kylo do so often it feels like it's her own muscle memory, “he is everywhere.”

“A bond between two living beings is not something easily broken. It not a choice,” Luke says and pauses, “… it is like breaking a feeling. Like turning away from the Force. To break a bond, your feelings would have to change, or one of you would have to die — but even then, the bond wouldn't go away, it would simply… it would simply be empty, a wound.”

Rey’s mind rattles with the implications of this and she comes up at a loss, “What does that mean?”

“Under normal circumstances, you would have to learn to despise your force-bound partner, and keep him out because you don’t want him in,” Luke says and let’s Rey finish the line of thought.

“But our connection started out like this,” she says, “I already despise him and it does nothing to weaken the bond, not even by a bit.”

“That’s what I was afraid of with you two,” Luke sighs and there is a layer to his tone that suggests a hidden meaning and once again, Rey has the sneaking feeling like her Jedi Master, much like Kylo, withholds information on her, like he knows something about her she doesn’t know herself.

“So there is nothing I can do?” She feels terror well up inside her like the tide.

“It seems you cannot break the bond,” Master Luke nods and she feels genuine sympathy wade from his side of the force to hers, “we can try but I think the more prudent course of action would be to devote some time to strengthening your mental capacity, to build up your defences.”

“Mediation drills,” Rey sighs imperceptibly and smothers it within herself. Meditation, though not exactly hard for her, always leaves her unfulfilled. She feels almost lazy when she doesn’t exercise her body but it makes sense. Kylo is not attacking her body, not directly if anything, and thus, her mind needs the work-out.

“Okay, so, let’s begin,” she says and rises but Luke remains, reaching behind him for the kettle and fills a cup. Rey awkwardly sits down again, feeling restless and panicky beneath that.

“Patience,” says Luke, “best not to walk into this blindly.”

He holds out the cup to Rey and the fact that only she gets one makes her nervous, “What’s in there?”

“Something to open up your mind,” he says.

“No,” Rey shakes her head adamantly, “I can barely keep him out as it is, if I drink this, he’ll get in.”


Rey is less than convinced but she takes the cup from his outstretched hand anyway. She halts before she drinks, the rim of the cup already pressed to her bottom lip. Luke nods a soft encouragement.

“We need to explore this bond, explore its depth. We need to know where you’re vulnerable to him,” he says, “and he to you.”

Despite herself, Rey nods and drinks the substance that tastes like run of the mill, indistinct tea and immediately feels lightheaded. She has to prop up her back against the stoney wall as her body becomes too heavy. Her eyelids fall down, weighing tons and she finds herself in a hybrid-state between sleep and waking. She can feel and hear Master Luke’s soothing voice but her mind blares open and becomes shifting shapes and colours and twisting emotions.

And of course Kylo is right there. He is almost startled by the sudden access and it takes a while before he materialises. He takes his own shape, his long body clad in a thin, black fight suit with his hair pushed out of his face. He never wears his mask in her head, it doesn’t do anything for him there. His own mind vibrates as he notes that there is something different in her complete openness. It
makes him wary. Ignore him, Rey hears Luke’s voice and lets it guide her, leave him, go back to the beginning.

And she does.

As if she is walking through corridors, she finds the interrogation chamber of Star Killer base and finds the exact moment their connection sparked and festered like a disease. She watches him push into her, further than he’s ever been inside any other’s mind. She wonders how she knows this, but doesn’t question it either.

In Kylo’s memory, she finds his bewildered wonder at the sheer capacity of this connection, feels his skin burn with her access to the force and feels his desire for it. He wants her power but, and this comes as a startling realisation, he also wants her. Immediately but quietly, so quiet Kylo won’t even know it himself before it’s too late.

What do you feel? Master Luke’s voice is a welcome anchor to reality. “He can sense the force in me,” she answers, voice clear through the haze of her waking dream, she knows Kylo Ren hears her just as clearly, “he wants it for himself…and something else.”

She can not see Luke’s face go blank for a second.

What does he get from you, how far does he push? “Far,” she answers and feels the sensation anew, Kylo’s mind so intrusive it makes her want to retch — he was tender then, she knows now, by the sharp contrast of other times he really wanted to make her suffer. But with a virgin mind, his thoughts had felt like probing fingers, scratching the inside of her brain.

“He can see my whole life,” she says, “he knows I’m lonely, he can see every day I remember.”

What do you do? “I try to fight it,” she says, mind straining with the memory, “I push back.”

And is it working? “No,” she says - but then, “yes, I think it’s starting to. He doesn’t even realise it at first, he doesn’t expect me to.”

What do you see? How far do you push? “As far as I can,” she says and remembers the darkness, and the light and the terror running through Kylo Ren’s veins like scorching, liquid iron, “I see his life, his pain.”

Kylo, the real one, is instantly there with her, resisting the recollection, feeling shame and reproach. He tries to attack her but with a strength Rey did not know she had, she pins him in place. It’s Takodana all over again, except now she is the one who’s rendering his body immobile and thus, his mind.

“He is split in half,” she says and she’s known this, but Master Luke maybe doesn’t, “Kylo and Ben and they are both so…afraid.”

What is he afraid of? “Kylo is louder, he’s scared that he will never be as strong as Darth Vader,” she says, “Ben is afraid of everything else…like an undercurrent.”

Stop this. Kylo’s voice is laced with strain and she knows it’s taken him severe effort to pry these words from the grip of her mind on his. No, she thinks back adamantly and feels a wickedness at the denial that is more Kylo him than Rey.

Leave him, says Master Luke as if he knew Kylo was in there with her and once again, she does. Kylo is disoriented, she can feel his puzzlement in the back of her head but she doesn’t care. Let him get a taste of his own medicine.

He is with you from now on, correct? “Yes.”
You can feel him in you?
“Yes.”

Like you can right now or is it weaker in the beginning?
She tries to examine her memory, “Yes, it’s weaker but it grows, quickly. I can hear his thoughts next. I know where he is. I become more aware of Ben.”

Does something change? He asks like he already knows the answer.
Somehow Rey’s mind rebels at giving the answer.
None of his business, it resounds in her head and to her horror, she isn’t sure if the voice is Kylo’s or hers.

In a new surprise, Rey learns that she’d been aware of the shift within Kylo Ren before he’d even accepted it himself.

“He thinks about me differently,” she says and pushes further, “He goes easier on me when we fight. He stops using force-based attacks on me. Because I think it’s cheating…and because he doesn’t want to hurt me. Although he doesn’t admit it to himself.”

Stop. Kylo’s voice crescendos but it’s not enough to rattle her.
“He feels compassionate towards me,” she says, and hopes Luke can’t hear just how measured she lets this word fall from her lips.

Who? Ben or Kylo?
“Both.”

Good. Leave him.

Rey does so suddenly she can feel Kylo’s sensation of whiplash. He is chasing after her but she wades through memories so quickly, he can’t keep up. His frustration is a fiery blaze that sizzles, unstable and unpredictable like his lightsaber.

Look for his weakness, Master Luke commands. What makes him unravel?
Rey can only think of one thing and then she looks on as Poe kisses her. She feels reminded of a question of her own she’d had back in Ben’s dream - when she wondered if Poe and her kissing looked like Ben and her kissing stayed right where it needed to be. Unlike now.

What is it? What’s his weakness?
“Can’t,” she says, “I can’t see.”

She can feel Kylo’s presence loom larger now, as if he’s crept up behind her. He is perhaps even more startled by her blatant lie than she is. He understands it as little as her.

Try harder, Master Luke commands, gently but firm.
“I am.” She’s not. She turns to find Kylo, bodied again and looking at her quizzically.

That’s between us, she grits out between clenched teeth, making damn sure not to say these words out loud.

Kylo takes a step toward her and his face is composed while every emotion from relief to shame and from longing to desolation courses through him in such quick succession it makes her dizzy.
Suddenly time and space becomes unhinged and their bond throbs and pulses as the material world falls away, his and hers. Both Master Luke with his inquiries and Lord Snoke, the way he always angles somewhere around his apprentice’s mind, become nothing but a faint shadow.

It’s just the two of them for half a moment that could as well have been years. Kylo — and this time she can feel it so clearly that it’s definitely more Kylo than Ben, or rather that rare cross between them both — wants to touch her with an intensity that brings stars to her mind’s eye. She flinches back. At least she thinks she does, but the imaginary body that carries her through this vision is unresponsive.
And in this instance their bond becomes a real, tangible thing. It’s a red, glowing tether and it spans from her hand to his. She can feel it, fuzzy around the edges but firm and enduring.

Kylo takes another step and nestles his mind even closer against hers. It feels almost like a kiss. Rey can’t think straight. And at this very second, she could admit to herself that she doesn’t want to. Then something entirely earthly crashes into this almost cathartic moment — and it’s Kylo. All Kylo, she is pretty sure. He twists their bodies in his mind’s eye. It’s Ben’s wholesome fantasy but with Kylo Ren’s lustful tinge.

It’s them in their peaceful bed. Only this time Rey is right there, not just looking on. She is the girl in the dream. Because now he doesn’t need to imagine her there anymore. She supplies herself. Then Kylo grabs her hands, interlaces their fingers and pushes his weight onto her body.

She can feel her phantom fingers dig into his skin as he shoves their hands into the mattress and wedges himself between her legs. There is the echo of the sigh that unraveled her whole world. It makes her float, makes her cross through their connection into Kylo’s world. It’s his quarters, she knows although she’s never really cared to look at them. He is alone and his breaths come ragged and distracted. In his mind’s eye, he teases her with his lips, grazing the sensitive skin of her neck while he rolls his hips against hers. And then a sensation too real to be imaginary passes from his hand to her groin in a flash as Kylo arches his body into the palm of his hand.

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She feels linen press uncomfortably restricting against his front and her heart picks up a much quicker pace. Kylo is fumbling with both hands at the breeches of his trousers. He staggers backward until his calves make contact with something solid and he sinks into a hunched over sitting position. Still air meets his freed length and he takes a deep, bracing breath while his vision of them in bed plays on. Rey disregards the dream and instead falls into the moment and his body as if it were her own. When his graceful fingers close around his flesh, once his thumb spreads a drop of wetness across his most sensitive bit of skin, his grunt of pleasure is almost hers. Now, Kylo senses her there, on edge and alert, and he growls. His hand starts clenching and unclenching, pumping up and down on its own.

It’s a weird sensation, Rey finds. She zeroes in on his efforts in a drunken-like haze, feeling his arousal thick and exhilarating. She strains into the friction he creates, yearns for his release with what feels like selfishness. She feels him hard under his grip and she can almost move his hands for him. Enticed and reaching back, he lets her. His skin feels like silk draped over steel and she uses his fist on him, knowing just what he likes because he is her and she is him and their pace becomes frantic. His hips buck into his —into her— grasp and she feels his knees jerk as his stomach becomes a pulsating coil. His mind falls away into oblivion to make room for his imminent release and then he comes undone with a startled gasp. Rey’s toes curl up, her physical toes and her physical self reaches for some purchase in the real world as his orgasm runs down her spine like a forest fire. Her head is spinning. She’s almost in pain. Terrifyingly wonderful pain.

Kylo himself, is in shreds and spent and only when his pleasure has ebbed entirely, Rey becomes aware of a scream resounding in her head.

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Master Luke yells her name in earnest and it shakes her awake. She jolts up, as if he had slapped her right across the face. Her hands are clasped tightly around the bench she sits on and she can feel her cheeks glow with exertion.

“You were struggling,” Master Luke says, worried, “did he fight back?”
“In his way,” she says, truthfully, “I think I need a break.”
Master Luke nods and she gets up onto shaky feet. She staggers forward, away from the fire, away from her master, out of their enclosed quarters and the mid-day sun scorches her like the shame she feels welling up inside her.

Kylo is dizzily happy around the edges of her mind and she wishes he was instead condescending or evilly joyous at her flesh’s evident failure. It would be easier to place than his disarming joy. For once, he and Ben truly are one and the same and it makes Rey nearly drop to her knees.

What has she done?
As the light of day way fades, Rey wants nothing more than to sleep or potentially dissolve into air. Luke joins her after what she thinks is at least half an hour of sulking and puts a big warm hand on her shoulder. She leans into the touch, maybe because for once it’s not Kylo Ren who touches her. She can just savour this contact and draw strength from it without it making her feel guilty and it doesn’t complicate absolutely everything. She almost curses that this is her life now and Luke squeezes her flesh between his fingers in a consoling gesture.

“I know it’s hard,” he says, “having this kind of connection with someone you actually like is hard enough and seeing as you share it with someone you detest, I can’t begin to imagine the strain you’re under.”


“Hate is a very dangerous concept,” he says, as he has about a million times and steps before her so she has to look at him, “it leads to suffering, which leads to the Dark Side. And what I sense in you is contempt and frustration, helplessness but also compassion…and affection.”

“And how is that less dangerous?” Rey challenges, piqued that everyone in the world seems to think they have a free pass into her most private thoughts and emotions, “And I’d appreciate it if you stayed out of my head. It’s already pretty crowded up in there.”

“Forgive me, Rey,” Luke says and her anger dissipates in the face of his calm, “Compassion is the way of the Jedi. You could argue that having compassion for Ben can be just as dangerous as hating him because you fear of what he can do to you once you admit that you care - but at least your compassion cannot compromise you. Not like hate can.”

“What do you know of compromising compassion?” Rey’s voice was meant to sound cutting but instead it’s just a sheepish, quiet jumble of words.

“More than you know,” he says gravely and a moment of loaded silence falls on them as the sun starts to set.

Rey looks over the side of the hill, over soft water and on and on all the way to the horizon. This is the island she imagined all these years on Jakku — peaceful and serene. But nothing feels right. Nothing feels safe at all. It isn’t fair. Her own body has become a treacherous thing and there is no reprieve, no escape. He is inside of her and there is no way to break this connection unless one of them dies. And even then, Master Luke’s voice resounds in her memory, it would not be gone, just empty, like a wound.

“Rest now, child,” Luke says into the mess of her thoughts, “If you like I can brew you another tea…one to quieten your mind this time.”

Rey wants to cry at the suggestion and she knows it’s weak but she nods immediately, with tears springing to her eyes. Yes, yes, she will take any remedy against her swimming head, whatever it is
as long as it silences the voices. And her body that still burns. Anything so she can sleep. Just for tonight. Tomorrow she will go back to shouldering this burden all on her own and unassisted but now, she just wants to have one night of peace before it all goes to shambles again.

A soft breeze caresses her ankles as she trudges after Master Luke and her eyes have to get used to the twilight within his quarters again. She finds her own whole-in-the-wall-cot at the far end and he prepares a sleeping-concoction with expert speed. She wonders how many nights Master Luke himself resorted to the old recipes of poison lily and leaf of ion to help him find his rest.

When he brings over her cup, he tilts his head and smiles a consoling smile. “I am sorry that this is happening to you,” he says as she drinks in large gulps, “but I have faith in your abilities and the strength of your character. If anyone can handle this, it’s you.” She wants to take the compliment and comfort gracefully but she is so exhausted and tired she just snorts. She immediately apologises but before Luke can even acknowledge it, Rey has sunken into herself and quickly after into a dreamless, comatose sleep that neither Kylo nor Ben could rattle her from.

She wakes up the next day feeling more like herself than she has in months and is pleased to find that Kylo has retired to a corner in the very back of her mind. She should be wary of this, she knows, because he usually plans something when he doesn’t run through her head. But this morning, she cannot get herself to. She is just happy that she's somewhat on her own for a change.

Master Luke is already up and has been for a while by the looks of it. He has assorted a slim but sustaining breakfast for her that sits on a tray beside her cot and a small fire heats her thick grey wool training outfit. She eats and dresses and when she meets him outside, the hilltop drenched in drizzly fog, he is deep in meditation. She sits down opposite him for what feels like the hundredth time and waits for him to become aware of her presence.

After a while, he does and his bright eyes blink open and find her. He smiles and inclines his head. “I hope you got some rest,” he says. “I did,” she replies dutifully, “Thank you.” “Are you ready to begin your drills?” “Yes,” she isn’t all too enthusiastic about them in all honesty, but ready she is.

And so they begin. He makes her run circles in her mind, raise walls, tear them down. Let’s her actually race, once, twice up and down the mountain while she has to keep her mental defences in place. It’s three hours into this, that Kylo reappears in her mind just as strong and as present as ever. She winces and hisses in frustration but pushes on. Luke’s exercises help and her focus gets sharper but Kylo never seems to stay out for long. It’s infuriating and inside, he feeds on her frustration.

Master Luke is none the wiser. He gives her new meditation tasks. He has her chase after a little hovering robotic ball with a blindfold on, tells her to put all her thoughts to the force, to neglect her own mind in order to become one with the Light and Kylo could as well be snickering at it. After hours upon hours of this, she has enough of silently ignoring him and uses a long, still meditation exercise for a short, furious confrontation.

_Are you quite done gloating_? she asks, examining his wicked joy at the fact that she is struggling to hold on to every inch gained on him. _My offer of teaching you still stands, Rey_, he replies as if he was having a different conversation. Her inner self has to chuckle in disbelief. _What? Wanna ‘show me the ways of the force’ again?_ She briefly remembers the scene, a lifetime ago on Starkiller base when she had just wielded a lightsaber for the first time and all clumsily let herself be driven to the edge of a ridge in the world. Only to have him try and snatch her up, drag her
right from the edge into the darkness with him. His offer had been tainted with his narcissist pride and an almost beseeching plea for camaraderie. It does not feel wholly different now.

_I can teach you how to close off your mind_, he says and this time she laughs, humourless and huffed.

_I need to learn that so I can close it off to you. I don’t think having you teach me is exactly the way to go_.

_I can still help you_, he says, unrelenting.

_But why?_ Rey is incredulous and puzzled at his intentions, what has he to gain from this? _What are you getting at? You can’t get farther into my head than you already are_.

_Let’s just say I want to protect what’s in there just as much as you_, he offers and she can sense the flicker of terror behind a carefully crafted layer of deflection.

She thinks that this might’ve been why he’d left her alone all morning. He was coming up with a pitch because he’s thought of something he hadn’t thought of before. Or something had happened. And then there it is; an echo of pain, of probing — mistrust and the threat of punishment far exceeding the levels of pain he’s already in and something so terrible and dark, Rey flinches away from it even though it’s just a memory in someone else’s head.

_Snoke_, she says and it’s not a question.

Kylo Ren is terrified that his Supreme Leader becomes aware of the secrets he keeps. And so far, his master has not yet caught on to his entanglement with Rey — whatever it is that they have and Kylo would like for it to remain thus. Because while the audience with his master has solidified his self-control through the grace of pain, it has given him just as much re-affirmation that Snoke does not take well to disobedience. And there is definitely something in the way Kylo looks at Rey that holds the possibility of exactly that, and more.

_Among others, yes, he is a factor_, Kylo concedes and continues, _should he ever…acquire you, I would sleep easier if you knew how to protect yourself_.

_You mean how to protect all your dirty little secrets for you_, she deadpans but can feel the raw tension beyond his veneer of composure.

_I think we share a good deal of those_, he says pointedly and then to drive it home, brings some memories of the day before to the forefront of both their minds. Flashes of long fingers wrapped around slick, sensitive skin and Rey’s own searing pleasure and curiosity that sent him crashing and burning over the edge. She tries to physically shake off the shameful imagery and all it does to her supposedly tether-less, physical body and he relents, if only for a bit.

_I am also not above admitting that if you really put your mind to it, you’re pretty good at keeping even me out. But you could do so much more if you only had proper training_, he says.

_I have proper training_, she says and she wants him to know that she is turning up her nose on him. _Ah yes, my uncle and his big words_, Kylo is oddly amused but there is something repressed and sad beneath that too, _You will find that he lacks refinement in his teaching methods, especially when he can’t understand how you are just not able to fulfil his ridiculous standards. Which he, of course, never had to really work for because he just got that lucky with the force_.

Rey would know he’s speaking from experience, even without the training montage supplied by Kylo Ren of a lanky, teenage Ben trying and failing at Master Luke’s slow but relentless lessons.

_And you'd of course be better suited as my teacher_, she says, finding her way back from memory lane to more pressing concerns. _With all your renowned grace and patience_.

_I can be very patient_, Kylo says and she can feel him pinch the bridge of his nose, _I think this conversation should attest to this_.

_You’re so full of yourself_, she titters in mock exasperation. This does not truly come as a shock to her...
any more after all.
And you lack imagination, he says, not missing a beat. Just think of what you could accomplish under my tutelage. You say you despise me, great, so you will not spare me anything in training, you’ll get behind it, with all your might. And I just won’t let you deflect some blaster bolts with a blindfold on. I won’t go easy on you and that’s how you’ll learn. I know you Rey, you hate being unprepared. I can make you ready.
To her surprise Rey can see his point in that—but still.

How would that even work? I’m damn kriffin’ surely not coming over to your house to play. I’m already here, he points out the evident. If I’m supposed to teach you how to keep your mind to yourself, where better to do it than in each others brains?
I don’t trust you, she says needlessly.
I know. But you don’t have to for this to work. He is hulling her in and she can feel it. There’s a low murmur to his voice that feels like molasses, trickling down the side of her neck, down her chest, warming her heart and luring her into a comfort way too pristine to be true.
You’ve got some evil plan at play here, she says, willing herself to withdraw from the soft modulation of his calculated bass, I’m not falling for it. Not a chance I’ll let you at my mind this way. Rey, he says her name like a caress. It’s numbingly infuriating.
What? Her voice is a whip.
I don’t want to hurt you, he says and to her chagrin, his sincerity is undeniable as it seeps through with his bare emotions, I don’t know if that will ever get through that obnoxiously thick head of yours but maybe you need it spelled out just once more. I’m trying to protect you as best as I can.
You mean while trying to kill all my friends, steal my lightsaber and haunt every waking moment with whispers of finding…what was it? Greatness in the darkness and other things you’d like to find there with me?

I never said I’m very good at it, Kylo admits. Thankfully you've been alright at saving yourself so far.
You’re making it very hard, she says and thinks of all the horrible and confusing things he’s ever done to her all at once and both Kylo and Ben flinch in unison.
I am not trying to hurt you, he says. Not anymore.
I know, Rey wishes this would feel half as hollow as it had sounded.
So?

He asks, and she can tell he can tell that he has her, will you let me teach you?
You will never let this go, will you? You’ll pester me until the day I die?
I am pretty resilient, Kylo’s smug and Ben is elated. And I usually get what I want.
I’ve noticed, she sighs. Fine, you get one shot. Tomorrow, same time, same…whatever this is. I will know if it’s a trap. And if you double-cross me, I don’t care how far I have to travel through this wretched galaxy, I will find you. And you will regret it.
I don’t doubt that for a second, he is sickeningly pleased with himself.

So, tomorrow? He adds after an uncomfortable moment of personal triumph.
Yeah.
Good, he says and then, I’ll…give you some time alone to prepare yourself.
Make sure you don’t dream tonight then, Rey calls out to him, already feeling him pulling gently out of her mind.
I’ll do my very best.

Of course he doesn’t. Or fails at it. She cannot tell. She falls asleep having declined Master Luke’s sleeping potion and hopes that maybe she’ll rest peacefully anyway.

At first her dreams are shifting, shapeless things and Kylo’s presence is just another shadow among
many. But as she falls deeper, buildings take shape around her, messes of walls and rubble. It’s a battlefield, she notes. How fitting. And Kylo is there. Rippling with Ben who fights for dominance. She walks toward him with sheer fatalism in face of the inevitable. He mirrors her movement, face unreadable and full lips shut tight. His eyes fix hers with a gaze that attempts to strip not only metaphysical barriers from her. Rey wills herself not to feel anything in the face of this.

They walk until they come up an arms length away from each other and Kylo angles his head down at her. From this close, she can see the familiar hurricane behind his eyes. He is everywhere at once. And mum. Despite herself, she wants to touch him and she stifles the urge as quickly as it comes on. Still, he says nothing. His face is stony, as if it has been carved in place by old masters eons ago. This goes on so long that it eats away at her patience. She is waiting for something that doesn’t happen. Like when he was waiting on Jakku and he is her parent’s ship that never comes to pick her up. It burns underneath her skin, the familiar impatience and impotence and she wants to scream but doesn’t want to give him the satisfaction. So she just stares right back up at him.

With a growl wedged in her throat, she squirms and knows he senses her discomfort because the edges of his mouth curve upward ever so slightly. It’s not so much a smile as it is a grimace. “What is it you want?” He finally asks her and the tether of tension between them snaps. “Nothing at all,” she says. He gets closer, if that’s at all possible and she can feel the well-known sensation of his mind wrapping around hers. It’s what he does when he just wants her near; he doesn’t probe, doesn’t push inside. He only hovers around the edges and it’s a feeling so vast, it’s a wonder the next thing he does even gets through. But of course it does, because he touches her and her skin burns in sleep as if it was real. It’s a little thing, feather-light, the way the tips of his fingers slither over her neck and come to rest on her face, thumb on the side of her nose and palm curved around her cheek.

“You’re lying to yourself,” he whispers and she know he feels her heart drum against his hand, thundering out of her treacherous skull. “No,” she mouths. He takes her defiance as a challenge and puts some force behind the hold on her face, tilting her head upward. Then he bends, agonisingly slow and anticipation builds up in Rey that’s unbidden but entirely overpowering.

Her hand flies up between them and crashes against his colar bone and she wants it to push him away but somehow it doesn’t. Somehow, instead, it digs into the soft dark fabric of his shirt and fists it together as her breathing ceases. His free hand rises to meet hers and closes around it with no effort at all. His lips travel even closer to hers and contact is imminent. The fire she wants to believe isn’t there and isn’t for him, flares up hotly.

“Silly girl,” he whispers just as her lips fall open for him, “I know you.” And then he leaves. And Rey explodes.

She attacks him as he retreats back into the shadows and lashes out as viciously as she ever has. She sends him crimson and painful memories of his, sends them right back into his twisted mind. She wants him to suffer for the fool he’s made of her.

It is pathetically obvious why he’s done it; to establish dominance, to prove to her that she isn’t the one calling all the shots. That he is not the beggar to her Queen. And it’s the ego of a rejected teenage boy as well as that of a challenged dark knight. Her resisting him—if you could call her pathetic attempts of trying to stay clear of that invisible line in the sand resistance at all—is a nuisance to Kylo Ren and a throbbing wound for Ben and both of them wanted her to know it.
Rey feels like a kicking and screaming child and while she knows Kylo is having a hard time keeping his composure in the face of her onslaught, she also feels the weird satisfaction he draws from it too. He lets her at his shadows, lets her peek behind the curtain at his torment and it seems almost inviting. In the cover of his darkness lays strength for her to draw from and exposure of his pettiest weaknesses. There is a whisper, soft and tantalising, and it's neither his nor hers and it says: 

*Come. It's so quick, so easy. He lays bare for you if you just take this step.*

The Dark Side.

No. Rey recoils. Quickly and entirely, but nonetheless the brush with his darkness has once again given her enough strength to shut him out. She returns to her own head and to her own dreams with a sick guilt that doesn’t leave her for the entire night.

When she wakes, she finds the faintest apology in the back of her head. Like a note left by Kylo, when he’s left little else of himself in her. She wonders for the first time, if maybe he isn’t as in control of himself in the nights as he would like her to believe. If maybe his barely uttered sorry is actually sincere because he too, lost a bit of himself in there.

She does not find an answer and she does not pose the question into their bond. She just goes about her day and tries to forget the dream they shared. Her stomach turns thinking about their impending lesson as the day drags on and it takes a considerable amount of focus to push through Master Luke’s drills.

When Luke is at the end of his program and has her sit down to meditate, she knows her respite is at an end. Soon, her first lesson with Kylo Ren will begin and she is afraid of what he’ll do to her and what she’ll feel and she wonders why she ever agreed to this in the first place. Still, she would rather die than to back down now or give him even an idea of her raw nerves.

In her outward calm, she enters the battlefield that is their connection. But it’s nothing like the rubble and scorching ruins of their dream. It’s exactly the opposite. They are under a bright, pink and clear sky on grey ground. It’s even and plain and she becomes aware of an arena around them. Empty ranks and plenty of space. It’s all stone and concrete but not desolate. She senses ages in these stones and nature has started to take it back — greenery bordering over the edges, grass sprouting out of cracks. The air is warm and weightless and both of them are wearing light training clothes.

*I like what you’ve done with the place,* she says when she walks up to him. Far enough to not see his face too clearly but close enough to be understood.

*I thought something more neutral would work best for our endeavour,* he provides and nothing about him acknowledges the events of the night. He’s not even baiting her with it, which is perhaps the most unnerving thing. He sits down, crosslegged and gestures to her to do the same.

*Let’s just get this over with so you’ll see that it won’t work,* she says irritated, sitting down across from him. He catches her eyes at this and she gets a glimpse of the satisfaction she knew was there.

It’s fed by the kiss he almost gave her in sleep—only, in his imagination he forfeits the moment of taunt and goes through with it. He imagines kissing her senseless, wrapping her in and up in his long arms until he gets dizzy. His underlying arousal makes Rey’s body feel blurry around the edges and she straightens her spine, pining for control.

*I would really appreciate it if you could keep your mind out of the gutter,* she says with great effort, throwing him out of the moment. *I’m trying to focus.*

Kylo looks at her, hooded eyes still burning but complies and the vision recedes. *Thank you,* she breathes and then adds, *so you can turn it off, after all.*
Oh, I wish I could, he says and sounds almost pained, I can just pull my focus from it. You can find it if you know it's there, if you know to look for it.

There is silence after his concession and she is not quite sure how to proceed. Go ahead…look, he tells her. And she tries, gingerly tugging at their connection, climbing up their invisible tether until she can wedge into his mind. It's all the familiar darkness there but no kiss. I don't see anything, she says truthfully. Think, he says and there is something really annoying about how he sounds like she wasn’t already doing that. I'm not an idiot, Kylo, she snaps. His brow twitches at the sound of his name from her lips.

I know that, he clarifies, I meant think about me. Where would I hide this? From you? This is when Rey realises that their lesson has already begun. Somewhere I wouldn’t think to look, she says, suddenly very willing to prove to him that she is a quick learner.

She probes through his mind and he lets her. She is going over recent memories and looks for the terror she would usually flinch away from and comes face to face with Supreme Leader Snoke’s broken face. She can feel Kylo’s fear as if it was her own but there is nothing else hidden but the shame over his bone-deep fear.

Not there, she tells him like he doesn’t know. Not there either, she says when she brings to bridge of Starkiller base to mind and Han Solo’s dead body falling and falling. Ben flinches as he always does but Kylo seems to have expected it. Rey leaves the scene and thinks for a second, as he had suggested earlier. Where wouldn’t she look?

Oh, she gasps as she turns a corner in his mind and finds it drenched in light. There is General Organa, young and beautiful as ever, cradling a young boy with wild black hair, the same boy cuddled into soft fur and warm Wookie arms and there it is, the kiss he never gave her, playing side by side with the image of him coming apart under the touch led by her and it’s blinding and painful and the most startling light she has ever felt in him.

That’s the first lesson, Kylo mutters, straining hard against the pull of the light. He goes on, longer than she’s ever heard him speak uninterrupted and she thinks he wants to talk over the voices in his head. Those gifted with the force will find almost everything inside you if they are strong enough. And so you need places within yourself where you can stash the, let’s call it sensitive content of your thoughts and desires. Hiding spots, so to speak. And it helps if you have some basic idea of the person you are trying to hide from. You looked for my fantasies in the darkness because that’s how you feel comfortable looking at me at all. So I hid it… …In the light. Where I wouldn’t go, she closes.

I did. But it hurts you, she says incredulously. So much his body reacts to it as if it was an open wound, gashing and bleeding him out. It does, he admits without a trace of secrecy. But think about it this way: If what I wish I could do to you if we ever came face to face again was some great big secret between us and you knowing it could maybe kill me, don’t you think I could handle a little pain in order to keep you from discovering it? It’s all a question of weighing off consequences and costs.

This makes Rey jump to a startling unpleasant conclusion. So, what you’re telling me is that you have a million other hide-y-holes where you stash all the things you don’t want me to know about you?

No, his answer comes quick and unfiltered. It’s no use with you. Ben just turns right around and
shows you everything anyway. I don’t keep secrets from you. It’s just a waste of energy at this point. Liar, she says and she doesn’t know how she is so certain but she knows he is still hiding things from her.

I keep one secret from you, he admits to her surprise. But you won’t find it. And I won’t tell it because it isn’t mine to tell.

Whatever, I’m not getting into this with you, she says, irritated by her curiosity and frustration at him withholding information but at the same time entirely unwilling to delve into it with him. Teach me then, about the places.

You need a directory, he says, instructionally, and it’s weird because again, their exchange starts to feel like a weirdly civil conversation. Like a sorting space where you can go and put your things away and that directory needs to be a fortress. And the kicker is that you’ll have to do your best to forget all about it as soon as you used it.

She ponders this, or better, tries to keep up with his rapid pace of thought. You’re not making any sense, she decides. Just give it time, there’s a hint of a smile in his voice and it feels all wrong. You’ll see.

So are we building a fortress inside me now? Rey wants to just get this over with before this all becomes even more absurd.

No. Not for a while, Kylo says. We’re going to play hide and go seek for starters. Can you shut me out for a second?

If you could stop pushing, she says, finding him clasped firmly around the edges of her brain. Forgive me, he says and the pressure fades almost entirely. Force of habit.

She settles into this freedom and braces herself for what he needs her to do next. Good, he says, deeming her ready, now think of something you don’t want me to know.

Rey jumps immediately to Ben’s dream, the one with the bed, and irrevocably calls to mind the image of him smiling. She sees it so clearly, the way his full lips spread almost to the borders of his face, his eyes small and peaceful, soft cheeks edging upward and it shoots a blast right through her heart. As it always will.

…Do you have something? He studies her face but doesn’t creep back into her mind although she can tell he wants to.

Yes, she confirms.

Good. Now hide it. He watches her as she shoves that smile into a far corner of her mind. Done? Yes, she says.

That was entirely too fast, he says with a furrowed brow, displeased with her, hide it somewhere else.

She does and runs through a plethora of places until she settles on one that makes the most sense. There, she bites out. It’s hidden.

Very well. Let me in, he says and Rey jumps at the command. No.

Kylo sighs and huffs out some air. Fine, let me in, Rey, please.

Rey holds his gaze for a second, thin lipped and a little bit angry but then relents. 7..8..9.., she counts and withdraws her fortress walls. And 10. Ready or not, Kylo says and she feels him coming, rolling in like waves on an empty beach. Here I come, she mutters and he’s there.

He wades through her as if her thoughts were thick water and he lingers in places that tell her he is not just working towards the goal of this exercise. He is perusing as if she was a library. He is curious and revels in the free access he gets. And of course, because of the teenager he holds in his heart, he sneaks into the shelter of her nights and finds her writhing, dreaming up faceless bodies,
retracing their imagined touches with her own blind fingers. Rey has never forsaken herself self-pleasure. It was one of the few fun things to do in the solitary years on Jakku, the only thing that made her glad to be alone sometimes. Kylo and Ben both shudder with her.

No, she winces at the intrusion and new wave of Kylo’s want that impairs her judgement. *Don’t go there. It’s not in there.*

Do not tell me where it is or it isn’t, Kylo nags but it’s raspy and breathless. *That’s not how it works.* Do you think Snoke will care about your petty little privacy concerns? The more you resist, the more he’ll push and when he pushes, it’s nothing like when I do. Trust me. Resist me all you like but don’t offer up information on where you haven’t hidden something — because all that’ll do is tell anyone that something is hidden somewhere else.

Still, he leaves her own desires there and goes on, scanning until he hits a wall inside of her and tilts his head. His eyes turn to slits as he’s pushing against her resistance and exerts himself not only a little in an effort to crumble it. When he does and the wall falls, what he finds is inconsequential at best.

Ah, see, that works, too, he says, his face clouded in something equal parts surprise and pride. *That was good, I almost couldn’t tell that it was a smoke and mirror wall there. You can do that; pick some random information and wrap it in defences so it seems like a secret when really it isn’t.* Good instinct. We will continue to work on this strategy some other time.

What? She blinks at his tone of goodbye. *You’re done looking?* Don’t be ridiculous, he puffs. See, I know the first thing you would think to put it in would be the darkness, because that’s just the opposite of what I’ve done. But then you thought this would’ve been too predictable and that it would be the first place I would look. But then you thought I would think so too and then not even bother looking there. And thus, you’ve put it there anyway.

And just like that, he reaches into her with something she has to describe as a thrust and plucks her secret from within her as if it was a ripe fruit.

You absolute bastard, she complains, you knew the whole time. I did, he says, stretching his arms behind his head. But, as I said, I know you. Someone other than me might’ve missed it.

Great, Rey winces. I hope you’re pleased with yourself. Tremendously, he says and she can sense him turning over the newly acquired information over in his head with an almost child-like curiosity. *But do tell me what is it with you and me smiling? It’s unsettling,* she answers because lying will only make him pry more.

Why? *Because it makes you seem like an actual human being,* she says, less menacing than conversationally.

I am an actual human being, he supplies.

Oh darn, even though you try so hard not to be. Rey actually jokes and only notices it later.

Kylo smiles at her in response, dangerously close to the one she’s holding in her heart. He’s just a tiny bit more tired and there’s a tinge of unfulfilled longing spread across the whole expression. But if not for that, it would be the same smile. It hurts her almost as much. Of course, he must be doing this on purpose.

Thanks for that, she grimaces. Can we move on now?

They do and she picks and chooses little facts about herself that she rather not he knew and he finds them all before long. Given, it takes him longer every time. Still, he learns of her dismal tolerance for alcohol, learns how pathetically she cried herself to sleep almost every night when she first lived alone on Jakku, knows that she gets very invested in holo shows and knows that she feels guilty about the way Finn feels about her and how she can’t reciprocate.
Those aren’t even proper secrets anymore, he laments finally, when the last discovered intel was that sometimes, she went to bed without brushing her teeth. I’m kind of running out of fodder here, she retorts, exhausted by the mindless repetition. I’m sorry if you don’t find me very entertaining but frankly, I don’t care. In regards to our training they fare well enough, he concedes. But if we move on with this, we are going to have to up the stakes. Maybe make some new secrets for you.

With his raised eyebrow and twinkling eyes come more trademark Kylo-fantasies of her beneath him, in a pose she has never been in and she is sure she should feel a lot less curious about than she does. She feels his pants strain and her throat run dry just at the image. Stop doing that, she grits out. Stopping, and thankfully he does. She marvels at his self-control but then again, something about teaching her, nurturing her gifts as he likes to think of it, puts him at ease. He feels confident, expertly, and that makes all the difference. He is good at this and it makes the hold on himself more firm than she’s ever felt it be. The fact that she isn’t truthfully repulsed at the imagery of them tangled up in each other does the rest.

Now what? She asks after she’s given his eyes time to un-glaze from his vivid fantasy. I’m tired. No, you’re bored. He sounds almost amused. Whatever, she hates that he is right. We will revisit the secret keeping, he says, trying to not let her get to him now that he finally feels in control for once. But let’s have you try your hand at directory building for now. Fine, she nods and uncrosses her legs. Relax, it’s almost a purr and has the exact opposite effect on her than he commands. Okay, she says. No, Rey, you’re not relaxed, he shuts her down, you’re rigid. Ease up. Come on, like you mean it. It’s not so easy with your fantasing around in there, she says and points at her head. I’m not even doing anything. Kylo raises his hands in mock defence. Doesn’t make a difference, she says. Still all up in there.

Look, I’m going to help you, he offers. And then she feels his mind rolling in on hers again but instead of pushing into, it suddenly feels like he is pushing under. As if he is raising it up and into fluffy clouds, holding her mind like a babe and he withdraws as much of his darkness as he can, instead focussing only on peace. She inhales sharply as she feels it calm her down immediately and she could half forget that it’s Kylo Ren doing this to her.

I didn’t know you could do that, she gasps. There’s little use for it in the circles I operate in, he says merely. It’s pretty much just a reverse on the probing. You’ll learn it too. I have a feeling you’ll be a natural at it. Now, relax.

Better, he says finding her far more calm than before. So, let’s raise a little fortress, shall we? It needs to be a safe place and it needs to be pristine. Nothing unpleasant in there, no rough edges. I need you to create a space in your head that is absolutely safe. And absolutely untainted by negative energy. No, don’t think of your family. They never came back for you, Snoke can turn that right on its head and use it against you.

While Rey tries to follow his instructions, of course the first peaceful thing she can imagine is immediately shattered into the dust. She wants to challenge him, tell him that her parents loved her and something bad must’ve happened and that they would have come back for her and imagining this is the only break she’d ever gotten and it's beautiful and Snoke will never ever turn that around. Yes he would, stop arguing, Kylo says with vigour. Don’t think of Jakku at all. Imagine something entirely different. People go for clouds often, floating, away from it all. It can be whatever you like, it just needs to feel good. You need to feel free there and wholesome and untouchable.
His words paint a pretty precise picture and her thoughts ghost to Ben’s dream and the serenity there. How the reverie is just what Kylo described, a wholesome, peaceful scene where Ben and Kylo both feel utterly free and unbothered.

*Is that*, Rey thinks hard of the scene, hard enough for him to see it played back to him, your directory?

Yes, he says with no discernible emotion. Just flat out honesty.

*What was it before?* Rey doesn’t know why she asks. Or why she cares at all.

*Before I knew you?* She senses his instant reproach, knowing that this is a potential a lead-in to the places of his mind he doesn’t have quite the best grip on.

*Mmh mnh*, she mumbles anyway but he doesn’t stop her there.

A memory, he says, weighing his words. A meadow. *Some summer residence my mother used to take me to. It was a sunny day, not too hot but very bright. And my father was there too. It was the only time he ever joined us out there. I was seven years old. My mother had let her hair down and it smelled…*

He pauses and she thinks she can hear him half tumble over a lump in his throat as his recollection of a life no longer his own threatens his gingerly upheld composure. He spirals for half a second but then wills himself back together, deadly opposed to letting mere memories defeat him and so he continues stoically.

—*It smelled like oranges and cedar wood. My father kissed the top of her head and then he picked me up and flung me in the air. ‘Before long, I won’t be able to do that anymore’, he said, ‘you’re gonna be taller than Chewie one day.’ It was the last time I remembered being truly happy.*

*I’m sorry*, Rey says, tears burning in the corners of her eyes as she watches his face crumble under the strain of reeling in two conflicted souls, both grieving for the same thing for different reasons. This is exactly the Kylo she can’t deal with and while she wants to be angry at him for making her feel this way, all she actually wants to do is reach out and console him, make it better.

*Don’t*, his emotions twist harshly and she is immediately repelled. *I don’t need your pity.*

*It’s not pity*, Rey huffs in exasperation. For kriff’s sake, Kylo.

*Well then what is it?* He challenges her and folds out of his lotus seat in a swift, snake-like motion.

*What is it, Rey? If it’s not pity?*

There is something bigger than accusation swaying along in the question she opts to ignore, more for her sake than his and she sakes her head, following his rise to sleepy feet.

*I don’t know. Let’s not…*, she mutters. *Don’t fight with me. I don’t know what you want from me, telling me stuff like this and don’t expect me to react to it. But fine, whatever. I’ll just let you do your tragic backstory bits and ignore them in the future. Suit yourself, see if I care.*

*You were the one who asked, don’t forget that*, he takes a step toward her, his faze blazing but then something clicks in his head and he stops short and turns on his heel. *I need to go. Duty calls.*

*Are you just saying that because you’re angry?* She yells at his exposed back.

*No*, he hisses sharply over his shoulder. *And you can finish this exercise better by yourself anyway. Think of a happy place. And then put some armour around it.*

*Ben*, she says because it’s the only way she knows how to stop him.

*Don’t*, the venom is gone from his voice, leaving a hauntingly hollow void. *I’ll see you tomorrow.*
Thank you for reading!

I am starting a new internship today and I will not be able to update as often BUT I have a plan for the rest of this fic now, so that's good news at least :) If you like, subscribe to this story, so you get all the updates.

I live for your feedback and comments, so thank you so much for those!
Things happen, some bad, some good. Some absolutely unbelievable.

The first night that Rey actually doesn’t flinch at the prospect of seeing Kylo, or Ben, whichever, in her dream is the first in months where she barely even catches a glimpse of him. She would like to have a chance to go over the secret-keeping routines again and maybe at least make Ben feel a little better about the uncomfortable memories her prying brought to light. As odd as it seems. Alas, he does not give her the chance. So she sleeps soundly instead.

First thing in the morning, she tries to find a place, a fortress of peace where she can put her directory of sensitive thoughts, as he’d put it, but comes up empty. Since her parents and Jakku are off the table as per Kylo’s instructions, her realm of happy fantasies runs relatively thin. She tries to imagine an uncertain future of maybe having a family of her own, a child buried in her hair, but all she sees is a tiny little boy with wild, jet black hair that looks entirely too much like Ben and she pushes it away.

Over her scarce breakfast, she tries to come up with more, more scenarios, more happiness and beside trying to banish Kylo’s fortress, Ben’s bedroom scene, from her thoughts, she gets absolutely nowhere. When master Luke has her deflect blaster bolts blindly at twice the pace of the previous day, she is very glad for the shift of focus.

“Good,” he says, “well done, Rey. You seem much more in tune with yourself and the force today. It seems like our method is working.”

She nods. She doesn’t have the heart to tell him that his exercises did exactly nothing to keep Kylo out.

“I can’t make out your emotions anymore,” he continues and that draws her head up from her feet.

“It’s really remarkable at what speed you’re learning. I have trained maybe two people over the years with your abilities.”

There are two things that irk Rey about this, “Really? You can’t feel anything, are you serious?” And, “Who were the other two?”

Master Luke nods to her first question and sighs at the second.

“Just one beside you, actually,” and he gives her the kind of look that tells her exactly who he is talking about.

“Ben?” Her eyes are wide in surprise, “But he said he was horrible in training, that you were never happy with his progress.”

Luke’s face is blank at first and then irritation comes in with a double-take, “When has he told you that?”

“No, I mean, just,” Rey curses her stupidity and scrambles for some halfway decent lie to cover up the slip, “never so much as said it…but I’ve seen it in his dreams. He…never thought he was good enough.”
“Oh, he was good, tremendous even,” Master Luke says, his eyes find some spot beyond the horizon and they gloss over with what must be memories. “But he was impatient. He wanted everything immediately and when he didn’t master a task in a day — and there were plenty he did master in a day — he became frustrated and angry and didn’t want to learn them at all anymore. When I told him that patience and repetition are very important lessons of Jedi training in and of themselves, he didn’t want to hear it. Still, before you, he was the most talented Padawan I ever taught. Which made the end of his training that much worse. All his strength and access to the force brought to such dark use. Nobody stood a chance against him, none of the others had even the slightest chance of defeating him in battle.”

“I did,” Rey says sheepishly, not to fish a compliment out of the situation but because it was true. “The first time we fought, I could’ve killed him.”

“But only because he was severely injured, Rey.” Master Luke sounds grave and serious. “It’s foolish to underestimate him. The others did that, because of how awkward he was, his robes too short for his limbs and his soft face always so easy to read — they made fun of him and he never forgot that. They never saw him coming for them. Don’t make that mistake. From what you and Chewie told me, he took a crossbow blaster bolt to the side that would have sent ordinary men flying through the air, yet he didn’t. You said he was bleeding through his clothes as he fought you, two of you, and until you managed to tap into the force, you did not stand a chance. You have learnt quickly and well, but you wouldn’t be standing here right now, if Ben…if Kylo Ren had been at his full strength.”

“He’s never defeated me after either,” Rey says and this time it is bordering on spite. “As I said,” Luke tells her, eyes locking with hers, “you’ve learnt and I think you and I both know that Ben has his reasons for holding back when he meets you in battle.”

Rey stops breathing for a second. Did he just insinuate what she thinks he insinuated? Her head shakes involuntarily as she tries to process this information and to decide how to proceed. She could just ignore it but then again -

“You…you know that?”

Luke just gives her that resigned smile, “Oh Rey, I do know him, even if he acts like none of us ever did, but I know Ben and I know you and with that connection you have…you don’t have to be a Jedi to piece together what can happen.”

He turns back to the ocean again and Rey wants to say something, to argue with him, to deny it, but something in his face renders her awkwardly still, half afraid to even breathe too loudly.

“Sometimes I wonder what would have happened if you’d been old enough to train with him when he was my Padawan,” he mutters, more to himself than to her. “If you’d been his age and you could have been children together. Maybe that light he fears and…must hate to love so much about you could have snuck him away from the edge. Maybe I could have prevented all this.”

“You couldn’t have,” Rey jumped in, “you couldn’t have found me in the first place. I was hidden under some rubble on an outer rim junkyard, remember?”


With this he falls silent and Rey along with him. Her lightsaber, the one that had been his once, hangs heavily around her hips, a constant reminder of reality, as she ponders his words. What would it have been like to train at the old Jedi academy? If she had gone there with Kylo, could whatever bond they shared now have sprung into life there as well? And maybe been something different? Less rooted in loathing and a constant struggle over dominance and submission but…something more like friendship, camaraderie? And if it had, would it have changed anything? She doesn’t know.

Beside herself, she tugs at the bond now, trying to see if he’d been there for some of the conversation, if he had heard or felt something and what he had to say about it, but the tether that
usually felt like a solid link, now feels like a rubber band she pulls on and his side gives no way. She tries again. And again until something flickers to life there, over lightyears and lightyears.

*Not now*, Kylo says, *I can’t deal with you right now.*

And then he shuts her out and it feels like he just threw a door in her face. Anger immediately flares up at his nerve, his gall, and it must’ve been strong enough to register with Master Luke, even if he said he couldn’t feel anything more coming from her.

He turns his head to her, his face a question mark.  
“Nothing,” Rey lies, “It’s just all so…unfair.”

“Yes,” he ponders, “with this great access to the force we enjoy many privileges and wonders others never get to experience. But they also cost us dearly.”

After a moment he adds, “I think we can forego your run up and down the mountain. What do you say?”

“Actually,” Rey replies, “I haven’t checked on the board comm in two days, I think I have to make the trip anyway.”

“Well then,” he inclines his head and his face lightens up a bit, “run as fast as you can and keep your mind closed.”

Nothing should be stopping her from this. But as a testament to how absurd her life has become, she tries instead to inconspicuously circle in on Kylo Ren’s, trying to figure out what horribly annoying thing she’s done to him now. Infuriating little git that he is.

The Falcon still sits peacefully at the bottom of the island, heavy chains securing it against the oftentimes harsh winds at the base of the mountain and she enters stale and smelly air, opting to leave the hatch open to let in some oxygen. She has cleaned and restored the old ship with everything the two resistance bases she has spent the last year on had to offer and each time she sinks into the newly lined seats, she thanks herself for that anew.

With expert strokes, she has the comm beep to life and at first she thinks it’s been another idle track down the hill when several messages come in at once, one graver than the other and she knows she has to leave Master Luke. Immediately.

Rey has never taken the steps up to her Jedi master quicker. He senses her unrest faintly and raises an eyebrow in question.

“I have to go,” she tells him while rummaging through their quarters to gather her few possessions.

“There was an intelligence mission led by Poe and Finn when they got attacked by a First Order division. We lost half of the pilots that went and Poe…they don’t know if he’ll make it.”

Rey has to hide her face in her scrap bag after those words left her mouth and suddenly become real. Luke is very understanding and puts a warm hand on her shoulder as goodbye.

“When the time comes,” he says just before she turns to leave, “you will come here and get me. Then I will fight by your side for whatever is left to fight for in this galaxy…and then I’ll tell you everything I know.”

Rey is too distracted to give his cryptic words a second thought and just jogs back down at top speed, trying not to fall and just catching herself barely a few times by use of the force to cushion her trembling steps. She punches the Falcon into hyperdrive even before she’s left AHCH-2’s atmosphere.

When she tries to reach Kylo again, she pushes for real this time, flying and flinging accusations at him while minutes in deep space trickle by, each one torturing her with impotence and more mother-kiffin’ waiting. Heavens and hell, she has done enough waiting for a bloody lifetime.

*So was that your big plan, huh? Keep me occupied while your minions evaporate my friends?*
She is seething.

*Answer me and stop hiding, you big fat COWARD!* That does it. Kylo pounces out of his temporary impassiveness with a bang and fills his space in her head so quickly her ears ring with the sudden presence. She is getting closer to wherever he is too, so the sensation only seems harsher in contrast to how comparatively dull he felt on AHCH-2.

*Do you just expect the First Order to call a cease-fire every time the two of us decide not to kill each other? Sometimes you’re even more naïve than I thought.* His condescending tone is more than enough for Rey to ram her fist into her armrest. It throbs and hurts immediately and she hopes he feels it too.

*“You are a bastard”,* she screams, into her head and into the void of space beyond the ship’s windows.

*A bastard who had no idea about either this particular attack, nor that your rebel and traitor friends would be the one to suffer it,* he says and she can’t detect a hint of deceit. He is lying, must be lying and she should never have trusted him for a second.

*You best hope Poe wakes up, because if not, you will regret the day you were born.* And then they both turn each other off and it causes near perfect radio silence. All they still feel of each other is frustration on Kylo’s and searing rage on Rey’s part.

The stillness and calm of the resistance base is in stark contrast to how Rey feels as she crosses the airspace, racing inside, foregoing any greetings of fellow rebels inside to get to the med wing of the mountainous fortress as fast as possible. When she crashes into the room she’s quickly been pointed too, Finn jolts up from what must’ve been a nap next to Poe’s bruised and beaten body. He lies in a med pod, eyes closed and heart beating slow but steady.

*“I hate that he keeps putting my friends in these things,”* Rey says instead of hello, the echo of Finn fighting for his life in possibly even the same exact pod startlingly present. *“I swear I will make him pay for this.”*

Now Finn has risen, still not fully awake but joy to see her plastered clearly on his face. He wraps her in a tight, bear hug and lifts her a few inches off the floor.

*“He’ll be fine,”* he tells her. *“It looked bad for a while there, but you know Poe, can’t kill the guy.”* Finn gives the plastic two light pats as if they could reach through to their friend, *“Now where did you go all of the sudden? Just off without a word and untraceable for the next three days.”* Rey has to take a moment to be glad about Poe before she can give Finn the attention he demands, *“I just felt like visiting Luke. Catch up, do some more convincing for him to join. And I think I might have succeeded.”*

*“Well that’s faaaaan-”,* he covers his face with his hand and yawns heartbreakingly, “-tastic. We could use some more force power around here.”

*“You’re exhausted, Finn,”* she says and pats his arm, *“go get some sleep, I’ll keep an eye on him for you.”* Finn is tempted, very much so, but his sense of duty won’t let him go just like that, *“Wake me as soon as there’s anything. Literally anything, when he so much as twitches a knuckle, I wanna know.”*

*“You got it,”* Rey manages a smile and when Finn leaves, she takes over his warm chair and raises a hand to the glass. It only leaves its place when she unwittingly falls asleep a long while later.

Kylo is making a point of staying at his side of the lane and Rey is glad for it. She devotes all her efforts in sleep on Poe, trying to undo his injuries, focusing on his bruises to heal and his blood to run smoothly to this body of his that has saved her countless times already. If only she could do the same for him.

She is still half asleep when she senses the shift in the room, feels it vibrating with a previously
dormant energy and then Poe, looking like he just woke up from a healthy nap, knocks at the plastic of his med pod from the inside and Rey jumps in shock and elation and frees him from his confinement.

“Rey,” he says, eyes ablaze and he sits up effortlessly, as if he was never hurt in the first place, “you’re back.”

“Of course I’m back,” she chokes on her words and the sob which immediately comes loose and she throws herself around him. “You scared me half to death.”

“I feel just fine,” he says and smiles and he does seem so, “but I’ve missed your laugh. Nobody knew where you rushed off to. I almost believed you finally went to find that piece of darksider filth to get it over with so you can finally get him over with.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Rey takes a step back and untangles her hands from Poe’s neck.

“Rey, do you remember when we kissed?” If she isn’t imagining things, his smile looks almost pained and she blushes violently at the mention of their all-too-short moment of simple human romance.

“Yes,” she replies tightly, “I remember.”

“You jumped away from me, looked me square into the eye, and then you said his name and went the Force knows where,” Poe says and Rey can’t believe him.

“Wh-what?” She takes another step back from him, “No, it must’ve been something else. I don’t remember that.”

“It looked like you were fighting with yourself in your head, Rey,” he continues, “and I fear there’s not very many things that sound like Kylo.”

And then she remembers, briefly. She does not remember saying his name but something about Poe when he spoke to her then. Sweetheart, are you okay? It’s fine, you know, heat of the moment, I get it. He hadn’t been talking about their brazen kiss. He’d been talking about her saying another man’s name right after. And who this name belongs to. Rey shakes her head vigorously, Kylo Ren is lifetimes away now, she refuses to even look for him within herself.

“No, no, no, no, she rambles, “that’s not what that was about. I don’t care about him, it was just… he is in there sometimes and he’d just…picked a very inopportune moment and I… I would never. Never, Poe, I swear. I wanted to kiss you. For a while, I think, and I really liked it. It’s just, you never brought it up again and I thought — but now I kinda see why, so I’d—“

“—hold on a minute, there,” Poe smiles and suddenly his hand is on the wrist that is waving wildly in front of her chest, “did you just say you’ve been wanting to kiss me?”

Rey’s blush is back with a vengeance and she can feel it snap right down into her toes and she revels in it because there is nothing at all wrong with feeling this way and then she nods and Poe does the rest.

Between bleeping and beeping machines that no longer have to keep him alive, Poe pulls her into his arms and against his firm, square chest, and kisses her, soft at first but then more demanding. She lets it happen, lets him lead and falls into this kiss. She wants this to be magical and special and wonderful and she can feel something rise in her, big and powerful. She almost wants to squeal because, yes, yes, it is fire and it is passion and she is not broken after all.

But then the flame becomes a scorching blaze and it starts burning her from the inside out and her senses are blacked out by wild, jealous rage. She staggers back, breaking the connection to Poe and fights both to keep on her feet and in possession of her wits. No, he will not have this of her. Not this, when he gets the rest of what is left of her life wedged into the wrinkles of her brain. And she fights him and tries to block him out, to un-hear his growling and screaming — as the sounds he is sending through their bond are hardly words at all. And she gains an inch and then some and Poe is smiling when she pushes herself forward into his arms again.
This time, her lips search his, attack them more like, and find them burning, hotter than they should be, hotter than she can stand. **Painful.**

*No, you will not ruin this for me,* she thinks and keeps on going through the motions, more aggressive, more desperate, she claws at Poe’s shirt and puts her back into it and then —

“Ouch,” Poe winces and breaks away from her, with a very new gash in his lip where she bit him. She can taste the tinge of iron in her mouth and she feels like retching.

“I’m so sorry,” she staggers backward, mortified by herself and the red hot darkness there. “I didn’t mean to, I’m…I just need a… I’m sorry, I, I’m gonna go.”

Rey runs and runs and runs, almost thrashing over people, droids and loads of *stuff* people just leave in the halls and corridors until she reaches her quarters and swishes the door shut with a whip of her hand so hard and fast, she thinks she can hear it tear.

*Who do you think you are? You have no right!* Seriously, *this cocky son of a bitch?* Kylo is, once more, having his own conversation, going right over her as per usual. His voice climbs up several octaves and breaks at, bends and flips over itself in the following, the way it does when he’s upset.

*I thought your little lapse of judgment on the shuttle was just that. But you actually have feelings for this arrogant, conceited, self-indulgent…*

*Are you sure you’re not talking about yourself? You’ve got some nerve!* First you nearly get him killed and then you do this, you’re a kriffin psychopath, do you know that?

*I did nothing to him, but I’m beginning to wish I had.* If I see his greasy, disgusting paws on you one more time, I’m gonna——

—**YOU DON’T GET TO DECIDE WHO PUTS WHATEVER ON ME! YOU DON’T OWN ME AND I DON’T WANT YOU! I COULD NEVER WANT YOU,** you’re a monster and a killer and you murdered your father and you nearly killed Finn and who even knows how many others, you disgust me. How you can even think for a second that this could ever be anything else is pathetic!

*You…* is all he says, barely a growl, because he is close to bursting and Rey’s eyes go blank because suddenly he is there, everywhere, pushed to such power by both their blinding rage and his excruciating pain that he could as well be standing in front of her in the flesh. The hallucination is so real that Rey is hardly surprised when he twists his wrist and fingers and she feels a pressure around her throat that immediately cuts off her air supply.

*He is force-choking me,* she thinks, beside herself, vaguely in disbelief and that goes on for a second before she starts fighting, wiggling and then reaches and rips into her own hold on the force and pushes back. Hard, harder than she ever had to but eventually, just before her lungs burn out, she wrangles free of his hold.

The vision of him fades as she stands panting and trying to steady herself, her fingers testing the skin on her neck to find it impeccable, as if this had never happened. But oh, it did.

*I never want to see you again,* she says to him, cold and definite, *and if I do, I will end your miserable life.*

And fuelled by all the pain he has caused her, she nearly damn well cuts the ties entirely and shuts him out.
Rey isn’t sure how long it takes until she feels like she can draw a free, full breath again but it’s long into her voyage to the outer rim in a small, battered tin can of a resistance shuttle.

Merely minutes after her brush with death by asphyxiation, her room comm ordered all able pilots to report to General Organa in command and when she asked for one volunteer for a scavenging task out on Wayland, Rey wouldn’t have needed the encouragement she got, she would’ve been the first to raise her hand anyway. Outer rim sounded just right. She wanted as much time and space between her and Kylo Ren as was at all possible.

He could have killed me, she thinks. He is nowhere to be found and she hopes he will be forever repelled by how hard she shoved him back and out, and it’s when she thinks that he might have stumbled and fell and broke his neck on the way down is when that first, freely drawn breath falls into her body like a lover returned.

For the first time in over a year, Rey feels like Rey again. She quickly navigates her shuttle around on Wayland, a planet decked in forests and mountains, cut through by ripples of water and old Empire hideouts for dark artefacts and secret technology. She is looking for an item of the latter and for once, her experience of tearing apart old Empire super star destroyers pays off. The planet feels dark and weighed down by the shadows of the past and the scattered remains of Sith memorabilia, of which there is undoubtedly still plenty to go around, but Rey shuts out the whistling and purring of the dark side. It’s louder here than elsewhere but not half as loud as Kylo.

Rey finds what she’s been looking for even faster than she herself has anticipated and, pleased with this, as well as overall happy for this weird taste of a life she has left behind and wasn’t aware she missed at all, she climbs back into her flye-bicle. It’s a little detachable cubicle which is far easier to manoeuvre around commonly pestered outer rim planets than a shuttle, may it be however tiny. In these regions, it was best to fly as far under the radar as possible. Because even if the likes of the First Order had bigger fish to fry, the collective neglect of planets like Wayland and their likes, much like Jakku, made these systems very dangerous, swimming with smugglers, pirates, and criminals of any and every kind.

Still, none of the likes bother her all the way to the ship and it isn’t until she finds her flye-bicle unable to navigate and being hovered into the docking port of the shuttle, that she sees the black on black outlines of a First Order ship, just a little bigger than her battered one. She knows that some smugglers or the odd murderer would have been preferable adversaries.

Panicky, she skims their connection and now that she lets it, it’s omni-present, like a fist to the face. How could she have been so stupid? How could she not have checked for him? Of course he wasn’t gone and of course he wouldn’t just accept her declaration, of course he would follow her. Of course, of course, of course. If Rey had the time, she would bash her own head against the wall for her stupidity but she doesn’t. As she docks, she straps herself quickly out of the seat and ignites her lightsaber before the door has even popped open. It’s a three-steps wide and five steps-far corridor until she reaches the shuttle’s humble cabin space — it holds nothing more than a cot, integrated into the wall, a sitting area and a ‘fresher and the walls reflect the blue light of her lightsaber like one of those night clubs she knows only from holoshows.

Kylo’s presence is so thick, she might drown in it. Their connection has only intensified since the last time they met face to face. He has turned off his thoughts to her, holding them back with great strain but she can feel his agony and violence billowing before he even faces her in the enclosed space, stepping in from the pilot’s cabin.

Seeing Kylo Ren again in the flesh at last, feels like the height of some crescendo she hadn’t been
aware of building but the tension doesn’t fade at the close. Instead, the way he comes to face her, is like a murmur of violent static buzzing, of tension almost about to shortcut as it surrounds them like an electric storm.

He straightens his spine, standing up to his full size so he towers over the room and she feels small. As if even on the far side of the room, he would reach her in just three, four paces. His face is stone and his lightsaber hangs tucked beneath his cloak. Even in the dim light, his scar is more prominent in reality than in both their minds. It splits his face and right now, it makes Rey feel wicked. Good, that he has this mark, way to remind him. She feels her lightsaber buzz with energy in her two-handed grip and thinks she will grace him some more of those.

“That wouldn’t be wise,” he says, grumbling low and eerily composed, “two or three of your lesser pronounced swings and you’ve cut this tin can in half.”

Rey wants to argue but to her great frustration he is right. Still, it doesn’t matter, only draws out the inevitable.

“I can rip you into pieces with my bare hands all the same,” she says, thumbs out her lightsaber and puts it back into the holder at her belt. She straightens her own back to stand tall. “And I don’t even need to use the force for that, like a cheap card-cheater.”

“’I’m sorry,” he says and just like that, Rey’s power pose deflates and collapses on itself like an old balloon.

“What?!”

“I am sorry,” Kylo repeats, perfectly still and with nothing but sincerity in both his voice and his feelings, “I should never have done that and I’m sorry. And I meant to say it the minute you shut me out but I couldn’t and then I couldn’t get through at all, so I came looking for you.”

Rey throws up her arms with a level of frustration she isn’t sure her body can handle.

“You can’t be serious, you nearly killed me! Does that even get through to you? Whatever you think you feel for me in your twisted head, that isn’t love, Kylo, not even close! You felt my heart beat out of my chest, thundering for air, you watched my lips turn blue! And you kept pushing, and now you apologise?!?”

“I lost control,” he says as meekly as if that was news, and Rey almost flies over to him, she is that quick in her pounce.

When her fist connects with his jaw for the first time, he barely budges.

“You lost control?” A left-handed low-blow and he tumbles back a fracture of an inch.

“You know, when other people lose control they scream.” Right fist into his gut, his muscles tense but she’s more hurt by the impact than him. “Or break some plates.” Double punches to the stomach until he can’t flex his body against the onslaught and she gains another bit of ground on him. “Or, I don’t know, talk about it, sing about it for all I care, but they don’t nearly choke someone to death!”

Rey keeps beating him up viciously, fists flying and feet kicking and he takes it all, actually moves through the tiny cabin with her, almost offering up spots of himself where she can get in another blow and he keeps the pain from her, she finally notices. It gives her a start but she isn’t done yet.

She hisses and groans, flings herself at him, tries to knock him out repeatedly until her head spins and her knuckles are bloody and whatever is left of her composure spills out of her skull. They have crossed the room twice over and stand close to the holo-show set when Kylo catches her last punch with his whole body, using her momentum to stop her cold against his broad frame. He closes his
arms around her and her head lands in between of his collar bones, nose buried in the folds of his cape. Her fists clench and grip into the thick fabric of his tunic while she breathes hard, exhausted. Endless minutes pass them by until her heart rate is back to normal and she can hear him breathing. He dips his head low, so it’s almost pressed against her ear. His mouth is hot as he speaks.

“I don’t know if you can forgive me,” he says under warm breath she can feel on her skin, “I don’t expect you to. But I wanted you to hear it.”

He holds her there and for a moment, Rey thinks he will let her go, but then he seems to win an inner battle and keeps her there to say something more.

“You’re right, I am a monster,” he says, “I belong to the dark side, I can’t come back from that and I don’t want to and we will have our fight to the death one of these days. Only one of us, Rey, for the balance…and then it’ll all be over, one way or the other. But if you could find it in your heart — until then — to just once…”

The rest of his sentence trails off as he loosens his grip on her and steps back to look at the floor. It’s almost impossible to reconcile him like this, broken and sad and open and desperate, with who he was just half a day ago, someone so dark he nearly killed her over a kiss she gave someone else.

Rey can’t breathe, she swallows hard, the memory of his choking mind still burning, but she cannot bring herself to hate him, cannot even send him away, cannot even say a damn thing.

“What?” She asks him eventually when he still hasn’t looked up at her again.

“Just once,” he repeats and flinches as if it causes him physical pain to go on, to ask for this and his voice comes out so tiny and quiet, she almost has to ask him to repeat it, “hold me.”

Rey’s knees nearly give out and her heart is suddenly four sizes too big for her chest as it aches for him with a fervour she has never known. If this is compassion it feels a lot like fever and it drenches her in a blaze of light. She could weep for him for days and how can she say no to this?

A part of her knows that the question should be how can she say yes after all that he’s done? But things don’t work this way with him. Keeping a tally is absolutely useless because its consequence would have to be his death and she can’t do that. She knows it. She can’t kill Ben, never could have but now, it’s apparent that she cannot kill Kylo either. And it’s him before her without a doubt. His anguish and sadness, the devastation and the longing, it’s all Kylo, it’s all him. And Ben too…but the lines are as blurry as they have ever been.

She has not given him an answer yet, can’t even move yet. And this is when he finally takes his cue to go. His broad form sets into motion, his emotions a carpet of despair and grief too terrible to name and he walks past her, his cloak brushing the skin of her arm.

And then she catches his wrist in her hand and he stops. There’s a tiny little gasp and it falls from his lips like a teardrop. The sound itself is so innocent and so full of relief and joy, it carries Rey over to him, lets her breech the distance and push herself up onto her tiptoes and snake her arms under his armpits and around his torso.

It’s an echo of the hug they shared in that first, ever-confusing confrontation, only this time it’s real. His hold on her is real, his fingers digging into her back are real, his heartbeat is quick and it’s real and he smells like soap and dark hair, man and something else she can’t quite place and it’s the realest thing she’s ever felt.

“Wait,” he mumbles and breaks the serene quiet. Then, he slips out of his cloak so fast, Rey hardly processes the movement and he unfastens his belt and tunic quickly enough that they all but fall from
him. When he is clad only in his undershirt, a thin black thing covering him from the neck to the
lengths of his arms.

Undisturbed by the thick layers of all his blacks, she can feel the outlines of his body and his muscles
move under his skin as they grip her. He wants her closer, undiluted, uncovered.

It kills another little bit of Rey. How long has it been? How long has he been craving this, starving
for this? Maybe not even so much her as just anyone who would open their arms to him and feel him.
How long has he not felt like a human being? How could he, when there was no one there to love
him like humans, at the end of all things, need to be loved? There's an odd recognition in his chest
when her arms settle around his neck and she knows it's been forever. The last time someone held
him, had been her, and this had been all but a dream. In his head, it didn't even count. In his head, he
can't properly recall when someone last wrapped him up with care and gentleness. How can this not
break her? His agony at the mere prospect of having to let her go again is so intense, she is very glad
to have his arms around to steady her.

“How do you stand the pain?” she mutters against his cheek and runs small fingers through black
waves of hair.
“I used to turn it into power,” he whispers, “I hoped it would just dissipate…or that I wouldn’t mind
it so much at least but it never…”
She cradles his head, fingers tracing circles against his skull.

“It’s tormenting,” he staggers against the touch, longing for more, for all of it. “You’re everywhere
and I want you everywhere but you’re so bright. It hurts, like falling into the sun. I feel like I’ve been
slowly burning up every day since I met you. Sometimes I just want it to end.”
“Shhh,” she soothes and nudges him toward the plushy seats of the sitting area until he goes down
and sits, so she is looming over him for once. “Don’t say that.”

He shakes his head as if that could stop the tear running down his cheek and without planning to,
without even really thinking about it before her whole body is in motion, Rey bends and places her
lips over it, swiping it away with her tongue before kissing the spot softly.

She is crouched over him when his hands clasp around her face and hold it in front of his, his eyes
are huge, pulsing things and their soft brown is almost black as he looks for something in her light
ones. He finds it when her gaze flickers from his down to his lips for the fraction of a second and
then they are both lost.

It’s the first time they kiss, Rey thinks, before thinking becomes too complicated. While she has seen
this happen in his dreams and fantasies, has felt the ghost of it on her lips, this is so immediate, so
raw, everything else pales in comparison. This is the only real thing in the entire galaxy.

And while she almost expects the fire and passion the simple touch of their mouths and teeth and
tongues elicit, their mind’s illustrations of this moment had not accounted for how soft, how full his
lips are, and how they hit her square in the heart the way they move on hers. It’s dizzying, the weight
of it all and when he pulls her hard against his body to deepen the kiss, to emphasise their
connection, his arousal sparks quickly and over-powering. He lifts her small frame on top of his, so
she sits in his lap, sideways, wedged between him and the holo-deck. Her mouth falls open in a
moan stifled only by his lips and she lets him in. Even further into her, if that's at all possible.
In the back of her mind, Rey knows she should be reeling with how wrong this is, how perverted and sick and how much she is supposed to loathe him but for the life of her, she can’t remember having ever done something that had just once felt so entirely, so irrevocably right.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for all of you reading -- please review, I feed on that stuff. And I love you all.

This was beta’d by the most wonderful ViciousRhythm (http://archiveofourown.org/users/ViciousRhythm/profile).
Kylo kisses like a man dying of thirst would drink water in the desert, needy, desperate and straining to get as much of it as possible because one never knew when the well would run dry. His lips are full and wide and could nearly swallow half her face but he uses them well, at once nibbling, at once puckering over skin and teeth. It’s like he’s never done anything other than kiss her, that’s how expertly he does it. Rey can only do so much to hold on to her sanity mere minutes into this. The sheer physicality is bordering on shutting every last bit of coherent thought down.

Rey is at the same time absolutely aware of how warped it is, them kissing after everything that had happened but also decidedly fatalistic about it. She doesn’t know how she will feel about it once it’s over, only knows that it is already starting to change her. And that it had been somewhat inevitable, if she is being honest. This is the culmination of all their shared thoughts, the inexplicable longing that sprung from them and all those invaded dreams. It transcends reason and begins to feel more like destiny. How can she begin to make sense of that? Especially with him holding her the way he does, as if she is precious, as if he can’t believe she lets him get away with it. She knows she shouldn’t. She might come to regret this like nothing before — and soon. But she can’t help herself at all.

_Not enough, never enough_. The words travel from one mind to the other and Rey isn’t sure who thinks them first. Kylo, however, is the one to act upon them.

In one swift and steady move, he lifts her up as if she was weightless, stands and then sits her down on the holo-show set. He kisses her hotly and pushes his hips between her thighs. Rey brings up a hand to touch his face, feeling his close shaved skin flush under her fingertips. The prospect of seeing a real blush on Kylo’s face makes her eyes dart open.

He looks blazing, flaring up like wildfire. She gently runs a finger over his pink scar, from the beginning just above his right eyebrow, all the way to the left side of his face. His features twist into an almost pained grimace as he tries his hardest to contain everything her touch is causing within
him. Rey runs her hand further down, until his angular jaw sits in her palm. She draws it there slowly, savouring, trying to commit all the little freckles on his skin to memory. They look almost like constellations, a whole new universe to explore.

She notes that she has never looked at him from quite so close before and traces the sharp angles and curves of his face, the length of his nose and deep-set eyes. Sometimes he looks all puzzled together but there is something painfully wonderful and endearing about it. He does not look like the holo-show stars she knows, doesn’t look like anyone she knows, but Rey thinks he is all the more beautiful for it. Beautiful is a new word she never thought to be using to describe Kylo Ren. It makes her head spin a bit.

Meanwhile, Kylo’s mind is a whirlwind she doesn’t have the capacity to decipher. He goes as slow as his self-control allows him, that is the one thing getting through to her own dazed brain. Kylo barely holds her now, eyes shut tight as he lets her run her fingers over his face, his hands resting only ever so lightly on her waist. It takes all he has not to devour her. Rey gasps when she feels how he wills himself to calmness. As he lets go of a great deal of his anger, pain, fear, and exhilaration fills the void they leave, it’s like a physical weight has come off him with a thump.

His face blurs as she moves in closer, propelled there by the flurry of power radiating off of him — she gets so close that all she can really see sharply are his round, perfect lips.

More, she thinks beside herself. Kylo hears her. He finds her mouth blindly and his hands flex on her body, struggling for restraint. Through their bond, Rey can feel how much he is holding back, even considering that the way he all but shoves his tongue in her mouth is dizzying already. She has to close her eyes just to get a handle on the onslaught of sensory input.

She tries to offer him some hold of her own but she isn’t much use to him like that, shuddering and flailing with every new breath drawn in unison. In a slip of control, Kylo trades in measure for force when he frantically thrusts his groin against her core and Rey sees stars in the back of her eyes. If possible, the sensation is even harsher for Kylo. The friction he is creating, rolling his hips into hers slowly but pronounced, slashes through him like a knife, and every single muscle in his body tightens. Rey has felt this before. The coiling in his lower body, how everything is suddenly aflame and hyper-sensitive, how he becomes light-headed as blood rushes south to sustain the nether regions. She knows how the world zeroes in on just him and whatever he desires and it’s a throbbing pulsar, hungry and burning brighter, harder.

But what Rey hadn’t known was how she would feel being at the receiving end of this, pressed flush against his growing erection. The way he drives it against her, a filthy, guttural sound falls from her mouth when she realises what is happening. He is making the strokes and thrusts of a lover, moving underneath layers of clothes into a promise of what’s to come. Rey flares up red and hot at the thought.
It isn’t like she doesn’t know what sex is. She is aware of - quite literally - the ins and outs of it. But whenever she has touched herself in the pitch darkness of her makeshift home on Jakku, she has only imagined how it would feel to actually have another human moving down where her fingers curled into her. And while she did draw her pleasure from these acts of self-exploration, it hardly compares to the real thing. He is so real there, between her legs and where he bumps against her, she flares up and her hips buckle to meet his by no conscious order. They just do, she just is. His arousal plays back to her and bleeds into her own. Where his is more contained and concentrated to a throbbing, twitching bundle of tissue and nerves, hers spreads from her core through her belly and leaves goosebumps all the way to her toes and ears.

If doing this fully clothed already feels like this, she can’t imagine what having him inside will feel like. Her imagination and his roaming hands on her body reduce her to a puddle of want. The way he kisses her, letting his tongue run over the side of her face down to her neck while relentlessly bucking against her makes her feel like all she is, is desire.

He is spurred on by her manic trail of thought. His own is barely coherent and Rey couldn’t follow if she tried. Thus, when he drops one hand from her waist to her thigh and then quickly moves it inward, thumb grazing her there, just over the thin linen of her pants, she comes up short in genuine surprise. The deed isn’t exactly unprompted or unusual considering, but she still did not expect it. This is the moment that it’s real, probable even. They might really go through with this, all the way. She will sleep with someone for the first time — and it will be Kylo Ren.

Does she want this, she asks herself. She has never been overly sentimental about her sexuality, never prized it as something overly special or precious. That was a luxury one could not have growing up on Jakku. She always used to think one day someone would take her virginity somewhere in a nomad tent and hopefully she would have given it willingly, and she’d be one experience richer. But now, her first time suddenly has a greater significance than she ever thought it would have. Given her very particular circumstances. It’s a little too much to ignore.

“Wait,” she whispers into the air and grabs him by the wrist to pluck his hand away from her. His absence on her leaves a pulsing ache she thinks might never fade. His fingers twitch and there is the ghost of a movement past her hold, to go on working his way under her clothes because he wants her, but as it registers, he halts all movement and opens his eyes.

He looks winded and dazed and she must not look better, her hair dishevelled and cheeks feeling flush not unlike after running up and down Luke’s mountain.

“Can we,” she starts and needs to take a deep breath, her voice raw and unsteady, “can we talk about
this for a second?"

“You wanna talk now?” He is incredulous, his ears red and pupils so dilated, they make his eyes look almost entirely black.

“Yes,” she says, not budging either for his lust nor her own. “This is...confusing. I don’t, I mean, this isn’t exactly how I thought this day would go at all. It’s... a lot to process and I’m not…”

“...ready to do something we can’t come back from,” Kylo Ren finishes her thoughts and already starts reeling himself in. He sighs and lets his head fall on her shoulder, hands idle on her thighs. He takes deep breaths, in through the nose, out of the mouth.

Rey winding herself down is echoed by his efforts as he is trying to meditate his heartrate down on the spot. He is trying the same thing with his near-painful hard-on but gives up. That must run its natural course. Rey nearly smirks at his resignation.

“So that’s funny to you, huh?” he mutters against her skin at the nape of her neck and she shivers, nodding through it against his tense body.

“If you would let me,” he retorts with a voice so low, it sounds like sinning, “I could show you just how long it would take you to come down.”

He thinks of moist, drenched fingers working quickly in and out of her and she knows, oh, she knows he is right because she can almost feel the touch just by the strength of his imagination. It’s nearly enough to make her forego all reason and just lay herself bare. Nearly.

Instead, she lets her hands fall on his and shuffles in her sitting position so he has to step back and create some distance. It’s immediately awkward. Because talking about whatever this is could never really be anything but.

“So,” she begins, unsure of how to go on.

“So,” he repeats.

“What is this?” It’s one of Rey’s more defined of the million questions about what the Force they are doing.

“I don’t know,” he admits freely, “Something bigger than us?”

“What do you mean?” Rey tilts her head. What an odd thing to say.

“I mean that I don’t think I ever stood a chance,” he says, catching her fingers in his, “the way I feel...It’s like gravity, it’s been like gravity from the start. That’s all I know.”

“Gravity kills you if you’re starting out too high,” she says and she can not compute that she is having this conversation with him. After all he did to her and the people she loved, he should be the last person gravity of any kind should be pulling her to.
“I wasn’t prepared for this either,” he says and she knows he’s been privy to her train of thought. It’s hard to distinguish from this close who is who and who’s in who’s head when and where exactly, “I was doing just fine before you came along.”

“I think roaming through the galaxy trying to embody your psycho grandfather while being ripped apart inside between the light and the dark side does not wholly constitute as doing just fine ,” she mutters.

“I was handling it,” he declares, with a spiteful and impatient edge to his voice that sounds a lot more like the Kylo she can manage to hate and this makes it easier for Rey to go on talking.

“Yeah, well, fact is you’re still doing that,” she says. “Running around in Vader’s boots. Leaving death and destruction in your wake. That’s not going to change, is it?”

Kylo goes quiet.

Of course he would. What did she expect? One kiss and Kylo Ren, first knight of Ren, Supreme Leader Snoke’s evil henchman, would just turn away from his life in the shadows and become a different man?

“You’re not gonna stop being a darksider, are you?” There’s no point saying it aloud because they both know it. But she still does.

“I can’t,” he says so quickly, it instantly angers her.

“Don’t want to , you mean,” she snaps.

“No,” he snaps back, “I mean yes. I don’t...I can’t want to.”

“Because you’re a coward,” she says and shoves his hands away from her with childish fervour.

“Don’t do that,” he warns, “don’t push me. I’m trying to have a level-headed conversation here.”

“Sorry.” There is bile in her words. “But I guess you’re going to have to deal with this right and get a little more of a grip on yourself. Because we sure as kriff won’t stop fighting just because we kissed once. It’s still us .”

“Fine,” he grits out and the darkness creeps back into some of the folds in his head where it had been temporarily set alight by their antics.

“I’m not a coward,” he says after a moment of loaded and borderline violent silence.

It’s never mellow between them, Rey figures. They’re always all over each other, the only thing that changes is the intent. Fight or fuck, if one liked to think of it in terms of profanity.

“Then why won’t you try?” She is nearly pleading, “You could…come back with me.”

“Rey, I couldn’t even if I wanted to,” he says, her offer hitting hard and deep. It obliterates his anger and turns into something more vulnerable, more like anguish and it paints his face grey and desolate. “Try to understand .”
It’s not a figure of speech because he sends her flashes of memories unbidden. They’re a whirl, drenched in fear and despair. Han falling, the faint notion of Leia feeling the loss of her lifelong love by the hands of their own son ripple through the galaxy and then back to him. Kylo knows there is no home to return to.

And then there is Snoke. His scarred face and the raising of a burnt away eyebrow that can render him immobile on the floor and in excruciating pain until all that’s left inside of him is darkness. Punishment and terror, endless loneliness and the pull to greatness he can’t quite shake spurred on by the wild hope to find it in the depth of darkness. The dark side of the force, pulsating through him, powerful and consuming. Still, Snoke is the most powerful incentive in all of it.

_He will find me_ , Kylo thinks through the flashes, _he'll kill me before I know what’s happening_ .

_But you're strong_ , Rey talks back into the bond and slips off the holo-set onto her feet, _Luke said you’re the most powerful Padawan he’s ever taught_ .

_Not strong enough for that_ , Kylo says although the compliment touches up on some glum corners inside him.

Then he withdraws the mental image, pushes it away into some wrinkle somewhere and looks at her blankly.

“I don’t have a choice,” he says, “I’ve got nowhere to go but back.”

Rey knows this, of course. And it begs a question she neither wants to ask nor hear an answer to.

“Where does that leave this? _Us_ ?” Rey gestures weakly between the two of them, trying to underline her point. Their connection and all the entanglement that comes with it. “Do we keep meeting on battlefields where your minions try to kill my friends and then we fight and if we both manage to survive, we’ll just sneak off after to fool around? That’s not a life.”

Rey suspects it’s the first time Kylo actually thinks the whole thing through. Since he had caught these feelings for her, lashed out at them and her, resigned to them and then pined for her and pined and pined, all he wanted for months on end was to have her. Now that his crazy idea could become a reality by some shift in the universe, he is left with the shreds of the self he dismantled in the process and can see no way onward. He can not keep her and keep himself too. Unbidden, Rey feels cheated out of a future she never knew she could have wanted.
When just the faint idea of the word “future” flows over to Kylo, he physically winces.

“You’re gonna have to kill me the next time we fight,” he says and Rey isn’t sure if it’s a crude, entirely inappropriate joke or if he is serious.

“Don’t say that,” she says, her hair standing up at the thought.

“Well, you’re gonna have to.” Somehow, he’s gotten closer again. “I can’t kill you, I won’t. And when it comes down to you killing me or Snoke, I’d rather it be you.”

It’s entirely absurd how ludicrous his request sounds to her changed ears. This very morning, she would have complied with him eagerly — or would at least tried to convince herself to. But now, it seems all but impossible. Something between them has shifted so completely, that there will be no coming back from it. It wasn’t just some kisses that did this either. It was him and her both accepting that despite every argument and circumstance pointing to the contrary, they were drawn to each other like magnets and it would never stop. She can feel it prickling under her skin as it runs through her veins, their bond, that tether. It won’t be broken, not by anything other than one of their deaths. And that’s simply not an option.

Rey doesn’t want to talk anymore, she wants to go back to kissing, to floating. Away from the absolute nowhere that is their future together. She feels him skim her feelings, trying to anticipate her reaction to his plea.

“Absolutely out of the question,” she says.

“Rey, I deserve to die,” he says and there is just a very faint trace of remorse behind his voice, mostly it’s just pragmatism as he tries to argue the case for her sake. “You’d be doing the resistance a favour, avenging my father. Weaken Snoke. Bring balance to the force.”

“No,” she repeats and pushes against his reasons in their mental tug-of-war. “There has to be something else. Another way.”

“We could — you know...” he says quietly, coming up short on alternatives but giving voice to what he craves, “Just have tonight and then...”

“Then we go back to the way it was before and act like it never happened?” she finishes for him and takes his hand in hers. She squeezes it, beseeching, “Can you do that? Could you?”

The scenario plays in both their heads, bodies intertwined, joined in this final act of union and possession. She knows instantly that he’s just as inexperienced as she is, so it would mean a tenfold more. Not just on a physical level but something else entirely.

“No,” Kylo says, flinching away from the fantasy and it twists both their guts.

“So, we don’t do this,” Rey says after a while of casting those images out of her own head. They will never come to pass. “Because there’s no way back and we have nowhere to go forward.”
They stand in silence, letting the weight of this decision engulf them. Being close to him was easier when they still wanted to pierce each other’s hearts. Now that they had, the universe was all at once too big and too small for either of them. Strange how you can miss something you didn’t think you would or could ever want.

“Do you want me to go?” Kylo half-whispers into the stretch of quiet and Rey knows she should say yes so she can get a start on trying to forget this ever happened. Alas, she can’t get her lips to say the word and her mind is completely useless anyway. There is no more conviction there, only confusion.

Exhausted and miserable, she shakes her head.

_Not yet_, she says without opening her mouth.

And because there is nothing left she can think of doing, she takes him by the hand and leads him to the bunk at the other side of the room. She climbs into the small space and pulls him after her. Kylo follows with no discernible train of thought and folds himself around her. He is much too tall but it doesn’t stop him from draping his limbs over her anyway.

They lie down, heads too full to communicate and they face each other, lying on their sides with one hand each between them on the mattress and one free to roam. There is a grave sadness in the exchange of caresses. Every bit of hair she pushes off his forehead is a swan song and every dimple he pushes into the skin of her arms is a mark he wishes would stay on her forever so he just left her with something of his. Even if it’s a scar.

Finally, she sighs and closes the marginal distance between them to wrap him in a hug. He shifts with her and turns so that she is lying draped over his chest. It rises softly, up and down like the sea, and she listens to it, void of words. She means to learn the pace and pattern to his heartbeat but falls asleep before she can.

It does not feel like sleeping, what they do. Because during, they both feel wide awake. Memories of kisses mashed up with undisclosed fantasies, mingling with very real body heat as they twist into each other. Still, Rey must’ve slept because when she is startled out of their reveries by a violent whack that seems to shake the entire shuttle, her fatigue is almost overpowering.

Kylo takes half a second longer to come to.

“What happened?” he asks warily, roused with hair sticking up and out everywhere and the ghost of sleep still on his face.

“I don’t know,” Rey says and climbs over him. She darts over to the pilot’s cabin as fast as her cracking bones allow and finds the source of the thud. “Get over here, we’re being captured.”
Kylo is with her in a second, lightsaber poised when they hear rattling steps coming from the docking bay.

The shuttle is instantly crowded with the seven pirates that board Rey’s scrappy looking ship. They reek of fire water and neglect of basic hygienic standards. It’s a ragtag band of males, three humans and four other specimen Rey can’t name. They stand in a loose formation, heavily armed with blasters and some close contact weapons like knives and machetes. Wrapped in scrappy, filthy clothes, they look just like the type of people you wouldn’t want to meet in deep space. They’re sneering, thinking the pair in front of them an easy target.

Of course they would. These shuttles usually hold no more than two passengers and if they had staked them out and watched her travelling to and from Wayland, they likely suspect that she brought back some Sith artefact that will sell for at least 1000 credits on the black market. She is easy pickings in this trash can they call a ship. Rey does not need to look outside to know they already took over Kylo Ren’s deserted First Order shuttle.

The pirate in the front, a stunted little creature of an alien race she has not yet encountered, measures them quizzically before he speaks in a screeching, uncomfortable voice.

“He’s a bit plain for such a beauty, don’t you think, fellas?” He turns to his comrades and then back to Rey, his gaze slithering across her body like a snake and she is instantly repulsed. “I think we’re going to have some fun with you once we’ve got your big-eared friend out of the way.”

This is the moment Kylo ignites his lightsaber and takes a step forward, trying to step out in front of Rey. For a second, she is irritated by this unexpected act of chivalry, because he knows that she doesn’t need protection. His mind is red with possession.

_She is mine_, he thinks and that self-involved disregard of her own agency is way easier to process than him suddenly acting like her knight in shining armour. There are only so many changes she can deal with in a day.

Mildly annoyed with both the greasy pirates and her dark companion, she straightens her spine, falls into a comfortable stance, hand on her own lightsaber she thumbs to power, and sizes the men up.

They are common thieves, low-lifes, surely among them the odd sadist or rapist, propelled by greed and lust. The scum of the galaxy. They are poised to strike and comparatively unimpressed with Kylo’s flickering, unstable-looking saber.

“Sith,” one of the men hisses and brings out his blaster cannon, “a curious sight on a Resistance ship, had yourself a little taste of the Jedi bitch, I take it.”

“Fine, you have my attention, pirate,” Kylo grumbles, low and threatening. He sounds barely human and Rey has never heard so much seething hate in his voice which is saying a lot. “I’ll kill you first.”
With this they pounce at each other. Rey and Kylo are quickly encircled but both their training gives them the upper hand against the swarm of scoundrels. Kylo cuts down two of them before they even make their first move. The pirate who called Rey a bitch loses half his head in the process and his brains and blood go everywhere.

The rest are more resilient.

Rey goes toe to toe with one of them and he is trying to chase her through the tiny space. He is shooting blaster bolts at her and misses often, the walls of the ship shattering with each hit. Those she has to deflect with either her saber or by use of the force have an even greater impact and she starts worrying about the state of the shuttle. Behind her, Kylo has left a giant gash in the far wall and the circuits and wiring shows, throwing off sparks. Rey tries to assess the damage from where she’s standing but then the force ripples around her and she deflects another blaster bolt sizzling her way more by instinct than ability.

Her aggressor falls, finally, when she splits his ugly head in two with a straight cut from above. He’s been gawking at her chest as her tunic fell from her shoulders instead of keeping his guard up. Served him right. Her power flurries in her arms and there’s an exhilaration that comes with a righteous kill, she would rather not feel so strongly. Still, she doesn't have time to dwell on the decay of her morals. There are still three pirates on their feet and she is about to throw herself into their three-on-one fight with Kylo when she loses her footing. Not because she misstepped but because the floor is suddenly just gone.

The ship tilts sideways and the light flickers off, leaving darkness only illuminated red and blue from the glimmer of the searing holes in the walls and their light sabers. Kylo seizes the confusion to cut down another pirate but the other two scramble to their feet quicker than either he or she can follow and the scum opts to bolt. With another violent thud, the flye-bicle is forcefully docked off the shuttle and Kylo’s and their pirate ship follow suit, leaving him and Rey stuck on the wreck.

Rey grunts in frustration when she falls a second time, grasping for the holo-set to pull herself up. Her knees are bloody at this point.

“Kylo, you need to man the controls,” she tells him and sees that his shoulder is bleeding from a blaster bolt that grazed him. She has missed the impact in all the commotion but can feel it burn on his skin now. “Have you ever flown a shuttle before?”

“I’m not a pilot,” he grinds out but lunges into her seat anyway.

“I need to check on the machines,” Rey tells him before she hurries into the latter part of the ship. “Just make sure we stay afloat.”
It doesn’t take her very long to figure out that the damages due to overloading and over-straining of the machines in face of the damage done in the main cabin are too severe to fix with what she has. And if they try to stay in space for much longer, the pressure regulator will simply explode and turn them into stardust.

“Move over,” she commands Kylo when she’s back with him, “I’m gonna have to crash land this thing on Wayland.”

The planet looms large and green in front of them and she punches in some controls and enables the accelerator to steer the ship downward.

“Have you done this before?” Kylo sounds very nervous. If she weren’t too busy, Rey would laugh at the way he is digging his fingers into his seat as they go down faster. Brave and terrible Kylo Ren, undone by the terror of an uncontrollable descent. It's a fear old as life. Rey tries to focus on the thumping and crashing of dead bodies rolling around in the main cabin instead. It's almost like a rhythm.

As the atmosphere of the outer rim planet comes closer and closer yet, Rey moves one hand swiftly from the controls to Kylo’s leg.

“Hold on, we’re going down,” she says and takes her hand back as the shuttle crashes through the stratosphere with a bang. At first, Rey is pleasantly surprised when the old ship comes out of this maneuver apparently unharmed. It seems to have steadied enough to land somewhat gracefully. Maybe even somewhere strategically smart but then, hundreds of feet down, the ship starts falling apart under her fingers. She is grasping for control as every warning lamp on the console flashes to red, alarming life, punching nubs and buttons at full speed, but the systems are failing faster than she can bypass them.

Kylo senses her discomfort and holds even tighter to his armrests. It would be adorable if they weren’t going to die in a fiery explosion in like five seconds. Rey casts her own fear out and throws a Hail Mary.

The ground comes at them, closer and closer yet and by some sort of miracle, Rey manages to pull up the nose of the ship and steer it into foliage. Branches and trees crash against the windows and it rattles them enough to get whiplash but at least it slows the shuttle down where the hydraulics and engines are utterly failing to.

Another breathless minute of this, hoping they won't crash face first into a sharp branch, and they have hit the ground. The landing is harsh and when Rey skims the static around her, she finds that Kylo has gone radio-silent. Her own stomach churning uncomfortably, she frees herself from the seatbelts and turns to check on him. His head is hanging down, lifeless, and she is worried for a second before she tugs at their bond with fervour and he startles awake. Apparently, he isn’t all that used to extreme G-forces.
He twists in his seat and she feels his panic just before she comes into focus, unharmed and well.

“Rey,” he says, breathlessly and she can feel his booming headache become hers, “you saved us!”

“If you mean crash-land us on a planet void of civilization with a toast ship, unable to send out a distress signal or find our way out of this forest, then yes,” she mutters, looking out at the trees big as houses that spread thick and close before them as far as she can see. “I saved us.”

Kylo sinks back and his mind instantly starts working a hundred miles a minute.

“Nope,” Rey says, keeping track of the many strategies of survival he works through, “and that won’t work either -- because I know, don’t argue.”

“It’s no use anyway,” Rey says, “we can’t do anything right now, the sun will set in half an hour and it’ll be pitch dark. The best thing we can do is gather some branches and camouflage the ship. There’s things in these woods even we better not contend with.”

“So, then we just sleep?” The inaction makes him feel weary, irritated and weak.

“- And look for a way to pinpoint our location tomorrow and go from there,” Rey says. “There’s really not much more we can do tonight.”

Kylo begrudgingly accepts this and does his part, carrying the dead pirates out and burying them in shallow graves, then goes on to cut down some lower trees and helps hover their branches up and over the battered shuttle so the worst of it is concealed.

Rey looks at it from a distance and bites her lip. This might fool a little animal but a fully sentient being will make them out immediately.

“We need more branches,” she declares.

“I’ve got something better,” he says as he strolls over to her, his confidence seeping through because he can show her something else he’s good at now. Their dire situation is temporarily forgotten as she tilts her head to him, waiting for him to show off.

“Come here,” he beckons and holds out his hand.

Rey hesitates but then follows and lets him slither behind her, the offered up hand folding around hers and pushing it out, away from their bodies.

“Feel the force,” he tells her, voice low and instructional, “get a hold of it.”

She does, though it takes a considerable amount of concentration to channel the static their proximity causes into usability and away from feral desires. She wonders briefly if this will always happen now when he gets close to her.
She can sense Kylo’s smile at this without seeing it.

“It’s alright,” he says, “I feel it too.”

She leans into his touch just a bit and lets their connection work for her. This way, entangled minds and close bodies, they nearly merge into one being and it gives Rey double the access to the force with him supplying his own share. It sizzles, exhilarating, dizzying. She can feel it run through her as if it was liquid.

“Focus on the ship.” Kylo breathes into her ear, hand closing around hers so she is clutching the air, “put a barrier around it. Imagine it gone.”

Rey does as she is bid and concentrates all her power on wishing the shuttle from sight, she wishes so hard, she closes her eyes.

“Look,” Kylo says then and when she does, she can see nothing but foliage.

“That’s amazing,” she exhales.

“You’ve just created a force barrier,” Kylo tells her, pride ringing along in his voice. “You’ll be able to see it when you get closer, and me because I helped a little bit. But everyone else won’t know a thing. They’ll feel repelled by something is all and it’ll make them turn the other way.”

“Wait a second,” she plucks her mind from the awesomeness of this newly found ability to glance up at him from over her shoulder, “does that mean I carried all these branches here for nothing?”

“It appears so,” Kylo says flatly and then he grins, “but I like watching you carry things.”

Rey rams her elbow into his stomach and he is startled but not angry. He’s feeling something she can’t place, not swaying remotely close to any clear-cut emotion. Rey herself doesn’t really know what to feel.

She had not been prepared to let him go but him staying hadn't been an option either. Had it not been for the pirates, she would probably be touching down on the resistance base this very moment and Kylo would have been gone back to whatever darkness he called home.

But now, their story has changed. They are stranded on Wayland with no means of communication or escape. Maybe they will be stuck here for a while. Maybe forever.

Cast away on some random planet at the outskirts of the galaxy, unbothered and untouched by whatever wars going on led by whatever forces. She thinks that might be nice. If it was just them and nothing of the powers that tugged at them left and right. Only him and her, together.

Kylo doesn’t argue. Rey feels the overpowering urge to turn and melt into his frame, to kiss him until her knees give out and he feels the movement coming only to stop her dead in her tracks.
“No”, he mutters against her ear, slouching to be level with her head and holding her in place. “You can’t kiss me again. I don’t know what I’ll do.”

He’s right, of course he’s right. They made a decision and no matter the current situation, their circumstances haven’t changed. But the thought of never kissing him again causes a feeling of loss she fears might never cease until the end of her days. She knows he's in her head, following her reactions and he strains with her, feeling torn and pulled apart, worse than he ever has but for once, he remains steadfast.

With a reluctance that makes his feet drag, he steps away from her and she can’t look at him as he walks off toward the shuttle they’ve hidden. He doesn’t even touch her at all the rest of the day and sleeps on the couch, keeping her firmly out of his dreams.

Rey should be thanking him but all she can feel is terrible, irrevocable emptiness and her heart slowly breaking into fractals.

Chapter End Notes

Hello friends, sorry for the long wait! I will try to deliver the next chapter a little bit faster.

If you like, you can reblog the artwork for this chapter from right here: http://jackpotgirl.tumblr.com/post/136848945910/exclusive-preview-art-for-chapter-5-of-in-my

As always, I feed off of your reviews and they make write faster and better ;) Thank you so so much for all of you reading and thanks to the wonderful vicious-rhythm for beta'ing like a motherkriffin champion!!
The morning light on Wayland has a weird, yellow-y tint and it drenches the main cabin in an unreal colour as Rey opens her eyes to face a new day. Her body is less sore than she expected after the fight and exertions from their tumultuous landing. She feels his shoulder wound but that comes out better than she would have thought as well after a once-over through their bond.

This active probing into his body rattles Kylo from sleep and he is a giant black heap of robes as he twists upward from where he slept in the seating area. Rey turns her body toward him when she feels him rouse and catches his eye. His hair's a tangled mess and he runs both hands through it to make it fall back into place. The most disconcerting thing is that it works.

“Does this crap pile have a decent ‘fresher at least?’ he says instead of Good Morning, and already sounds annoyed. Rey all but revels at how normal it feels being annoyed with him in return. She rolls her eyes.

“No, Resistance fighters never shower, don’t you remember?” she snaps, calling back to some throw-away thing he said about Finn and Poe once, about them reeking. Kylo tilts his head and purses his lips in distaste at this. He didn’t expect a comeback with that much fire behind it this early.
“You aren’t exactly a morning person, are you?” He frees himself from the robes he used as a blanket and stands to stretch heartily. Rey gets lost in the way his muscles contract under his shirt for a while there and notices just a second too late that her mouth is hanging slightly open, just enough to make her look really dim-witted.

Kylo’s smile is almost a snark when he finds her blatantly staring and he holds her gaze even after she’s shut her lips tight and furrowed her brow. He holds her there until he ducks under the garment he is taking off. Rey swallows, locked in place and he drops the shirt onto the rest of his clothes. You would never knew all of this was under all of that. His broad shoulders rise and fall softly, toned chest pale and defined from years of training and fighting. Rey is dimly aware of just how on purpose this is, how he stands there, not really moving and just watching her watch him.

She can feel Ben in all of him right now. Spiteful and unaccepting of their terms set the day before. He is being very childish about being denied what he wants and it makes for a weird game of tease Kylo lets unfold. Maybe just to see how long they can go without being tempted to break their agreement.

Rey clears her throat and shakes her head to break the hold he has on her. There is wickedness tingling through their bond as Kylo makes note of just how trying this is for her.

“I’m a morning- alone -person,” Rey mutters, “Fresher’s that way. Don’t use up all the water.”

He nods and she could swear he is beckoning her to take a peek through his eyes for the entirety of his shower, but Rey holds her own against him. Occupying her mind with taking stock of the cupboards. There is enough food to last one person a week and thus two people for about half. Additionally, if they managed to catch some game in these woods, they could easily hold out a week or two. That should be enough time to find their way to one of the Empire’s old tech facilities and find something flyable or anything they can use to communicate their location.

Planning with scarce rations, she prepares one portion and divides it onto two plates, digging into hers immediately. She deliberates waiting for him for a while but she decides against it, feeling the proximity a breakfast side by side would entail held a little too much risk before her first caf or her first round of meditation. Plus, she would rather already be climbing a tree when he gets out of the shower.

Rey succeeds in this at least. When she feels the absence of pattering water on his skin and cold air hitting it instead, she is already halfway up a pine tree, just a stone’s throw away from the crashed shuttle. She climbs quickly and expertly. Trees are a lot easier to master than super star-destroyers and she reaches the crown in record time. Up there, the air is clear and smelling wonderfully pure and undisturbed. The yellow tint has made way for bright daylight and she can only see woods for miles and miles.
It takes a while for her to notice the tiny reflection of something manmade beyond heaps of trees off by the base of a mountain to the east. It could be nothing, or maybe just rubble, but it could also be a hidden door to an underground base that could as well hold what they would need to get off this planet. Rey commits the direction and position to memory and climbs back down, buzzing with her find.

Kylo isn’t joining in her enthusiasm, sitting at the holo-set eating, fully clothed, still save for the mask he has lost along with his ship. She has a pretty good idea why but decides not to follow him down that path. Staying on Wayland with him was a ridiculous fantasy that has no practical merit or a realistic possibility of turning into anything but a disaster. He has no intentions of changing sides and she would not betray her cause. There is no future for them, only pain, and any further they let it go with each other will only make it hurt more when they eventually return to their real lives.

“Can you stop thinking at me?” Kylo winces and pushes his half-eaten half-portion away.

“I’m sorry,” she says and means it, especially with how hollow he looks just by listening in on her. She hurries to change the subject. “If we leave very soon, we can reach the factory before nightfall.”

“You aren’t even sure it’s a factory,” he argues and sits up straighter, almost challenging but not quite yet, “What if it’s just a piece of wayward trash you saw?”

“Then we’ll sleep in a tree and continue on or circle back in the morning.”

Disapproval at this rolls over his features and ends in a piqued frown.

_How pedestrian_. He has the grace not to say this out loud.

“Snob,” she retorts.

He just raises an eyebrow in reply. She thinks she might like him more when he’s arrogant and condescending like this, it’s that much easier to keep her distance. Still, she hides this thought behind a wall of her own because she has no interest in seeing him wince one more time before having her caf.

She drinks it in a hurry although it burns her lips and tongue and sloshes all over because she is simultaneously packing a backpack with all their portions, some rope and three small blankets that would keep the worst night-cold away. Kylo pointedly stays in his spot at the holo-set for the entire endeavor.

“I’m glad you’re enjoying your morning,” she snickers as she snatches his plate from under his hands and wraps it in a small dish cloth to put it with another into the bag.

“I’m preserving my recourses,” he deadpans with no shame at all and then stands as slowly as he can manage.
“You’re unbelievable,” Rey shakes her head and it’s a weird kind of irritation that surges through her. It feels terribly commonplace, human and mundane. Like he’s just another wisecracking friend having a go at her patience. Not like he’s Kylo Ren, arch nemesis, star-crossed something, eternal enigma and hopeless weakness.

Hesitantly, she retracts the tether that connects him to her at all times and finds his emotions closely in reign. He is working hard for the composure but it’s been worse. She finds him capable of managing and neglects investigating his hiding place for secret emotions when he gives the faintest push against her intrusion. It’s gentle and neither laced with anguish nor reproach. He just wants her to give him some space. She looks at him then and he lets her find his eyes.

“I can handle it,” he says to everything unspoken that passes between them and it’s a reassurance as much as a promise. From this alone, she can tell Kylo is back in the driver’s seat. It’s somewhat comforting. Ben is far more unpredictable in his mood swings.

“Good,” she says and tries a smile. “Let’s go find this factory.”

Outside, it’s gotten a lot warmer and more humid, even in the shade of the trees, and Rey is glad that she opted to keep her tunic tucked into the bottom of the bag. She is only wearing a thin undershirt and linen pants and thanks her years of dressing for the weather when she can see sweat bead on Kylo’s forehead just half an hour into their trek through the woods.

“Aren’t you hot?” She turns her head to where he follows behind her but keeps walking.

He is struggling, she realizes, his limbs not used to such natural terrain and so gangly, he hits his feet at roots all the time with his heavily layered outfit not helping at all because he keeps tripping over the hem of his cloak.

He shakes his head with the conviction of a child that dressed itself completely wrong for any given occasion yet refuses to acknowledge it, and keeps up his spite-fuelled forced march for another half hour. When he eventually gives up the charade, he strips out of his over-robe and the thick wooden tunic that sits on top of the thinner black shirt and pants with an almost sheepish grunt. She can make out the scent of his exertion even from paces away. It should resonate as stink for all intents and purposes, but somehow all it makes her feel is hunger. Or thirst, she can’t quite place what the rumble in her lower belly comes closer to.

“You’re quite pleased with yourself aren’t you?” Kylo puffs and stops moving.

“Just happy that my days on Jakku haven’t been an entire waste of time,” she says and trods on a couple more steps before she halts to turn back to him, “at least I know how many clothes are too many.”

“I know full well how many clothes are too many,” he says dryly but gives her a once over pertinent
enough to make her half choke on her tongue.

“Are you trying to flirt with me?” Rey cocks an eyebrow and puts her hands on her hips.

“I don’t flirt.” He scoffs.

“No, never,” Rey scoffs right back, “You just insinuate. And then throw in some filthy fantasies and let them do all the work for you.”

“Well,” Kylo thinks hard enough of nearly anything intimate they ever did together, real or imaginary and Rey shifts her position because everything burns, “it seemed to work so far.”

“I positively loathe you,” she closes her eyes and breathes out hard through her nose, shooing the images away.

“No, you don’t,” he states and she could be hallucinating but it sounds almost sad.

Rey doesn’t argue. There’s no point, so instead she focusses her attention on his balled up clothes as he weighs them in his hand absentmindedly.

“You’re not gonna toss those, are you?”

“I was going to,” he says flatly.

“But what are you going to wear?” Rey tilts her head at this wastefulness.

“This isn’t the only set of clothes I own, you know,” he tells her incredulously.

“Of course,” she says and then snorts because she has truly never considered this before, “I was wondering what you wore on wash day.”

In her mind’s eye, he’s a little dress up doll and she tries some ridiculous outfits on him, one more outrageous than the one before. She feels a laugh bubbling in the back of her throat that feels so alien it turns into an awkward snort. She could swear his lips are twitching ever so slightly but he gathers himself so fast, she could be wrong.

“Well,” she says, trying for an even voice, “we should hold on to them anyway, who knows how cold the nights get. I can fit them in here, I think.”

She brings the backpack around and holds it out for him. He looks appalled.

“I can carry them myself,” he says, clutching his bearings as if she was going to snatch them away immediately.

“Don’t be silly,” she says and then she recognizes his trail of thought, he doesn’t want her to have to carry the heavy fabric. This is even funnier than imagining him in a fluffy pink bathrobe, “I’m not half as delicate as you think I am. I can carry it.”

“No,” he says, like a petulant child.

“Then you carry the backpack,” she offers, utterly unable to take him seriously anymore and extends
her arm even further. It’s not like she cares who wears the damn thing in the first place.

He all but stomps over to her and rips the rucksack from her hands, shoving his clothes inside and putting it on his back to continue walking without another word. Ben is strong in him today. It’s almost adorable.

He wears the backpack until they finally reach the big metal portal marking the entrance of a subterranean Empire tech-facility and Rey congratulates herself once more on her expert skills at finding things.

*Once a scavenger, always a scavenger,* she thinks and smiles to herself over how much Kylo dreads getting an “I told you so”. She relents and spares him this.

“We still have to get this door open,” he mutters, bordering on sheepishness.

“Well, you’re the one who can freeze blaster bolts in mid air,” she shrugs, “work your magic, dark boy.”

He sends her a pang of reproach but it feels more like a tickle than a sting. The sun is setting around them and she realizes that this entire day has felt so pointedly normal. Just yesterday, she’d believed they could only go from extremes but for the entirety of their hike through the forest, they’d been somewhere in the middle, amicable, even playful. That’s maybe the only thing that could still surprise her about him.

While she ponders this, Kylo positions himself smack dab in the middle of the portal and raises his arm, palm facing the cold steel and she can feel the Force crackle around them. Through their bond, she can retrace how he connects to the door, finding the hinges, probing to see where it’ll give way and he tugs. It gives none. His face twists into a frown and he pushes harder. She has seen this face so often, she could draw it by heart. Kylo gets frustrated and grunts under the strain.

“Don’t just stand there,” he grits out, “help, will you?”

“Oh,” she jumps and nearly hops over to do as he bid. She steps to his right and mimics the way he holds out his hand, trying to recreate the bending of his fingers. She lets his handle on the power he commands become hers and concentrates on the door. She can feel the door, feel the way it crumpled and contorted its shape under years of nature reclaiming it and she pushes with him until-

It’s the tiniest of movements but then finally, the metal is budging under both their force. Slowly, but inevitably, a slit opens with a painful screeching noise and Kylo holds it open until they both slipped through. Once inside, it crashes back shut and leaves them in perfect darkness. Rey jumps from the sudden loss of orientation but also finds a curious sensation unfold. She can feel Kylo. She knows exactly where he is and when she tests her hypothesis, of course her hand lands right on his, bare because he left his gloves in the shuttle. There’s instant electricity but Rey holds on until Kylo
thumps his lightsaber to life with twin *swooshes* and the red, flickering glow lights a wide, desolate corridor.

Rey knows her goosebumps aren’t solely from the sudden chill and multitudes of spiderwebs all over the place. Kylo’s are solely from their touch.

She clears her throat and gives her eyes a little time to adjust, “So...let’s figure this place out, shall we? We’re gonna need some more light though, maybe torches, or candles? How are these facilities usually laid out?”

“If it’s a run of the mill testing compound I think I can find my way around,” Kylo ponders, remembering dozens and dozens of floorplans studied in endless hours of sifting through Empire archives. “This tunnel should be leading to a large hangar. The rest of it should be accessible through there and it should have utility stash in one of the adjacent corridors going off from it.”

Rey catches a whiff of something, although it’s not scent, it’s more like a feeling - as if her chest was pulled on by a string. Yes, *utility*. A large room full of more or less well stocked goods. She knows this feeling like the back of her hand and it moves her feet without her having to even think about it.

Led by muscle memory and instinct, Rey walks and walks, a mildly confused Kylo trailing after her, trying to keep up with her sure steps to light her way. She wouldn’t even need it. Before long, the tunnel, as he assumed, opened out into a huge dome, the walls harsh stones. The dark side looms in the shadows here. Rey could almost get distracted by the unsettling comfort Kylo experiences beside her. It’s a twisted sense of homecoming he’s been conditioned to feel. She pushes on, crossing the hangar in a straight line, all over to a small hole in a wall that looks like an ant-made tunnel in the scope of their spacious dwelling.

Inside, it’s still bigger than expected and Rey feels the pull in her chest get more pronounced, more intense until she is at the end of her efforts. The door to the stock room broke open ages ago and the pair enters. The air is stale and moldy at the same time and it takes a lot of combined willpower to keep from retching. Any food that has been stocked in here has gone bad probably before Rey was born.

“We need candles,” she tries to breathe only through her mouth and lets her instincts lead her onwards. Again, she almost knows where she has to go and before long, a couple of sturdy rows of racks to the left, she finds a box filled to the brim with stunted candles. She nearly laughs out loud when she sees that they are *black*.

She wants to make some stupid joke about darksider interior design when she brings them back to Kylo who’d lit her way and waits at the end of the shelf. He doesn’t give her the chance.

“You’re disturbingly *good* at this,” he says and takes the box from her without asking for permission. She thinks this is what he takes for chivalry.
“Always the tone of surprise,” she huffs and snatches the box back from him. “This is all I did since I was old enough to go off on my own. Scavenge things.”

“I know,” he sighs. “It’s just different seeing it with my own eyes. How you use it like that.”

“Use what?” She tries to make out the creases on his face in the red light.

“The Force, Rey,” he says softly, “can’t you feel it? You’re glowing with it.”

“Huh,” she is genuinely surprised and feels around her, she has never thought of it this way. “I guess I just always knew when something was worth collecting. The things, they called to me. I always knew where I had to go. It made everything a lot easier.”

“That would’ve been nice,” Kylo says quietly, eyes searching something in the distance, somewhere in the past, “knowing where to go. The Force never led me anywhere. It was used to lead me but it never called to me, not like it does you.”

“That bothers you,” Rey attests, feeling it as much as seeing it painted across his open face.

“Yes,” he admits without a trace of shame or irritation, “I don’t understand it. For you it’s so easy, the path is always clear, so straightforward. You feel no temptation.”

“That’s not true and you know it,” she says and thinks of the times she wanted to kill and tear him to shreds and, for half a heartbeat, of the times she wanted to destroy herself entirely just so she could touch him without it ripping her life apart.

“Well, you’ve never fallen for it,” he replies, voice thick. “You’re strong. Stronger than me.”

“I don’t know about that,” she raises an eyebrow that he can’t see. “I think you just got confused. I was all alone, there wasn’t anybody to corrupt me.”

Kylo huffs at her. “You could’ve turned into gods know what in that ATAT but you became this. You’re...pure. You’re not the product of isolation.”

“And you are not the product of weakness,” she challenges and shifts the box in her grip so she can stand taller.

“Then what am I the product of?” he asks and matches her change of stance.

“Are you asking me what I think,” she says, “or is this a rhetorical question?”

“Asking.”

“Hm,” she hadn't expected him to and thinks about it, shutting him out so she can in peace. “I think you wanted to be happy, to feel loved and you felt like you weren’t. That your father wasn’t proud of you and had wanted another, better child. That your mother carted you off to Luke because she didn’t love you the way you were, not enough to deal with you.”

He follows her voice and deliberation paints his features thoughtful.

“Then you thought you’d belong to the force instead,” she says when he shows no signs of interjection, “but it wasn’t clear-cut. You know why that was, you remember it.”
She knows he does, has heard it echo faintly in the back of his head but he lets her say it anyway.

“Snoke,” she continues, “he was starting to groom you, even then. He warped your mind, when you were little more than a boy. It’s horrible what he did to you, mostly because you still refuse to see it as something that was done to you, but as some defect inside you. You blame yourself for your weakness, for not resisting the Dark Side, for proving your parents worst fears right. You forget that you were only a child when he messed with your head and gave you a poster boy of glory and authority to emulate. He made you turn to Vader, made you want to become him. He made you look for belonging within his legacy.”

Kylo remains mum, considering her words.

“If you need something to blame,” she says and tries one more time to sway him because now he actually seems to be listening. “you should look at what Snoke did to you. I think you’re exactly what he made you. But you don’t have to be, you know that, don’t you?”

“I don’t know anything anymore,” Kylo says after endless seconds tick away into silence, “I know I can’t leave him.”

“He doesn’t...argh,” she wants to throw her hands in the air in frustration. “You could-”

“No, Rey, I couldn’t,” he cuts her off. “Just stop. This isn’t some kids’ story where I can just slay the monster and be free. The dark side, it’s everything I am, it’s all I have.”

“That’s the crassest understatement of all time,” she blurts out, legitimately angry at how little he thinks of himself, “and it’s also pretty rude.”

“What, are you gonna tell me that I have you?” It’s a rebuttal, a mockery and a pitiful question all rolled into one mess of things Rey can’t react to. She opens her mouth to say something, anything. But fails and closes her mouth again like a stupid blubbering fish.

“Yeah,” Kylo says, “didn’t think so.”

The quiet that follows is thicker than the darkness and Kylo is brimming with something ugly.

“We should go find whatever it is you need to get us off of this godsforsaken planet,” Kylo says then, resolute and seeped in irritation.

“No,” Rey resists the impulse to match his temper. “We’ve been walking all day. You’re cranky and I’m exhausted. We should find somewhere to sleep and continue in the morning. We’ll do nothing more productive tonight anyway and I’m tired of fighting with you.”

With this, she leaves him behind to catch up with her several minutes later. She finds her way in pitch darkness because she can and trudges on for what feels like miles on end. With him brooding
slowly behind her, head reeling and thinking unflattering things she does her best to ignore.

And here she thought this day would end on a civil note. He is upset with her because she won’t let him sit and wallow in self-pity, because she doesn’t accept what is so glaringly obvious. That his whole life he navigated - or has been navigated - to a place he can’t get out off. Stuck between a rock and a hard place with no lifeline. She believes so stubbornly that there is a way out and he is annoyed that she can and that she won’t even try to see things from his point of view.

At the end of a long-winding, endless seeming corridor, she feels something a little less dark resonating from behind a door and she senses a bigger space beyond the threshold, First Lieutenants quarters maybe, a residue female energy that she finds as appealing as anything in this hole could hope to be. Without telling Kylo her intentions, she stops short but he isn’t surprised. He’s been keeping track of her, obviously improving at compartmentalising his and her thoughts. He gives his wrist a flick and the door swishes open. Rey doesn’t thank him purely out of spite and lets the candle box fall to the floor so it lands with a violent bang.

Rey tries the light switch beside the door, fully aware that it’s futile. She takes stock of the room spreading out in front of her and makes out the shapes of a spartan interior. Pale walls, a large bed, a dresser, and a single chair that seems so void of purpose, it’s almost tragic. There is a mattress on the bed but neither pillows nor blankets.

“I need to step out for a minute,” Kylo says flatly and she spins around to puzzle out where his head went while she was lurking around. He’s worked himself up pretty bad but he’s keeping her out. The only thing that gets through are the raw emotions, ranging anywhere from rage to regret, dotted with yearning and fury. She can only begin to imagine what storm is raging beyond his eyes. He keeps them downcast as he walks out and she is left alone in the Lieutenant's room. Her fingertips tickle from how hard he grips his lightsaber and lights the first candle with her own when he begins slashing a cabin at the end of the hall into rubble. She lets him work himself out and dedicates herself to the task at hand. They need light.

The thing with any number over three candles in a room is that the space turns from sufficiently lit to —for lack of a better term— romantic. And it’s deeply unsettling. As soon as Rey has set the last one aflame and put it beside four others burning in the far left corner and takes a step back, she realises with a start that she has unwittingly created the scene of a third-rate holo-show from one of the blue channels. It does things to her, remembering these bits of cheesy clips; heroes bent over heroines, rolling over each other, into each other and her heart flutters as she substitutes these faceless figures with Kylo and herself. It could be them. It could. It’s not like anyone’s here to stop them. It would be so easy to just forego her resolutions, to just give in and fall into this. The notion is so tempting, her whole body ripples with shivers.

Feeling her self-control slip, she decides to un-light a good two thirds of the near twenty candles before Kylo gets back but because that’s just her luck, he reappears right that second. He takes half a moment to take in the scene and then his eyes land on her with a double-take.
Their bond *booms* with how quickly his anger and pain turns to something entirely different. It’s so powerful that Rey’s knees turn weak. She feels the floor call to her but she keeps herself upright. His chest heaves up, eyes glowing fiery red with desire in the candlelight.

To him, she looks like the sun; he thinks a million words just to distinguish the different hues of colour the light paints her skin with and each one is more praising than the next. He even supplies new ones when her blush mashes into the yellows and whites of the flickering candle light.

Breathing suddenly comes very hard to Rey. This is very, very dangerous. It is this real, tangible buzz their longing for each other brings to roaring life.

*So easy*, she thinks. *So ready*.

Kylo standing there, in awe, unmoving and just drinking her in, is enough to unhinge every sense of time and space. Rey’s body sears under his gaze, beholding her like she’s rare and wonderful. It elevates her whole being until she’s soaring three feet above the ground. His eyes travel leisurely about her frame and her skin prickles wherever they linger.

Rey shouldn’t go there but her head goes forth without asking for permission. It’s the practicality of all this, surpassing the bare technicalities of a candle-lit room holding a bed and two glowing bodies equipped to use it. They are all alone here and their heat is enough to drown out any shadow of the Dark Side that ever lingered in this room. Who can say how long this will last? If she put her mind to it, Rey could find countless ways of escape from Wayland, as early as the morning. And then the circumstances would change and may as well never be quite as good as this very night. Her belly sinks with the realisation of this, with the fact that she could just take this one little step and it could *happen*.

Then, three things happen at once. First, she becomes absolutely aware that this is the moment she needs to diffuse the situation if she decides to stick to her plans, say something irritating and make him sleep on the floor. Second, she waits one missed and two quick heartbeats too long to do it and third; she pushes her thumbs underneath the waistband of her pants and shimmies out of them until they hit the floor around her ankles. He gulps at the unexpected change of trajectory, not following her inner workings at all for once, and she feels Ben’s presence stirring up like a blaster bolt. Kylo lets him seep through with all the boyish, teenage wonder he still possesses.

Rey has no idea just how much this could wreck them both. All she knows is that she wants to keep his eyes on her body as long as she can. So, before she can think herself out of it, she pulls her shirt over her head too, leaving her in only her underwear. She is being reckless and horribly irresponsible. They said they wouldn’t do anything, wouldn’t even kiss ever again. Yet, here she is with her clothes in a pile on the floor and her heart in her mouth, beating away at hyperspeed. She only has this life and she only wants this man, twisted and sick as people might think it is. And
wouldn’t she be an even greater fool to let this opportunity pass them by? What if she never saw him again? The thought is too crushing to linger on.

Kylo’s mouth falls open and his emotions are too dense to contend with. Lust is fighting for dominance over giddy disbelief at her rashness, restraint battles against childish greed and there is something louder than all of it. She could call it love if that wasn’t entirely too terrifying. His eyes are devouring her where she stands. He clenches his fists and when this isn’t enough, brings them to his sides and digs into fabric and skin vigorously as he exhales sharply through a locked jaw. He wants to rip the last remaining pieces of clothing off her with his teeth, so badly it makes Rey’s throat close off.

She feels suddenly hyper aware of her body, his eyes leaving a trail of fire behind in their wake where they skim over every newly exposed bit of flesh. Instantly self-conscious, she frets over her scrawny shape, her barely existent breasts, the glaring absence of curves and she worries about the fact that her legs aren’t smooth like the ones the girls in the holo-shows have but are covered in fuzzy, soft hairs and altogether, she doesn’t look like these sensual, voluptuous women at all. She’s shaped more like a bony, scraggy, little boy and what if he doesn’t like it?

"Don’t," he pleads, his voice strangled and gruff, “don’t think that, I can’t keep this up if you do.”

An endless second passes and it’s full of his furious quest for self-control and mindless longing and then Rey throws their agreements on their grand funeral pyre with two tiny little words.

“Then don’t,” she whispers and Kylo is with her the next time she blinks.

He crashes into her and he is so overworked with desire, he kisses her whole face at once and his hands and fingers dig and drag at her skin equally as rabid. Rey loses the boundaries of her body under his touch. When his lips and tongue nibble her mouth open, she forgets where she ends and he begins. It’s mind-boggling that Kylo could kiss her even more desperate than he had the day before but somehow he does, maybe because Rey pushes back all the more now.

Her kisses aren’t half drenched in pity this time around, they’re born from need and yearning and she craves them, craves him like nothing else ever before. She claws at his back and wants to feel his skin so bad, she nearly tears into the wool. Kylo, in eager response, grabs her bottom with both hands and pulls her hard against his already bulging pants.

And then, the very next second, he changes his mind, seemingly unprompted or at least in no way anticipated by her. He twists his wrists, moves his hands to her hip bones and stops kissing her to push her away. Her hands fall from his shoulders and land on his forearms and the sudden cease-all of their passionate embrace hits her like a brick in the face.

She wants to yell at him but the look on his face stops her short. His features are twisted together in something very akin to agony.
“I’m slipping,” he confesses and his voice breaks, every appearance of superiority or maturity from age gone without a trace, he is completely undone. “I know you don’t want us to… go further and I know you’re right about it but I can’t...hold on to my head. I’m really trying. It’s too hard, I can’t even feel the Force, can’t even try, my body is just - too loud.”

It’s truly killing him and what’s worse is that it has been killing him the entire time that she in all honesty had already given up any pretense of fighting the inevitable.

Rey can’t really put words to what she is feeling so she climbs into his mind and finds the knots of attraction, arousal, of mania and urgency he can barely contain and untangles them. His eyes are swimming along with his head as he is trying to puzzle out what she is doing.

It’s okay, she thinks into the mess of his thoughts. It’s truly a wonder that even when she is at the brink of capacity in her own brain, she still somehow has room for the tenfold of things going on in his.

I want this.

Then all his little knots snap into one thickly woven coil and it’s nearly unraveling them both. Still, with a strength and new level of control that surprises even Kylo himself, he holds on to his wits and opens his mouth to speak.

“Are you sure?” He is all but grilling her, shuffling off the rest of his mental faculty to dig into her head and bring her earlier, very much justified reservations to recollection. “Nothing has changed.”

“I know,” she whispers, “I don’t care. I can’t imagine going back home and not having done this while I had the chance.”

We might never get one like this again, flows along with this, unspoken.

“But you’re,” he stops, throat running dry instantaneously and it is Ben looking through his eyes, “you’re a virgin.”

“So are you,” she reminds him softly.

“That’s different,” he mutters, “you’re different. I’m whatever I am.”

He still holds her, so she can’t move in to kiss him how she wants to, so badly. He thinks of himself as pitch dark tar that will taint her down to her bright, light fiber and it’s the same black and white thinking that nearly cost them everything so many times before.

“I choose you,” she says with as much certainty as she can put into her words, it might be the only
way to get through to him, “I want it to be you. I know what you did, I am not forgetting that. Trust me with this, I am aware of who you are. But I knew all of it going in. I still ended up right where I am.”

He just looks at her, as if his body has collapsed under the weight of their words and thoughts. Rey takes a breath to brace herself and then lets her arms fall down to her sides. He barely registers the movement.

“Kylo,” she says, calling his eyes to focus. “Take off your clothes.”

When he still doesn’t move, she does it herself, works her quick hands between their bodies and rolls up his shirt, up and up until he has to raise his arms over his head so she can fling it across the room. It misses a flickering candle by an inch. Rey doubts she would’ve noticed if it had gone up in flames.

Kylo’s pale skin is burning up when she runs her hands across his chest. She’s wanted to touch him there since this morning. His heart is running away from him and his thoughts are a fuzzy, illicit blur. She wants him to focus, to be aware with her and she nudges his mind, pushing a bit of the glaze from his eyes. He stares at her as if she was the stars, in wild wonder.

“Kiss me,” she orders and he complies, finding order in the motions of lips on lips and tongues on tongues. His hands pick up his earlier path over her sides and back. And his thoughts become more defined, whipped into shape by their connection.

He asks her before he rids her of her bralette and her shoes and waits again before taking off his own and asks if it's okay to strip out of his pants. She chuckles at this as he unties the strings that hold them up after she nodded.

“Do you think I’d have you do this with your pants on?” She says to his folding form as he bends low to climb out of the obstructing garment. “I don’t think it works that way.”

“I know how it works,” he grumbles but there’s no real irritation behind it as he stands back up again, putting his hands on her hips.

They’re in matching states of undress now, naked but for some little cover of their modesty. It’s exhilarating enough by itself. Kylo’s eyes flicker down to her exposed chest only then and she wants to applaud his restraint. She resists the urge to cover her small breasts with her arms and hands, and keeps them pinned to her sides. Still, she can’t look at him anymore and twists her head away.

“Don’t do that,” he says ever so gently and nudges her by the chin with his index finger to make her look back at him. “Don’t hide.”
His head is reeling with want to see her, to see *everything*.

***

He never stops looking at her eyes though when his hand travels from her neck to her chest and he palms her breasts, lightly, soft as a feather and her nipples pebble under the touch. Kylo licks his lips and takes a deep, slow breath which sends a jolt through her body that strings up a symphony of craving right in her very core. She arches into his touch, moving in on him and he takes the hint, kissing her briefly then moving on to lick and bite his way to her earlobe and down her neck and down, until he crouches over her, back bent in a completely ridiculous angle because he’s so tall. Everything so he can put his fiery mouth over her breasts and *suck*.

Rey wants to curse but the ability to form words escapes her. Her hands fly to his head and fist into his long hair. His beard stubble rasps her skin deliciously. It feels like a song she can almost sing along to. Kylo moves the hand that held her by the hip to her panties and tugs them down. He doesn’t ask this time, her head is already screaming out in approval, in hunger loud enough to echo from the ridges of his brain.

When his fingers first make contact with her puffy, drenched flesh and he curls them inward, she can’t breathe. It’s a familiar feeling because she has done this before, she knows the twinge, the yearning for release, the exhilaration of creating and raising friction but it’s oh so different now that it’s *him* there. He is testing, curious, trying out speeds and angles, he browses through her head, sending a rush of memories through her of how she did this quickly and slowly, drawing it out or speeding it up and he tries to mimic her strokes, the pressure she uses. As if he is trying out her muscle memory to see if it fits.

But there is something in the way he’s touching her that’s entirely his own. A thirst, a desire to surprise her and pry those little sounds from her, the soft moans and groans that make him come apart. She makes them all and thinks she might lose her mind if he doesn’t release her soon, fills her throbbing, aching need which pulses hot around where his fingers dance around the edges of her. He doesn’t push inside, just ghosts there and it drives her stir-crazy.

*Kylo*, she thinks, scratching his scalp hard, *I’m ready*.

“Are you sure?” He mumbles around her skin, fingers halting.

“Yes, dammit,” she grunts and bucks her hips against his hand just to make a point. The crushing impact sends shivers all the way down her spine.

It propels Kylo back to his feet and he staggers backward to fumble down his black tight underpants that have felt unbearably small for the longest time. As he frees himself, Rey feels her blood rush to
her cheeks when she sees him bare for the first time. He is the first man she’s seen naked in the flesh and doesn’t know what she expected but he looks huge and stiff and...huge.

Like too big to fit, big enough to split her in two. Whatever shapes they made before, her features fall and he catches it. His first reaction is flaring humiliation, then he jumps into her head and finds the reason for her blank expression.

“It’ll be okay,” he whispers, terrified that she will call the whole thing off now but willing to take the coldest shower in history none the less if she so much as waves a hand. “If you don’t want to anymore that’s…okay.”

“No, no,” she shakes her head and holds out her hand. “I’m just nervous.”

“Me too,” he says and sounds younger than he ever has before. The ten years that separate them dissipate into thin air and she can see Ben and Kylo equally hesitant to take the hand she offers and follow her to the bed.

Rey lies down, feeling the raw, dusty sheet crumble under her weight and she shimmies upward until her head softly bobs against the headboard. Kylo sits on his knees at the edge of the bed like a pale shadow of himself.

In an act so excruciating in its vulnerability, she has to shut her eyes and breathe through the blood racing past her ears, she spreads her legs. She keeps blinking awkwardly away until his hips wedge between her knees and he captures her wayward glance, eyes bulging and pupils so dilated she can not make out the soft brown. He shuffles closer and places both hands beside her torso to steady himself.

This is happening.

“Can you,” he whispers so faintly she barely hears him, “um, guide me?”

He winces when she gingerly closes her fingers around him and his eyes fly shut when she strokes up and down his length, once, twice, just testing the silk on steel with her own hands and then holds him there, angles her hips upward and helps him find just the spot.

The first second is all him, blazing through her in a very different sort of awakening. Just the feel of the tip of him is enough to make both their visions white out but then he gains half an inch on her and the pain sets in. She flinches when she is being stretched and filled up, and it stings. He’s barely even inside.
“Are you okay,” he asks, short of breath and hanging on to his sanity by a threat, “do you want me to stop?”

“No,” she grits out, “go on, I can take it.”

“I don’t want to hurt you,” he says, pained by the mere idea of wounding her in this.

“It’s not so bad,” she says.

“Liar,” he retorts, softly, “I can feel it too, you know.”

“I’ll push through,” she says, dead set, “just go slow.”

He does. She takes him in, bit by bit, biting her lip while he hovers on top of her, holding his own weight, just tilting his hips forward and in. His breathing is ragged and she latches on to his pleasure to work through her discomfort. He feels guilty for enjoying it while she struggles but she shushes him with a kiss and just like that, he’s in as far as their position allows.

Rey gasps into his open mouth. It doesn’t hurt so bad anymore. Something seems to have clicked there and they both need a moment to adjust. Kylo’s head falls on her shoulder and he pants, delirious.

“How,” he strains to speak, “how do you feel?”

“Alright, I think,” she whispers, “how do you feel?”

“Like I can’t breathe,” he answers hoarsely in complete sincerity, “like I haven’t… lived before.”

Rey gives her groin a little push up and against him, just to see how it feels to move in this new reality and draws in a sharp breath that is both his and hers. His mind goes blank and his teeth catch her shoulder biting down hard. Where there should be pain, she feels only wild, wicked lust well up and rush down to where they are joined and she bucks onto him again.

The initial pain slithers away, extinguished by her arousal and she turns her head to the side, nose bumping against his.

“Move,” she commands and, gods, he does.

He tries to go slow, really tries with all his might but it doesn’t last very long. She can feel him dangling off a cliff, hanging on by his teeth but then Kylo loses his head and Ben staggers forward, released and unhinged, craving, desperate for more. Faster, deeper, everything.
He thrusts, then pumps into her. There’s no great force behind it but the pace is too quick for her to follow, too much of him in too little time. She isn’t hurting but she isn’t reaching his level of exaltation either. Ben’s too far gone to reach. When she wants to tell him to slow down, so they can get a handle on what they’re doing, she feels some invisible tangle come apart and he explodes inside her, shaking and jerking with release as he spills into her. All the air leaves his lungs and his head is spinning. His body is shaking so violently that he can’t support himself anymore and he slumps down on top of her, his weight at first reassuring and then crushing.

“Ben,” she says when it gets hard to breathe. “Ben, you’re really heavy.”

He mumbles something she hopes is an apology and then rolls off of her without any ceremony, hitting the mattress beside her with a whomp. He breathes shallow, trying to get some oxygen back into his system as his hold on the world slowly returns.

In his head, the sensation of wholeness is an entirely alien concept and he embraces it with such a boyish joy it nearly kills her. He is so happy, it brings tears to her eyes - or his, she doesn’t know. Rey feels instantly horrible because she is so… hollow. No, not that. She is as swamped as she’s ever been but still she feels - what’s the word? Unsatisfied?

She’s felt more kissing him. Different, not quite as immediate but simply more.

Was that it now? This great forbidden, wonderful thing that supposedly changed lives? It hadn’t lasted very long, just two sweaty bodies clashing against each other and then it was already over. He’d felt something different but she can’t reach it, can’t make it hers. She doesn’t like this, she wants to feel altered, to feel like he does, as if the whole universe suddenly shifted into place. But it’s no use, every nudge at her own emotions makes her come down harder than the one before.

She only notices that the energy around them has changed when he sits up abruptly and she feels his glare piercing. Turning to him, she finds his face contorted into a grimace of hurt, embarrassment and discontent.

“You didn’t like it,” he says and she nearly jumps at the faint accusation in his voice.

She could snap now, actually she could bite his head off from where she lies but instead, she takes a deep breath and sits up. She is fully aware that he has just forgotten all the joy he felt and replaced it with anger at himself. Not at her, not really.

She can feel it like a dagger, how much he hates himself just when the full scope of her feelings hit him. She can hear him think it.
Stupid, stupid idiot. Of course you’re bad at this, selfish and distracted. If you could keep yourself together for one little thing but no, not even this. Useless, pathetic piece of—

She catches his hand in hers before he can ram it against his forehead and has to lean against his momentum with her whole weight.

“Stop,” she imposes, her voice like a whip, and makes him look at her.

“Let go of me,” he hisses like a cornered animal.

“No,” she tightens her grip on his arm, clutches him hard enough to leave a bruise, “don’t go there, don’t go to that place.”

“You hated it,” he repeats, thickly and humiliated. “You feel nothing.”

“That’s not true,” she retorts, “I just...I couldn’t catch on. I didn’t hate it, that’s ridiculous. I - It was just like you suddenly went on without me.”

Then, he just hits himself with his other hand so hard that Rey’s eyes start to swim.

“Would you just stop hitting yourself,” she grumbles and digs her fingernails into his skin.

“The pain helps me focus,” he says spitefully.

“Well, then I suggest you find a new strategy for that because you’re hurting me too,” she snaps and his arm gives way in her grip, the sudden loss of counterpressure making their limbs fall apart. She wants to shake him.

He is mentally gathering up his satchel to work himself into a full blown tantrum in some far off corner of his brain and she can feel his hands clutch the air where he yearns for his lightsaber. If only he could trash some more empty rooms.

Rey refuses to let him off that easy.

“Ben,” she tries and then, “Kylo!” Because Ben is no use to her like this. “Get a hold of yourself.”

She grabs him by the shoulder and when he tries to wiggle her away, she pushes her body off the mattress to bring her leg over his hips so she ends up straddling him. His pubic hair tickles her as it curls into her own and she tries to ignore the flash of newly sparked, somewhat distracting arousal which he is not echoing in the slightest. He’s as soft and out of shape as he feels.
“Stop being angry,” she tells him and he scoffs, thinking she has it easy. “And stop feeling sorry for yourself, it’s very unbecoming.”

He frowns at that, brow creasing deeper than it ever has before.

“Listen,” she says, relenting, and leans in to kiss the crinkle between his eyebrows, the one cut through by the scar she gave him. She kisses every wrinkle on his forehead until he can’t hold on to the frown anymore.

“I’m still here.” Then she pecks his unresponsive mouth, each corner of his lips and his cheeks for good measure. “I am right here.”

“I knew I would fuck this up,” he says, more to himself than to her and Rey flinches both at the curse and the raw vulnerability that breaks free from him. “I wanted it to be good for you, to be great. And I just…”

There’s an endearment forming in the back of her head, something silly like Baby or Honey, something the girls in the holo shows say but it feels weird to even think it, so she leaves it be.

“Who says we’re done?” She asks him. “Like I said, I’m still here. On top of you. Not running. Not going anywhere. We can try again.”

“I don’t think I can,” he mutters and he feels terribly inadequate; excruciatingly emasculated. He is miles away from being in any state to get hard.

“Just you wait,” Rey says then and wants him to catch the twinkle in her eye. She has never been one to step down from a challenge and when she has decided to take this night with him for herself and for forever, she was not thinking of just two minutes. She wants everything he has. And she’ll get it.

“Close your eyes,” she orders when she feels him ease a little into her touch. “Empty your mind. Deep breaths.”

He complies, albeit a little reluctant. Even so, she feels Kylo find his way back into his body with every meditative breath he takes under her guidance. Rey bends forward to whisper the rest of this into his ear.

“I want you,” she begins, “look, or take my word for it. I just wanted more there, I still do. Do you know how I felt when you first started moving? I went half crazy. Even before any of this, I’d go out of my mind every time you touched me. Back, when it wasn’t real. Do you know how many times I squirmed and had to untangle my panties because I wanted you there so badly? How many times I-”

She pauses, overcoming some great barrier in her head and blushing beside herself, just from testing out the words up there.
Her thought takes half a heartbeat to register and then it becomes a drop falling into still water and it hits the flat surface like a ton of bricks and causes ever-growing ripples. They flare out, take him over, unravel him anew. Rey isn’t sure yet if she likes this kind of crude, filthy speech but it resonates with him and she finds her instincts rewarded yet another time.

Her next move is to retract one arm from his shoulder and drag it down, across his sharp-edged body, past his pubic bone and his wiry curls and down until she finds skin tender to her touch, so soft she wants to weep.

He stirs to life under her fingers and she fondles around, kind of clumsy at first before she makes sense of what is what. He almost chokes and grunts out a strangled breath when she starts using both hands to give him all the physical attention she can offer.

Rey goes slow, teasing a bit, but mostly just giving him the time to find his way back to her. He smells wonderful, she notes, head still pressed against his hair. She starts nibbling at his earlobe because it’s just in reach.

Big-Ear Ben , the kids had used to call him when he was growing up. She remembers the taunts he replays in his dreams, the cruelty and wounds inflicted on him that never really healed and she kisses her way up and down the shell of it.

I love those big ears , she thinks and then he twitches in her hand as rekindled lust is joined by a rush of warmth and bliss so bright, it fills his end of their bond almost entirely.

Three, four more strokes up and down the whole size of him then and he’s titanium in her grip. He is straining for even breaths, trying to stay with her as she tugs at their bond.

There you go , she thinks. Just stay with me now.

He nods his head eagerly, as much as he can muster and when she aligns them, she smiles against his cheek and then lowers herself onto him, slick and so ready.

This time the pain is just a dull little thing she can easily ignore as this new angle touches something inside her she didn’t even know existed.

And she feels it now, like she hadn’t before. The Force .

It flurries all around them, like a current, pure and golden and he reaches out for her in it, body and
soul, and finds her alert. Kylo snaps back his head and they open their eyes to each other without a distinct cue.

“Oh,” she breathes when he pushes up and deeper into her. His eyes are light itself.

Chapter End Notes

Okay..I know this reads like a fade to black, but trust me, it isn't.

I just had to cut the chapter somewhere or it would've been absolutely ridiculous. :D
Reviews make me write faster and sustain my muse <3
Thank you all for reading!
Kylo lowers himself from his elbows to his back and Rey’s eyes fall shut enjoying how his hands run up and down her sides in no discernible pattern. Everything rumbles inside her, his touch causing ripples and setting off goosebumps across her whole body. Where they are connected, she feels a delicious sort of low drumming. It’s as if every bit of blood that flows through her touches up there until it flurries onward, rushing, pulsing life into her she hadn’t known was there.

“Open your eyes,” Kylo strains to speak and she knows he needs her eyes locked with his to keep it together.

The way she rocks against him in a slow, tantalising rhythm nearly obliterates his entire brain. She complies, though it’s hard and she is a bit reluctant. Her senses are overwhelmed just by the feel of him and adding sight into the mix seems almost like a distraction.

He is already piercing her with his gaze, fixating with an intensity that makes her skin burn and her cheeks flush red hot. His breath rolls low, deliberate and stubbornly controlled. He is trying so hard and Rey feels his struggle.

He digs his fingertips into her thighs, denting her flesh as he matches her rhythm and then applies more pressure to impose one of his own. He slows her down so she rises further up and slides further down, tilting her hips just so.

He gasps when she does and the sound races from his mouth to her toes. The feeling is excruciating but in a good way, like an unquenchable hunger for more that can never be satisfied. It’s encompassing and trying to sate it alone feels so, so good.

See the end of the chapter for more notes
“Yes,” she mutters while he loses himself in their movements, matching her every stroke and thrusting upward to meet her.

Their minds melt with their bodies, bond ringing with the Force and something entirely their own, something so intimate it opens up even more capacity to feel.

How? He asks dumbfounded into the whirl of tremors and thrills. He doesn’t specify his question, isn’t able to, but she has a pretty good idea what he means.

Rey leaves her own body for a moment and spreads into his. She can feel her own weight, feel how tight and hot she is wrapped around him. It makes his blood boil and she tries clenching and unclenching her muscles just to see if he can feel that.

“Fuck,” he shouts like a blaster bolt and grabs her by the bottom to pull her down harder on him, “do that again.”

She has to take hold of his shoulders to support herself so she can do as he bid, trying the same thing one more time and his hold on her grows only fiercer. She leans down, closing some of the distance between them, only rolling against him now, in and out, not up and down. Kylo stares up at her, mouth agape and when her body is in reach, catches her nipple with his tongue. He devotes as much of his attention as he can spare to kissing and nibbling at her, bringing up a hand to knead the breast he isn’t kissing.

Rey tries to stifle the sounds she’s making by half swallowing her lower lip, biting down hard on her flesh. Kylo is in her head, questioning the impulse, tugging at her, pushing into her mind to make her unlock her jaw and let them out.

I want to hear you, he thinks, softly, almost begging.

I want to hear you, she retorts before she moves up on him until his lips lose contact with her skin.

Rey bends again lower to kiss him, just to get his mouth open. Because Kylo has kept it shut tightly since they started over, clasped so tightly as if it was his very self-control. He groans, long and hard into her mouth before resuming the kiss, hungrier, wilder this time.

She moves faster on him when he brings his arms around her back. They are so long, they reach almost right around her tiny frame. His hands are quick, grabbing and releasing her flesh and his mouth falls from her face as she arches against him, neck exposed to his bites. She lets the noises she makes fall out now, freely. Little moans, staggered by hopeless panting, mumbles that could be words or merely variations on the one: Yes.
This is just what she meant. He is attentive, curious, drinking it all in while keeping a bit of himself in reign and alert enough to stay with her. In turn, she can let almost all of her inhibitions fly - the pain from earlier all but forgotten. She goes faster and feels his throat boom with low grunts and growls and he too, gets more verbal for every thrust they make.

Kylo can’t hang on to his arms anymore, they run across her back, down to her butt cheeks, up and down again, grabbing one then the other, pulling her onto him and against him frantically. 

*Faster,* he thinks, breathless. *Can you go faster?*

She can. He moans.

Then she goes overboard, rocks up too high and he slips out. Rey feels immediately empty, terribly hollow and wants him back, sooner than now. He complies, grabbing hold of his length, sticky with her and navigates it back inside. Her sinking down on him again makes him see stars and she feels his toes curl with it.

She picks up the pace, faster until they have to realign again, Rey gets more antsy with each slip. Kylo chuckles the third time, softly, drowsily.  

“You’re so *eager,*” he whispers and then it turns into a strangled groan when she’s on him again.

The bed is almost louder than they are, ages old wood straining under the weight and the strokes. It drowns out the bopping, smacking noises of skin hitting skin. Rey is glad for it because something about these noises makes her blush even with else everything they’re doing to each other. Kylo however, would like to hear them more, hear every single time her body slams against his. It’s another bit of proof that this is real.

Rey pushes herself away from him again, seeking the angle from earlier while keeping the fast pace they set. He can’t slip out of her, not like this and she leans back, hands closing around his calves so she can use the purchase. Her breathing is ragged and strained. It seems like she just can’t get enough oxygen to sustain her through all of this but she’ll continue and choke if she has to. This can never ever *end.*

Kylo, with room to roam, extends a hand and finds the place where their bodies meet, rests his palm on her pubic bone and lets his fingers wander. He finds the *spot* and puts gentle, ghostly pressure on it. Rey yelps at the touch and nearly comes undone on the spot.

“Wait,” he huffs, urgently and withdraws his hand. She hisses at that.

You *didn’t wait for me,* she challenges into the bond.
I know, he thinks, an apology ringing along with it, but I want to try just one thing.

Then he turns them around. They part as he holds her over his body, lifts her up and sits, gently nudging her to follow his lead. When she does, he makes her turn to all fours, so he kneels behind her and lets his long fingers run down her spine and palms her back down.

He pushes back into her without pomp or ceremony, swift and efficient and it’s yet another way she unravels, stretched around him. Funny how one simple motion that is essentially the same each time can feel so entirely different with each changing position.

Kylo doesn’t even attempt starting slow, he thrusts hard, deep and fast immediately. All that’s left for Rey to do is try to catch her breath and moan when she does.

He pounds into her but it’s different from before because this time, he is reaching out to her, mind nestling against hers to keep checking, keep building up on her responses. Once she remembers, just briefly, how nice his fingers felt at her core, they’re already there and she jerks down. He follows, bending his back over hers and his hot mouth lands on her shoulder. He curses now, then pants and curses again in succession and she twists her head to find his lips.

It’s all too much. Rey’s vision starts to white out at the edges and something starts low and promising in her back. It’s distant at first, like the low rumble of an earthquake far away or the sea withdrawing to gather steam before crushing against the shore in a giant wave.

This is it, she thinks and Kylo echoes it, pushes harder, twitches and half loses control of his limbs. He mirrors her every emotion, or becomes them himself. She loses the boundaries of their bodies with their tether gleaming and at once burst into flames. Kissing is not possible anymore and their lips flap apart, hang loose around open mouths.

Curses and panting. His insides coil in tightly, receding, while for her it feels like something deep inside her starts pulling at her very essence, starts jumping, flapping and twirling. It’s coming. And into this crashes the bright, white light of the Force, rolling in, taking them with it. Before she loses her mind she can feel Kylo so clearly, dangling at the edge of this light. He hesitates for just the briefest moment, finally embraces it and then he’s gone.

Their climax hits them in unison, propelled and mirrored, played back tenfold through their connection. Who knows which fragment of pleasure belongs to whom, this is both their doing. Or undoing. The result remains the same.

It’s like flying, falling, as if they were being ripped into fractures, down to molecules and crashed
back together, again and again. Rey thinks she might be dying. She doesn’t fight it. It would be nice
going out like this. At the height of everything. But Kylo is there, steady for once, a solid mind in a
solid body and even as he quivers around her, he holds her in place and keeps her from falling apart.
At the absolute peak, the thing which had been an explosion for him before now becomes an
eruption. With volcanic strength and fire, he jolts and she shivers and he pushes into her leisurely
until the last quake has turned into soft ripples.

When he pulls out, he does it softly, keeping his hands on her body, smoothing her pulsing skin and
lays down, pulling her with him. They come to lay side by side and they’re calmer than ever before,
even in deep meditation. Rey looks for him with her mind and finds him still buzzing, still drenched
in light. It’s the closest he has ever felt to undiluted, unchallenged goodness. She thinks he relishes
this even more than her.

She kisses the closest spot of him she can reach which might be his collarbone. Hanging on to her
calm, he lets her seep deeper into his head, tapping into her light, letting it mesh with his. Rey hums
along with their bond. They’re lying in a haze, softly contending windedness. Fighting that battle
together as well.

“How?” he huffs, once he is finally clear enough to revisit his earlier line of thought. “How does that
work? I felt like...like I was everywhere inside you at once and you in me, not just inside your body
but in everything. How is that possible?”

“I don’t know,” Rey replies, feeling very heavy and utterly weightless at the same time. “The bond?”

“Probably,” Kylo mutters, “Given that what I read about force bonds never touched on...physical
bonding of this magnitude.”

“But you see I was right,” Rey says because she is still her and she still wants him to know it.
“Trying again was a good idea.”

“The best you ever had,” he concedes.

“I’ve had some other decent ones along the way,” she quips and he smiles a wide smile that’s nearly
accompanied by a sound - which would make it a laugh technically and that would be a very, very
rare occurrence. Rey looks for it inside him, curious, and finds that he can’t remember how it feels to
really laugh with a light heart - from joy or a joke, not pain and resignation - and hardly how it
sounded when he used to laugh out loud.

Kylo plucks her out of this corner of his mind then.

“I don’t do sadness right now,” he mutters, closing his eyes and she can feel him reach for her light
again, holding on to his own with the fervour of a lioness protecting her cubs. “Talk about how right
you were about the sex again.”
“I was right about the sex,” she says and watches his fingers dance out lazy circles on her belly, the ghostly touch in stark contrast to the very immediate experience of his seed trickling out of her. In a funny notion, she thinks to stop it, keep it there - as a reminder - but that might be silly. Kylo swallows hard at the thought and if he wasn’t so entirely spent, it would be enough to get him hard again.

“Talk. Be a smart-ass,” he nearly begs of her, his cock so sensitive even to this faint stirring he feels that she suffers the strain along with him. “Don’t think, I’m going to die if you keep thinking stuff like that.”

“You were being a whiny baby,” she says because it’s the most obnoxious situation she can think of to call back to. It’s entirely for his benefit because she isn’t mad about it anymore and yawns into the next sentence. “And you completely overreacted.”

“I do that sometimes,” he says flatly.

“I’ve noticed.” Rey can barely form the words over her tired grin. “But you have to admit it, practice and repetition are-”

“- important lessons in and of themselves.” He finishes her sentence, the old lecture given by their Jedi master resounding in their heads.

“Exactly,” she nods faintly.

“Rey,” Kylo’s voice is soft, murmuring.

“Hm?” She closes her eyes.

“Please don’t talk about Master Luke in bed ever again.” With this, he sits up again, crouches forward and collects his robe from the floor to drape it across their bodies as Rey mumbles a quiet consent to his request.

He gathers her in his arms and she drapes a leg over his. When he kisses the top of her head caught under his chin, Rey has already drifted to sleep.

They sleep peacefully, without fully shaped dreams. The only thing that stays with them all night is togetherness and belonging. It’s just as present when they wake.

It takes Kylo a little longer. Among other things because for the first time, there was no trace of darkness in his night. Rey doesn’t have the heart to cut this short even as she lies awake beside him. Her mouth is bone dry and she fishes for the backpack where it lies discarded beside the bed. Kylo must’ve gotten the spare blankets from it when she was already asleep. They’re twisted and draped
all over them.

She’ll brush her teeth later. For now, she makes do with a little capsule to clear out the taste of sleep and is glad that she doesn’t have to leave the warmth of the bed.

She has no idea how long they slept. Kylo has left only two candles burning and the rest of the windowless room gives no indication of time of day or night. She doesn’t care. She doesn’t want the day. It would mean the end of their night together and she is decidedly not ready for that. All she’s ready for is to turn to her side and watch him sleep.

Although she could have overestimated herself with this plan.

It almost hurts to look at him, the way he lies there. His open face is even and soft in his dreams. He looks young and rested, a little caked with dried sweat and strands of hair sticking to his forehead but all the more endearing for it. After straining for a good minute, Rey succumbs to the temptation of tucking them behind his big ear, retracing the trail her fingers made after multiple times until his brow creases under her touch.

He becomes more aware, slowly waking up, and frowns in an unconscious fight for continued sleep. Rey would let him win but she simply can’t and lets the wandering hand fall from his face to his chest, going under the blanket, over sleepy heat and down to his hips. She stays below the navel but above everything else, waiting patiently for his head to catch up with his body’s reactions. He grumbles and life flashes into their bond at the same time as the blanket begins to tent. Rey shifts on him to reach for the spare morning capsule she’s put on the far end of the bed and pops it into his mouth when he barely has his eyes open and seals it with a kiss on his shut, sensual lips.

“Good morning,” he says, chewing, and she can’t make out the colour of his eyes in the dim light.

“No,” she declares, “no morning. It’s still night.”

Recognition flickers across his drowsy face and he nods before his attention flutters downward where her hand starts moving towards.

His cock twitches up to meet her, as if this was already second nature. And Rey loves touching him there, loves the soft skin and the way his eyes roll back into his head whenever she gently runs her thumb over the tip of him and the little sigh that escapes him everytime, without fail.

Her own arousal piques when he grows harder and she has an idea that sends an electric current through Kylo’s entire body. She frees him from the blankets as quickly as she can and climbs lithely between his legs, keeping her hands and eyes on him the whole time.
Then she settles in and he looks at her at once puzzled and curious but also wicked and craving.

Yes, he hisses into her head and she lowers her upper body, one hand still wrapped around his length when she wets her lips and bends to kiss him there.

Something at the back of his eyes flares up when she does and his lips part to make way for an “oh” so delicate, she wants to hear nothing else for the rest of her life. At first she licks the top, then the sides of it. She tries to nibble it too but feels the sharp and poignant pain before Kylo can even say a thing and knows that teeth are something to keep as far away as possible, given the circumstances. So when she hollows her cheeks, she is careful to tuck them under lips before taking him into her mouth.

Initially, Kylo thinks he dies. Then, when he finds that he is still very much alive, he is torn between letting his head fall back and his mind into obliteration or pushing his upper body off the mattress to watch whatever she is doing to him. She’s wide eyed and searches for his responses both in his mind and on his face. He goes back and forth but always lingers longer on her face, trying to commit everything immediately to memory. He never wants to forget this for whatever is left of his sorry life.

He curses harsher than ever when Rey takes a deep breath and takes the whole length of him into her mouth, deeper, until it hits the back of her throat and she breathes through her gag reflex. The constrictions of this nearly send Kylo staggering over the edge and he grabs her long undone hair, away from there, up and up and tastes himself on her tongue when they kiss.

Before Rey gets a chance to recover from the wet, hot trail of kisses he plants everywhere he can reach, every single one a gleaming thank you, he already has her on her back, legs spread wide for him and pays her back in kind.

Now it’s Rey’s turn to curse. He kisses her, licks her out as if she was a piece of delicious candy you only got once or twice in your life and she feels like she can touch the stars. She finds him searing through their connection, revelling in how much pleasure he can give her and it spurs him to fantastical speed and virtuosity. He plays her like an instrument, tugs at her strings, making her sing.

And then, when she can barely take it anymore, he sits up, hoists her right leg over his right shoulder and slides into her heat. They’re faster this time, both too wound up for a drawn out, slow affair. Some time before they both come undone, she feels him measure his strokes as best as he can and she huffs at him.

“You don’t need to hold back,” she struggles to say, “I won’t break.”

“But I might,” he says and fucks her harder anyway.
This goes on for a while, the two of them resting, then working each other up and on again and they refine forms, figure out the best places to touch each other, catalogue favorite sounds and how to elicit which reactions. Rey devotes a bit of her time just testing out angles while Kylo devotes time to kissing every bit of her flesh he can reach.

It could be hours or years but when they collapse on each other yet another time, Rey, sated but not even close to satisfied, takes a deep breath and then lies down on his chest, arms folded under her chin and gently scratches him with her nails.

“Tell me something about you,” she says, “something I don’t know.”

This cues something to life in him, a huge feeling, like that wave that swept them away, like Force that buzzes and their bond resounds with it. It’s coming rolling in and just when it’s almost a tangible thing, a very short but very profound sentence which culminates everything that has happened between them, Rey blocks it.

“Not that,” she says because she can not bear to hear it, can not bear to hear it and know it and go on from there or move on from it, she simply can’t. “Something I don’t know.”

Kylo isn’t surprised that she won’t let him say it, won’t even let him think it but he is still somewhat sad. He needs to say it eventually and he believes that she knows it but he can wait. He has waited all his life for it, what’s a bit more time in the great scope of things?

So he answers: “I’m really bad at maths.”

“What?” Rey nearly spits.

“Big numbers overwhelm me,” he says. “My brain short-circuits. That’s the only thing Hux has ever been better at than me and you’d think he jerks himself off to it every night.”

“You also have a filthy mouth, I didn’t know that before,” she notes, recalling the very many, many uttered curses throughout the night, adding them to the most recent one.

“Only with you,” he says and smiles. “Now you. Tell me something I don’t know.”

“Uh, okay,” she starts, shifting her weight on his so she has one hand free to twist and tangle through his mess of black waves. “When I was a kid, some time after I came to Jakku, I had an imaginary friend and - gods, this will sound so strange but - I guess since we’ve crashed here, you’ve reminded me a bit of him. When you smile...you feel like him if that makes any sense at all. It’s silly, I know but I just, I keep thinking about him.”

Kylo swallows and when he speaks, he speaks with a lump in his throat: “Not silly at all. Tell me
She smiles at him and something twists his features. More candles are alight now and so she can see it flash across his face and then sees only skin as he draws her in, wraps her up like this blanket-mirage she’s just told him about and the big wave hits without either of them being able to stop it.

“I love you,” he whispers, barely louder than their heartbeat and Rey freezes.

_It’s okay_, he thinks through her convoluted tangle of a brain. _You don’t need to say or do anything. I just needed to tell you_.

When she finds nothing probing or pressuring inside him, just like he said, she relaxes against him. Somewhere, in the back of her mind, she is fully aware of the fact that of course she loves him too but she hasn’t quite caught up with this knowledge yet. Rey disentangles herself from him, because now that he said it, maybe she can try making him realize what it _means_.

“How does that fall into the shape of things?” she asks him evenly, hoping that it won’t set him off. This is, after all their utmost touchy subject. “Are you even allowed to love someone?”

Kylo just laughs bitterly and there is Ben too, who has been remarkably quiet for the longest time. He’s full of distaste bordering on disgust when Kylo answers.

“Of course not,” he says. “Love is weakness. Lust is fine if you can manage it but it’s preferable to steer entirely clear of any _entanglements_. If Snoke looked very hard and found this particular emotion inside me, he’d be very cross.”

Rey flinches with what she knows from his memory Snoke being _cross_ with someone entails. It isn’t pretty.

“Come back with me,” she tries once more.

“No,” he says but his entire being is wavering, weighed down by the sheer capacity of what he feels for her, what lengths he would go to for her.

Rey thinks it would take just a little more convincing, just a little more of what they’d done for however long they’ve been holed up in here but he catches her hand right as it starts its familiar downward trail.

“If we have sex one more time within next three hours, it will fall off,” he says dryly. “Of course I could take care of your insatiable needs otherwise but that’s not what you want to have sex for.”
It’s a statement not a question because he is fully aware of her antics.

“You can’t fuck me over to the Light side,” he says.

“I don’t necessarily want you on the Light side,” she retorts. “I want you on my side.”

“Well, like I said, give me three hours and I’ll make it happen,” he deadpans and Rey laughs, beside herself.

Then she stops, sits upright and stares at him just when she realises what just happened.

“Did you just,” she starts and she feels something bubble up inside her, “did you just make a stupid sex pun?”

Kylo sits up too and shrugs nonchalantly: “Well, if you have to ask…”

And Rey bursts.

The laughter starts low in her belly, and then comes out in a loud and ridiculous snort. Once she started she can not stop and it’s so weird and so good to be laughing again. She feels like it’s been ages of sadness, of turmoil and then pain and pleasure and yearning, weak and exalted smiles but she hasn’t laughed in forever. He’s funny. Who would’ve thought?

Then everything spirals out of control because suddenly he laughs. Or giggles more like. His voice gets an entirely unfamiliar tint, rises several octaves and turns to silk, catches in his throat and then in his nose. She looks at him and tries to listen to this strange new, wonderful sound but she can’t hear it between her own snorts and chuckles and tries to stifle them behind her hands. They keep coming. She wants to see him too, see that laugh she has doubted was even possible on that face but her eyes turn to slits and she can’t study it like she wants to. They’re laughing about each other now, shaking with these new feelings, this new information.

By all the gods, they’ve studied each other inside and out so thoroughly these endless past hours but they had never laughed together. And he is beautiful at it, she thinks. His big mouth is made for laughing, splitting his face and he has dimples. Dimples. Deep and pronounced and amazing. His eyes swim as he tries to catch his breath and Rey’s laughter dies in her lungs with a bang.

There’s no air. She tries to find it again but comes up gasping. For a wild, terrible second she thinks he might be doing this but he has barely registered how the universe suddenly shifted. She can’t breathe, her face contorts as she gasps, gulps for air, desperate like a fish on land. Then he notices and his features fall back into their default frown.

“Rey,” he asks her, grabbing her by the shoulder as she hyperventilates. “Rey, what’s wrong?”
Quickly and without any effort at all anymore, he slips into her head and oddly enough, his presence brings order to the chaos. The truth that had sat waiting in the very back of her head has come loose with their laughter and she manages to catch a breath and takes it right back to him. They’re on their knees, sitting up and he isn’t surprised by the kiss because he has felt it coming. Still, her momentum makes him have to readjust his weight to keep from falling.

She kisses him like a madwoman and she’s dimly aware that sometime between the laughter, the nearly dying and the last refuge found wrapped around him, she has started crying. She has never in her life felt as unstable as she does in precisely this moment.

Kylo’s face is soft, his lips patient and enduring and she clutches his face until she can’t feel her own anymore. Their heads boom, it’s louder than anything she could’ve ever said to him.

I love you, I love you, I love you.

There it is. And it’ll never go away. Kylo has somewhat shut down, unable to contend with what her declaration does to him and her body folding around his at the same time. Thus, he choses the thing he has more experience with. He kisses her until her manic tugging and pulling at his back ceases and she slumps against him, exhausted. Her forehead falls on his shoulder and he lets his big hands soothe over her back in slow, deliberate strokes.

“Thank you,” he whispers and she laughs with a broken little sound.

“I was not prepared for that,” she says, embarrassed, and wiggles out of his hold to sink back down and crosses her legs. He studies her face, leaving her to deal in peace in her head.

“I don’t think I was either,” he huffs with a little exasperated laugh and scoots to lean on the headboard. He passes her one of the wayward blankets before she even notices the chill.

Rey’s head works a thousand miles a minute. She’s known this, if she’s honest. She’s loved him likely a lot longer than she realises even now. But the implications are greater than she has room to navigate. She could have gone down that path of accepting his decisions of not defecting, of going back to Snoke and the First Order if only he loved her. But as it is, now she’s admitted to him as well as herself that she loves him just the same, she can’t accept this anymore. He feels her fervor before she says a thing and his walls snap back into place, head shaking a weak plea to relent. If that’s possible, he hates it more than she does.

“I can’t come back with you,” he repeats and by now it sounds stale and old.

“Then don’t,” she says, “you don’t have to come with me to the rebels, you can just...leave Snoke. Hide somewhere. Luke has been holed up at some throwaway planet for decades and no one’s found
him, not even you and Snoke.”

Rey gets a little more animated because this could actually work: “What’s to say that he could find you? You could even stay here, away from it all or switch planets every now and then. We can get a secret comm so I’ll know how to find you.”

“I’m not just gonna hide out on some outer rim outpost like a coward,” he says gravely, hurt pride mingling with the tantalizing allure of what she’s proposing. And then he remembers. “And Snoke knows where I am anyway.”

“What?” Her voice catches, too loud and too high for their little refuge.

“Well, I had to take my leave before I came to find you,” Kylo says, defensively, “and he sensed it had something to do with you so I didn’t bother lying. I was also angry with you at the time.”

“What, so you sold me out?” She scurries away from him.

“No,” he reaches, hand and mind, “I told him I received a tip that you were off on your own somewhere in this system and I was going to bring you in. I wouldn’t have gone through with it either.”

“Oh, of course you would have,” she puffs but there is no real anger behind it because he’s changed so much since that confrontation on her ship, it’s hardly fathomable that it’s only maybe about three days past. “Or you would’ve tried.”

He doesn’t say anything.

“Fine then,” she continues because this doesn’t have to be a major problem. “Let him think I killed you. Leave Wayland and start somewhere new.”

“He knows that I’m not dead,” Kylo shoots her down.

“Why, is he up there too?” She scoffs, gesturing vaguely at his head but he doesn’t dismiss her entirely.

“He knows many things about me, Rey, he would know from the disturbance in the force if I died,” he tells her quietly. “He can’t just come and go as he pleases like you do, but I told you he probes on occasion and even if he never got any specifics about you or us, he knows that we have a connection. He knew I had compassion for you before I even admitted it to myself and he has thought to use it to bring you in. To find Luke or just to have you; your potential.”

“I guess that plan backfired then,” Rey says, almost a little smug. “But how can you still want to get back to him?”

“I don’t,” he says, “but I don’t want to run with my tail between my legs either. If you would come with me, that’d be a different thing…”

He lets the suggestion hang there and Rey’s head waves with it. *Come with him?*
“As in run away together?”

“As in run away together, yes,” he says and the way he does, it doesn’t sound so outrageous at all.

“But the Resistance,” she mutters, “Finn and Poe, General Organa...I can’t just desert them.”

“Please, Rey,” he beseeches, taking her hand in both of his, the idea taking shape in his head, “You could just quit, leave this battlefield they appointed you to. Be safe somewhere, live a full life. With me. We can start over together.”

For the first time, Rey experiences the excruciating pain of being pulled into two different directions first-hand and not just from his perspective. She is positively torn between two now impossible realities. Either return to her old life without him, watching him go back to living not even half a life with the threat of exposure always on both their heads or leave and let her friends down and the galaxy potentially in the hands of Snoke and the First Order. Her head and heart are pulling at the opposite sides and Rey wishes she could just stay in this room, in this bubble with him, forever. He is right with her in this.

She wants to tell him that she doesn’t know, that she needs a little more time, a little more him, to get his mouth on her body until the world makes sense again. But when she opens her lips to speak, his face falls apart and he starts upright. She’s been distracted, caught up in her own mind but as soon as he trembles beside her, she looks through him and feels it.

It’s a voice in his head, murmuring, cold and depthless.

*Kylo Ren*, it says, *Hux is on his way to collect you. I expect the girl to be in your possession.*

Rey gasps in horror. “I heard that,” she exclaims. “I thought he couldn’t get into your head!”

“He can’t,” Kylo says, distracted, a sheen of nervous, cold sweat covering his forehead, “This is just his way of passing orders, it’s the same thing Master Luke does sometimes. He talks at you, not with you.”

“Where is he?” She can’t breathe, fear clutching at her throat as Kylo springs into action, gathering his clothes and dressing in record time. She is left shivering, still naked in her blanket.

“Not here,” Kylo says, temporarily muffled by the robe he throws around his frame, “if he were here, he’d be much louder but Snoke never leaves his temple.”

Kylo halts and looks at her, his face filled with anguish, love and yearning. She can see herself through his eyes, scrawny and disheveled, marks of his teeth and lips on her body, red and raw around the mouth from beard burn and he half topples over with how much he wants to keep her just
like this, just as safe and sound. Forever and ever.

“Come on,” he says and it causes him physical pain, “get dressed, we have to get you away.”

“What? Me?” She gets out of the bed, onto her feet, blanket falling to the floor. He looks only at her face. “We’re going together, I can find us something that flies in here.”

“No,” he shakes his head, “there is no time. No matter what Snoke knows or suspects, he won’t give me room to react. We have to get you out of here and fast. If you can get to the shuttle, the force barrier should hold. But you have to leave now. Please, Rey, get dressed.”

“I won’t let you do this,” she argues, unmoving and Kylo closes the distance between them to kiss her hard on the mouth, dark fabric pressing against naked flesh.

“There’s no time to argue,” he says after he has pried his lips away. “We have to act now. Rey, trust me, it’s the only way I can help you. You have to run. I can give you a headstart from here.”

The urgency in his head makes her climb back into her clothes and boots and as soon as she is done, Kylo puts the backpack on her and swishes the door open. They run with their lightsabers ignited to light the way. In the hangar, Kylo grabs her by the wrists in an after-thought.

“Slash my side with your lightsaber,” he says when she spins to face him.

“What?” She is breathless and incredulous.

“Right here,” he points to his left flank, “try not to kill me.”

“Why?” she all but screams at him.

“Because it’ll be more believable when I tell them you got away,” he says as if that was completely obvious.

“No,” she says, the thought alone is monstrous.

“Rey,” he presses, “we don’t have time for your morals right now. Hit me and run!”

She feels her saber in her hand while he holds his out, drenching his body in red, flickering light.

You have to, he says into her head.

Before Rey does anything else, she gathers his head in her hands and kisses his lips. This could as well be the very last time she gets to and she will not leave without it.
He’s warm and welcoming, his lips full and inviting but beneath it there is the desperation of someone drowning in their intensity. This kiss is air and there will never be enough.

He is still running his tongue over hers when he thinks: *Run, let me go. Do it now, Rey.*

They break apart and she steps away from him, getting into a fighting stance beside herself. Kylo raises his arms.

*Do it.* He beckons, still dizzy with her. *Not too much force, aim right. Just graze me - but deep enough to bleed, it has to look real.*

And she slashes. Watching as if she stands outside herself, she sees the deep gash she burns through his clothes and sees the half second before the blood gushes out and Kylo sinks to his knees, palming the long cut. It goes from his left hip bone all the way up his left side to his armpit. The pain is excruciating but he keeps as much as he can to himself as to not slow her down.

“Stay here, I’ll come for you,” he says under his running breath and it sounds like a ghost from a long forgotten past.

*Run,* he beckons, filling her head with his white, hot love and then gives her a push through the Force with his free, outstretched arm.

Trying to see through the tears springing to her eyes, she makes for the corridor, running and running until the the door comes into view. She pries it open with both hands extending and leaves it ajar, broken from her force. It’s the middle of the day, with a low hanging sun pushing up the humidity and temperatures to a near unbearable level and it’s like a slap in the face after the chilly cavernous tech facility.

Rey darts into the edge of the woods and onward, trying to recall the way back to the shuttle. She taps into the Force to find it and readjusts her course to the right. She looks for Kylo while trying not to trip over roots and foliage. But he has shut her out in an attempt to shield her from the searing pain from the wound he made her inflict on him.

She runs and runs and runs until she hears footsteps behind her, trampling, too close. Then, half in a lunge, her body freezes in mid air and Kylo is back in her head.

*Play along,* he says, *I’m so sorry.*

It takes a breathless, torturous minute before her hunting party has caught up with her and she doesn’t fight the bonds Kylo has placed around her. She could wedge out of them but it’s no use.
She knows that he is keeping her immobilized so Hux has no justification to have a Stormtrooper shoot her. The ginger is the first one to emerge from the trees, a squad of troopers left of him and others undoubtedly circling them. Kylo comes up behind him, to the right, his right arm still pushing down on the oozing wound while the left one keeps the hold on her tightly.

“It will never cease to amuse me how this scrawny thing keeps besting you, Ren,” he quips void of humor and then turns to one of the storm troopers. “Get her.”

“I’ll do it,” Kylo says grimly and steps away from the group towards her. He blocks them out from view for a brief moment that he catches her eyes, panic and apology swimming there.

*I’ll figure this out*, he promises them both and then Rey’s system shuts down, mind going blank and body collapsing into his arms as he makes her faint.

Rey isn’t awake, she can’t reach into herself and she can’t feel her body. But the part of her consciousness that is merged with his at all times follows him as he carries her, bleeding and straining under the muscles tensing to hold her upright.

He won’t let anybody touch her. Let them think whatever they want. If anyone tries to take her away, he will crush their windpipes one way or the other and blame it on his temper.

He’s failed, miserably, and now he has to find a way to keep her safe. They’re bringing them directly to Snoke. In the flesh, in his devastated Sith temple from which he intends to rule the galaxy. Stupid pirates and their loose tongues, he knew he should have killed them both when on her ship. He can feel Snoke thinking at him, probing even from afar about what he’s been doing on Rey’s ship instead of bringing her in. They’re in for a world of pain if he can’t figure out a way out of this.

He can’t bare the thought of her getting hurt, it’s almost too much to hold on to his wits and secrets. She lies in his lap, unmoving, chest heaving and sinking in her induced sleep. Her mind is still. He will protect her if it’s the last thing he does.

For the first time he feels no pull from either the Light or the Dark, everything that is tethering him is her. Everything he wants to belong to is this woman. She has changed everything and there’s such a sick irony in this. That just in the moment his life finally has meaning, finally makes sense; the first time in thirty-one dismal years that he isn’t being torn apart but instead so sure where he stands, the universe tries to take it away from him instantly. He’ll be damned if he lets this happen. He’ll unhinge the worlds, he’ll kill Snoke, destroy the First Order, throw the whole galaxy into chaos, he doesn’t care. No harm will come to her while he still draws a breath.

*Think, Kylo*, the little voice urges, its terror bordering on insanity gnaws at his self-control. *Think of anything.*

*I am* trying, *Ben*. He snaps back at himself.
So...from here on out, things won't be quite so mushy. So buckle in, maybe read the fluffy bits again and then bring on the horror :)

Chapter End Notes
If I'm Forgotten You'll Remember Me For Today

Chapter Summary

Enter Snoke.
He knows things about Rey that Kylo would rather he didn't.

Chapter Notes

Hello my lovelies! So, I didn't get to edit the rest of the chapters yet but that will happen definitely!
Another thing is that I promised "updates" for this weekend and this is only one singular update. I'm sorry. But this chapter kind of put up a bit of a fight and it's a mind-effing 11K, so I hope you understand and forgive me maybe.
My wonderful beta vicious-rhythm is still awesome and deserves all the praise (and also helped me naming this chapter) and my room mate Vici still gets my love for kicking my ass.
And all you readers are totally amazing and make me work so much faster and keep up the stakes to do good and do better. Your comments and kudos give me life and love and strength. <3

Rey wakes in a room, not remembering anything past the time Kylo stopped holding her, and she tries to frantically scan her mind for anything crucial she might have missed. She comes up empty and turns her head instead, trying to figure out where she is.

A quick scan of her surroundings tells her three things. One: She isn’t in that forsaken interrogation chair that Kylo had once hoped could contain her, so that’s something. Two: The room she is being held in is equipped with nothing more than the cot she lies on, a surveillance camera in the upper right corner and is painted a particular shade of grey she would name ‘desolation’. Three: She is unhurt as far as she can tell and possesses full control of her body and brain.

This realisation brings about the next logical step. She reaches out, her mind finding its way to Kylo’s quickly but she finds him immediately actively shutting her out. A dark presence looms over him that she can feel from where she is and she quickly darts out of his head. He is with Snoke and the terror he’s in still pounds in the back of her head as she groggily sits up. She allows herself a few heartbeats of panic.

The feeling is cognitive as much as it’s physical. Her situation is the absolute worst outcome of the
last couple of days, one that she couldn’t even have imagined. She is in her enemy’s lair, trapped and
at some creature’s mercy who isn’t even capable of such a thing from all she knows of him. Her
lungs feel tight and her stomach turns the way it does just before you throw up. And Kylo, gods,
Kylo is with him right now, completely alone. What is he telling him? Does he have a plan? What if
he can’t deceive Snoke? *What if that monster kills him?*

Her heart coils into a knot and she wants to lie back down again, her chest bubbling with searing
anxiety. Kylo could suffer an agonising death at Snoke's hand any moment and it’s enough to make
her fear become an avalanche, threatening to bury her. She has to focus, to think. To survive.

*Deep breaths*, she tells herself, *in through the nose, out of the mouth.*

She wills herself back to a calm place, clearing her mind, trying to connect to the Force. The Light is
feeble here, Dark Side persisting but right now, she isn’t picky. The sinister energy licks at her
wounds, every single one ever sustained, but she has clear, strong and good memories from the last
two days that keep her hold on herself secure and unwavering. The way the darkness tugs at her
feels almost like Kylo had, before everything. She can handle it.

Carefully shielding her mind from any other overly aware Force user, she taps into the static energy,
letting it flow through her veins to find a resilient calm, an almost spiteful level-headedness without
which she will be doomed. She needs to be collected and prepared. When Kylo tells her his plan -
and he will survive this audience with Snoke, has to survive it - she needs to be ready. She recalls
everything he ever shared with her about his dark master, consciously or not.

Rey brings Kylo’s lessons back to mind, the hiding places, the directory. She needs a peaceful place,
somewhere the shadows can’t touch her. And in a callback to his own fortress, she now has that
candlelit room with the grey bed and their bodies entwined in a blissful tangle that already feels years
old.

She goes from there, finds her secrets and his and puts them away, careful not to miss anything. His
laugh goes there, the way his eyes crinkle when he smiles. How it feels when he moves inside her
and how he sounds when he reaches release. All the ways she loves all of this gets its very own
space. It feels almost wrong to ponder any of it in this *place* is and she is careful not to linger. Loving
him here is dangerous. Doing anything here is dangerous.

When she is done compartmentalising, keeping her emotions furthest away from her practical,
tactical thought process, she sits and waits. It’s all she can do. Around her, she can feel the energy of
maybe a good hundred people flurrying about. Dark auras, some entirely vacant, as if any real,
human inklings have left them years ago, and throning above all is Snoke. She has only ever felt his
presence through Kylo’s thoughts and memories but it’s so encompassing here, she would probably
know even without the recognition. His energy is evil like nothing she has never felt. It’s neither
vindictive nor sadistic, it’s just pure, undiluted indulgence of the Dark Side. She recoils from it but
there is no refuge. His ruthlessness is like an undercurrent, flowing along in the air. She instantly
knows that he has been here for decades, possibly longer. His aura constantly seeping in and through
the very fabric of the compound, throwing it back at whoever walks around this place.

Then it somehow lessens and she feel her own lungs fill with the breath Kylo takes. He has made it
out. Rey has to try her hardest not to sigh in relief. Even the emotion itself is whisked away quicker
than it can bloom. She slips into him, more careful now, trying to not leave a trace. His nerves are
raw but there is defiance in what he is feeling too.

*I’m coming to you*, he murmurs, whispering from head to head which seems silly but also widely
appropriate.

*What happened?* she asks him.

*No time to explain*, he replies curtly. *I told him I think I can get you to switch sides. That’s the story.
The two pirates that got away blabbed. He knew I was on your ship not even trying to fight you and
so I told him I almost convinced you to join the Dark Side before Hux came and ruined everything.*

*Did he believe you?* she asks, terrified and unsure how exactly his plan will unfold. If there is a plan
at all.

*I have no idea*, he says, fear pulsing hotly in his veins. *He sent me to you to finish it. I’m to either
convert you or kill you. I trust you know what I need you to do.*

*Put up a fight*, she says because he is right, she does know exactly what she has to do.

*And lose*, he finishes. *It could get ugly.*

*I am fully prepared for ugly.*

As tentatively as she can, she sends him a little nudge of affection, a reassurance and blind hope.

*We need to make it believable*, he tells her, working hard to remain unaffected by her gesture. *I don’t
mean anything I’m going to say to you in there.*

*I know*. She bites her lip to keep it from quivering.

Rey can sense him getting closer, the energy that is so distinctly *his* radiates off of him like a tracking
signal. She is not startled when the heavy door whooshes open but does tremble and rise from her cot
when she sees the almost forgotten, cold mask on his face.

Maybe it’s better this way, not to see his face when they play out whatever he thinks will sell best for
the camera.

“What do you want from me?” she says when he approaches her with weighty steps and she staggers
backward, towards the end of the room.
“You know what I want,” his voice is soft even beneath all the mechanic modulation his mask adds. But it carries a dark and dangerous tint.

Kylo lifts his hand and Rey freezes again. Yet, his hold on her is lax, more a suggestion than a bind, one she could step out of with only so much effort.

*Act like you’re struggling*, he thinks her way, *like I’m trying to get in your head.*

Rey complies, starts tensing and jerking. He strengthens his grip on her so she has something real to resist. It feels good, like she can actually do something and not just play pretend to a faceless, undoubtedly hostile audience.

*I took over your ship and attempted to interrogate you about Luke’s whereabouts*, he tells her. *You wouldn’t give him up. So I tried something else.*

His imagination flashes before their mind’s eyes; Rey resisting him in a duel fought in their heads, then him attacking with a different sort of skill set. She supposes it makes as much sense as anything that he would try to seduce her. The fantasy is so pronounced that she quickly realises it has at one point been a *plan*. He flinches inside at her puzzling this out, embarrassed.

Rey withstands the urge to comfort him and frowns instead; *It’s not like I don’t know you.*

*I*, he swallows under the mask, she can feel his adams apple rise and fall with it. *I nearly had you but then we were attacked. You crash landed us, then ran away from me.*

Rey jerks in his grip and stares daggers at him, following his bullshit version of their time on Wayland. In it, Rey found the tech facility, hid out until he got to her. Then a fight in the stock room and him getting the better of her. By the end, he had her pinned against a corridor wall — she doesn’t miss that he is staying pointedly clear of the real room where it happened — and fucked her wild and raw, selfishly. It’s a dark fantasy, tinted with delusions of possession and dominance. Kylo tries to stifle any stirrings it awakes in him, ashamed of what the imagery does to his blood, even with his brain fully aware that it isn’t at all what he’d wanted to do to her.

Rey only has half a mind for his struggle because her own body catches fire at the mental sight. This could have happened, Gods know she would’ve tried to fight it but she isn’t kidding herself into believing that this exact unraveling of their time together was completely in the realm of fiction. This registers with Kylo and his grip falls from her unbidden. He looses a bit of himself every time she accepts another little bit of his twisted personality.

*Kylo*, she warns, imploring him to keep up appearances but he doesn’t move and instead unclasps his mask. It hisses loose and he takes it off with one hand to throw it across the room. It falls heavily with a metallic *bang*. His long face is shaven clean again, dark circles underneath his eyes, but it’s still the same man who had pledged his life to her en route to wherever she had been taken.
I'm here, he replies reassuringly, past the tumult in his lower abdomen and the flurry in his brain to match. Then he speaks, tightly and ragged.

“You’re yearning for this,” he states with meticulously calculated wickedness in his voice, “I can see it in your head. You’ve felt it, the Dark Side, felt what it can do to you, how it elevates you.”

Rey shakes her head, half in play-pretend, half because she can feel the darkness gnawing at her right now, strengthening her with help of her blind fear. She tries to fight it but at the same time, she feeds off of this unfamiliar power.

“Join me,” Kylo whispers and takes a step forward, releasing her body so she can tumble the last few steps backward until her back hits the cold wall and his palms connect to the concrete. He has pinned her in place, so close she can feel his breath hot on her skin.

“Come to the Dark Side with me, you’ll be more powerful than you ever dreamed. And you’ll be mine.”

“Never,” she whispers, more to the twists and licks of darksider Force charring the edges of her self-control than for the benefit of their little scene. Kylo’s eyes catch hers as he feels the real strain and softens ever so slightly.

You’ll be fine, he thinks tenderly and then snaps right back into his hungry, sinister persona, so fast it gives her whiplash.

“Stop lying to yourself,” he bellows and it’s like a punch to the gut. “I can feel your heartbeat through your shirt.”

He looks down at her, while his breathing accelerates and then, with no warning, he retracts one hand from the wall and shoves it into her pants, finding her heat, pushing two fingers into her folds. Rey gasps at his gloved touch, the leather feeling foreign and alien.

“You’re soaking wet,” he grunts in triumph.

I’m so sorry, he thinks simultaneously. Rey twists her head toward the camera and shakes her head.

“No,” she mutters while she searches his eyes, trying to think clearly past reluctance, humiliation, utter trust and the fire he’s igniting.

I can stop, he says into her mind and his fingers haven’t even started moving, but it felt like something I would’ve done.

Rey takes a deep breath, deciding, tries to make it look overwhelmed, taken aback by the lust coursing through her and then bucks her hips against his hand.

Be obnoxious about it, she orders him.
“That’s what I thought,” he snickers and starts moving his fingers, circling, then dipping in and out and the sounds she makes in response are real. His own arousal straining his pants is real too.

This is so messed up, Rey thinks, mortified at how unaffected her lust is by the terrifying and downright perverse circumstances. Kylo buries his head in her neck and bites down on her pulse point, making her shiver. He touches her the way she would touch herself, letting her memories guide him, applying what he learnt over the last few days and it resonates so thoroughly within her, she half forgets where they are. She moans, beside herself, catching her lips between her teeth right after and he goes on. Until he doesn’t.

He ceases all movement and it makes her head snap forward from where it had been rolling against the wall. She was so close, is so close.

“Say you want me,” he compels her, leaning out to watch her face while he withholds her climax. She presses her lips together, forehead still frowning with ache for him.

“Say that you want me,” he repeats with more fervour. She pretends that admitting it comes hard to her.

“I want you,” her voice is low, growling.

“Do you feel the Dark Side,” he asks her huskily and lets his thumb flick over her drenched, puffy flesh.

“I feel it,” she breathes.

“Do you feel its power? Feel it inside you?” Another flick, and his index and middle finger pushing up deeper into her. Another shiver rushing up and down her spine and the coil in her belly grows ever thicker. “I can give it all to you, and more.”

“Yes,” she mutters, unraveling and something inside her uninges.

“Do you want it?” His mind remains steady but a part of him has offered himself up to the fiery, consuming depths of all hells ever invented and his voice rings with it, desperate and a little insane.

“Yes,” she says and she has no idea what is the truth and what is a lie anymore.

Then come for me, love, he thinks and it’s all for her.

He moves once more, microscopically, sending a harsh pang of his own churning desire along and she falls apart around his hand. It’s the only thing that keeps her from drifting into space as her orgasm tears into her soul.
She comes down hard after he withdraws his hand. The black leather is smeared with her, sticky and clinging and her scent fills the room. It’s enough to distract Kylo from the tears that run down her cheek at first. Once he’s thrown his gloves on the ground and looks back at her, he notices immediately though and his hand flies to cup her jaw on its own.

“Rey?” he says quietly and her eyes bulging panicky at the intimacy and care in his voice throw him back into reality.

*I forgot who I am*, she thinks, explaining her reaction and masks it as defeat.

*Me too*, he answers her blankly but then runs his bare thumb over her cheekbone, supplying her with hope all his own, *but we’ll be fine.*

“You’re mine now,” he says louder, aiming to match whoever he was before. “I’ll show you the ways of the Force, I’ll make you so much stronger, so much better than you were. You’ll be a good girl for me, won’t you?”

Rey nods up at him, trying to seem as young and impressionable as she can. It’s a nice touch he’s thought of there. Turn the deliberate choice they played out into susceptibleness, into her falling prey to his wicked game. Take away her agency. Let them think she is his marionette, undone by his seduction. If it works, they won’t see her coming when she pounces.

And almost right on cue, Snoke’s voice booms in Kylo’s head and Rey thanks her quick reflexes that she doesn’t jump at it, giving away that she can hear him just as clearly as Kylo can through their connection.

*Well done, my apprentice*, the creature acknowledges but there is no sincere appraisal behind it. *Clean the girl up and bring her to me.*

“Supreme Leader Snoke wishes to speak to you,” he informs her for the sake of the camera and grabs her by the arm.

*Do you think he bought it?* She asks as he leads her outside, neglecting his gloves and carrying the helmet under his arm. The holding cell opens into a stoney, chilly corridor that seems positively ancient.

*I don’t know*, he says, *his heart keeping time with their quick footsteps.*

Kylo escorts her down a bunch of hallways and stairs. This place is so different from Starkiller base. Save for the doors and the interior of the few rooms she can peek into, it feels really old, like Maz’s
castle before the First Order destroyed it. Some walls have crumbled and have been replaced with flat concrete and it mashes the times together, juxtaposes the old, black boulders.

*It’s an ancient Sith temple*, Kylo provides, leading her around the corner and then he halts. Rey hears footsteps, behind or in front of them, she isn’t sure. Kylo waits until they’ve completely disappeared.

*Knights of Ren*, he says, *I’d rather not they see you like this*.

*How many are there?* Rey asks when he presses on.

*Around 40 that have completed training, ten in the highest ranks*, he replies and the temple seems to drag on and on.

*And you at the top*, she states.

*Yes, and about a hundred in earlier stages of training.*

*150 people.* Rey sighs. *That’s a lot.*

*You’re thinking of escaping*, he says needlessly. *That’s not gonna happen.*

*Why?* She looks up at him, wide-eyed. Of course it is, they can’t stay here.

*Wait ‘til we’re inside*, he cautions and nudges her around another long corridor. At the very end of it, there’s a door and from the way Kylo’s steps quicken, she knows it’s his.

*You’re awfully out of the way*, she notes as he punches in a code and the door opens swiftly.

“I prefer the solitude,” he says when the door closes behind him, simply because he can speak aloud again. His room is dark, as everything else is. His bed has no headboard, it’s just a mattress on a pedestal. Small bedside tables stand on either side and the rest of the room is spartan at best. There is an oblong viewer over it, revealing a scarce, desert landscape and a sky full of stars. Apart from this view, Kylo possesses nothing but a dresser, an even more scarcely equipped ‘fresher and a desk with a chair. Even his sheets are black. Rey half snorts at that.

*“Standard issue,”* Kylo tells her with a shrug and his tone is so light and familiar, the hairs on her neck stand up.

“Can he hear us?” She grabs him by the arm alarmedly.

“No,” he shakes his head. “Private quarters don’t have surveillance.”

“I mean, can he hear us?” She taps her head with her fingers, unsure if Snoke’s proximity elevates his mental capacities.

“When given the chance, he will look for the memory,” Kylo concedes, “but if we hide it well, he won’t find it. Like I said, he can’t just invade into our minds as he pleases. He can talk at us, like Master Luke can but to be able to hear you talk back or go through your memories, he needs physical contact.”
“You can do that with me though,” Rey tilts her head in question. “You never needed to touch me for it.”

“Why do you think he made me First Knight of Ren?” Kylo asks her, taking her hand and pulling her into the room to sit down on the bed. “Why do you think he needs me to interrogate people?”

“Because he isn’t good at it.” She stares at him in wonder. It would make so much sense.

“He is good at it,” Kylo says, “but he can’t do it from a distance. He thinks I don’t know because he can get at emotions from afar and is very good at guessing. But now I know how it feels when someone goes through my thoughts when they aren’t touching me...I know he can’t do it without it.”

“We can work with that,” Rey says and Kylo nods, padding the space beside him.

“We’re gonna have to,” he says, “we need to keep our emotions in check and don’t give him reasons to question them. When he sees us, he will look, he will probably touch us. We need to be prepared for that.”

“I already sorted through my secrets,” she sits down beside him, telling him things he already knows. It’s nice to though, normal and mundane, considering what they’d done earlier, under gods knows whose eyes.

“Let me see,” Kylo mutters and digs through her head, the way he had when they were training. It takes him longer than ever but he finds her directory, smiling at what it is.

“Good,” he says, pleased.

“But you found it,” she says, cursing herself. She should have done better.

“I know where to look,” he says, squeezing her fingers, “he won’t. He’ll look for the Resistance, for the Light. He might even look for lust but he won’t think to look for love. He can’t fathom that. Keep it there. It’s safer there than anywhere else.”

Rey has an inkling that he is relying on exactly the same strategy. “So that’s the plan then? Convince him I switched sides?”

“And keep up the facade,” he says and she can feel Ben strain against this inside him. Ben wants to run, right now or tonight at the latest, but Kylo knows too much to relent his own plan to this. “He’ll keep us for a while, to make sure you’re really one of us. Eventually, he’ll send us on a mission somewhere and from there, we can disappear.”

“How long will we have to stay here?” She asks but already knows she won’t like the answer. She can tell from how the part of him that is Ben squirms underneath his skin.

“I don’t know,” Kylo answers, “but it could be a long time.”

“Are we talking days or weeks?”

“We’re talking months,” he says, and his eyes flicker away from hers. “Or possibly years.”
“Years?” She lets go of him and jumps to her feet. “I can’t stay here for years. I’ll die here.”

“That’s why we have to be believable,” he says and rises too, towering over her again, “You have to be believable.”

She is about to argue with him, about how she can’t, how she doesn’t know how to, when a timid knock on his door dissipates her trail of thought.

“Who is that?” she asks him instead, at once a bundle of nerves.

He waits for a second to dig for missed commands and comes up with nothing. So he walks over and opens the door with his hand on the hilt of his lightsaber, ready to block whoever might try to get past him at Rey.

But before Kylo Ren stands and beeps nothing more than a service droid with a pack of neatly folded robes for Rey and a new, clean set of gloves for him. He takes the pile from the droid and it rolls away, leaving them alone once more as the door whooshes shut.

“Ah,” Rey breathes relieved, “the costume for the mummer’s farce.”

He holds the garments out to her and she catches his eyes. He would apologise a thousand times now, she knows, but it’s no use. If this is what she has to do, she’ll do it.

“I’m taking a shower,” she announces and takes the clothes with her.

For fifteen glorious minutes all she feels is the pitter patter of water on her skin and when she steps out of the shower, she holds on to this feeling from drying her hair and putting it back into her three signature buns and dressing in the black robes that have been provided for her.

They are a slightly lighter and more feminine version of Kylo’s and the other knights of Ren’s robes. Tight black leggings in heavy black boots beneath an undershirt with a high collar and layered fabric running down the length of her arms, a thicker tunic going down to her mid-thighs, taken in by a belt wide at her waist and parting just below where her thighs meet. There is a robe-slash-cloak such as the one Kylo wears but she neglects that, already feeling uncomfortably restricted by the clothing.

She steps out, feeling very unlike herself and Kylo gasps when he sees her. A very old fantasy of his has taken shape in front of him and he has to sit down from how strongly he feels about this now. It’s a clear-cut, obvious conflict. On one hand, a deep, hidden part of him relishes in this dark vision of her but on the other, this is not Rey. It’s not real and he knows it. She scowls at him.

“It’s so scratchy,” she complains. “No wonder you’re pissed off all the time.”
He laughs, low but definite and grasps for the gallows humour she supplies. He reaches out for her and pulls her onto him, sitting down, straddling his lap.

“He wants to see us as soon as you’re ready,” he tells her. “Are you ready?”

“No,” she says and kisses him, for love and for strength, “but I’ll never be.”

She somehow manages to push both their anxious panic down enough so they can breathe deep, undisturbed and bracing themselves.

“Let’s do this,” she mutters and climbs down, pulling him by the hand to the door until it opens and she drops the physical connection.

The air around them is stale and unmoving. Kylo marches forward, stifling his fear with every thudding step. He wants her hand, she can feel that very distinctly but he knows it’s unwise. He is rearranging his headspace, still reeling with his earlier appeal before Snoke. Rey is sufficiently engaged with just trying for even breaths. She feels somewhat well prepared, her mind tightly locked and beneath, well sorted. She thinks she can do this. She doesn’t really have a choice but to.

Snoke’s presence grows with every step, like an inflating balloon and she knows they are getting close. One more staircase, downward, always down and another corner turned and there it is. A huge portal, larger than life and heavily ornamented. It could be steel or very dark wood, it’s massive and heavy. Still, as they approach it opens without so much as a crack. Kylo sends her a wave of grim defiance and she clenches her fists. He goes in first, her half a step behind and the door falls shut behind them.

Snoke inhabits a little chapel with high ceilings and no windows. There is dim light giving shapes to the darkness but it doesn’t seem to emit from anywhere definite. Rey has to blink several times before her eyes adjust to the gloom and there he is. A stunted little creature on a stony lonesome throne. It’s elevated, high up an almost ridiculous flight of stairs and she has to look up to make out his small figure. He could as well be a fleeting shadow, clad in simple black robes and boney, skinny, almost frail. Somehow, it does nothing to make the terrifying aura surrounding him even a fraction less intimidating.

“Approach,” the figure orders and the two of them comply.

“Supreme Leader Snoke,” Kylo says, looking up at him in sickening obedience. “Excuse the delay.”

“So you are the girl I have heard so much about,” Snoke says, his low, rumbling voice making her hair stand up involuntarily. He does not give Kylo a second glance and turns his full attention on her.

She feels him dart into her mind immediately. He is searching but it feels more like skimming. She can almost retrace his steps, follow which emotions he looks for, finds and then moves on to the next. He has expected the fear, the irritation, even her defiance. What surprises him is her satisfaction. He starts at that and she feels very accomplished because the emotion is entirely
fabricated on her part. She just wished it into existence, trying to be the girl Kylo created. The one that cut her ties to the Resistance, to the entire Light Side of the Force to become a darksider. A girl who yearned for more power and a companion in it and got both.

Snoko pulls back, if not entirely. He devotes a bit of his attention to monitoring her reactions through what follows.

“Speak, child,” he calls to her. “What do you wish of me?”

What an odd question, she thinks. One she does not immediately have an answer to, so she ponders this as he stalks around her consciousness like a blood-lusty animal.

“Guidance, Supreme Leader,” she says with Kylo supplying the words. “I wish to become Kylo Ren’s student.”

“His student?” Snoke raises an eyebrow and seems almost amused. “Very well. Kylo Ren.”

He turns his gaze back on his apprentice and Rey feels him tense up. “Do you think you will be able to train this savage girl? She does have a magnificent handle on the Force, does she not?”

“Yes, my lord,” he answers flatly and Snoke is already bored with him.

“Pray tell,” he rasps toward Rey, “what persuaded you to our cause after all this time, child? Was it mere human weakness? Did he tell you all the little nothings you wanted to hear?”

And then Rey hears his cold, depthless voice in her own ear, aimed only at her and piercing like a dagger. The intent is clear enough. He doesn’t believe them yet, suspects a plot, feels Kylo changed and suspects something between them as the cause. Should his suspicions be correct, he wants to put a wedge between them.

*He seduced you, made promises. Has he spoken of love? Are you sure he was not acting on my orders this whole time, silly girl?*

Snoke stirs up doubt in her, in spite of everything she knows. It’s ugly distrust that feels like it’s not really hers but it bores into her soul none the less. Could that be? Could the whole thing on Wayland and even before that have been nothing more than a sinister plan to get her here — get her to submit to the Dark Side while she believed she was fighting it? Did Kylo lie to her his whole time?

*Don’t let him get to you, Kylo’s voice is very quiet and very distant. You know I didn’t do this. He is trying to rattle you. Just play along.*

“No,” Snoke says when his taunting doesn’t elicit a palpable reaction, “that couldn’t have been
enough to sway you, such a good little girl, so light and bright. Was it promises of a greater power, then?"

Rey tries to feel something strong; exhilaration and ambition and a dash of guilt for good measure. He seems pleased with what he finds in her. But he is not done.

“Or did my apprentice tell you his hero’s tale about how he saved your life when you were but knee high, weak and pathetic as the act itself was?”

The surprise and instant curiosity he feels emanating from her is completely genuine.

*I saw to it that he was punished for this disobedience, even if years too late*. Snoke is back talking at her mind, he thinks it has more effect like that. *Your lover is only here with us now because I forgave the childish folly of his inconvenient attachment towards you.*

“Maybe it wasn’t so stupid to preserve you after all,” Snoke feigns contemplation when she pushes back against him, wanting just a little wiggle room to make sense of what he is saying. “You have turned out quite impressive.”

*What is he talking about?* she asks Kylo, trying to withstand Snoke’s pushing back at the same time. *Rey, I…* Kylo tries to raise his walls up but she is having none of it.

*What does he mean? You saved me when I was little?!* Kylo doesn’t answer and then Snoke speaks again, an evil twinkle in his eye piercing through the twilight.

“I do not blame you for your susceptibility in the face of that, child,” Snoke speaks evenly. “It is endearing how he spared you from my righteous wrath and let you get away the day Luke Skywalker’s ridiculous Jedi Academy was turned into rubble. It’s a debt to repay to be sure.”

Rey doesn’t understand a word of what he’s saying but she can’t let him see it, can’t let her emotions out of her tight grasp. Kylo is a tense ball of stress beside her and that upsets her even more.

“It’s truly a pity your parents weren’t as lucky as you,” Snoke plows on. “It was not for lack of trying on Kylo Ren’s part.”

Rey has a hard time keeping her cool. Between trying to figure out what in the galaxy Snoke is talking about, what Kylo’s deal is and how she can keep up her collected appearances, she half loses
her balance at the mention of her parents.

Nobody knows about her parents, *musrn’t know*.

They’d told her: “Rey, no one can know who you are. Don’t tell them your name. Keep your head down and don’t leave here, whatever you do. We’ll get you as soon as it’s safe”

She had cried her little heart out.

“Stay here, sweetheart,” her father had said, “I’ll come back for you.”

“Your father’s demise left only Luke to contend with, the last Jedi after Dune Brightstar turned into stardust,” Snoke says and Rey’s heart stops at the mention of that name. It’s been so long since she’s heard it said out loud. And then there’s the other thing.

*Jedi,* she thinks. If Luke is the last, it means her father was one too. The concept is mind boggling. How can she not remember that? She remembers her father, her mother, remembers their embraces, their encouraging words but she can’t recall lightsabers or talk of the Force. She’s spent her life believing the Jedi where nothing but a myth — but here she is despite all of that.

“Now his legacy lies on your shoulders,” Snoke says, gauging her reactions. Rey doesn’t know how, but she pulls herself together, reaching for the flat cold calm of the Force.

Snoke watches this, feels the ripple in her energy and she feels his almost merry curiosity. He wants to pick her apart just to see how she works. Visibly reluctant to concede even the slightest focus on her, he turns to Kylo, who freezes again.

“I’m sure your namesake is turning in his grave to see his granddaughter pledging her allegiance to Old Lord Snoke,” he says tentatively, his scarred eyebrows raised in something very shy of mockery and turns his attention back to Rey once more.

“He wouldn’t have understood how you were swayed by something as fickle as passion. He wasn’t big on dealing with the outcomes of it. Your father could have told you.”

The allusions to something she should be aware of gnaw at her patience and nerves. It’s humiliating that she doesn’t know what he means, infuriating that she forgot, that nobody told her. And what does Kylo have to do with her grandfather? His name sure as hells wasn’t Kylo, or was it? For kriff’s sake, she can’t even remember that.

*Deep breaths,* she tells herself. *In through the nose, out of the mouth.*
“Young as you were,” Snoke continues relentlessly, “you probably barely remember your father, such a scrawny, little thing when they left you. Kylo Ren knew him better. Let him tell you more about it now that you have found in him your new teacher.” Snoke smiles, contemplates this with the dramatic air of an old cantina actor, perfect with a pondering finger tapping at his broken chin. “Some things do keep coming around, do they not?”

*Is that true?* Rey asks Kylo who remains completely silent. *You knew my father? You knew me?*

He doesn’t respond, doesn’t give her any indication he heard her at all. She turns her head to him feels Snoke revel in her reaction, his animation is dangerous, threatening in its wickedness. It’s so different from Kylo attempting and failing to *enjoy* the pain of others. For Snoke it’s sincere. She has to bite the inside of her mouth to subdue her raging emotions.

*Kylo!* She practically screams, frustration wallowing out of her despite her best efforts.

*I'm sorry*, finally. It’s more of a feeling than a sentence.

“Forgive me,” Snoke rips Rey away from her mute, brooding boy. “I must bore you, rehashing all these ancient anecdotes. I fear the nostalgia comes with old age. Kylo Ren has told you of your shared past, has he not?”

Instead of screaming the way she wants to, she reaches for the Force, wills it to calm her down. She needs to focus on the task at hand. Whatever Kylo and she need to get into, it’s something to get worked up over later.

“Yes,” she bites out. “Of course he told me.”

Snoke studies her face along with her emotions and finds her closed off. He pushes but she doesn’t budge. And then, instead of lashing out, he does something far more terrifying. He smiles at her.

“Yes, little Brightstar,” he says, “I think we are going to have a splendid time trying to unravel you. You may go.”

Rey doesn’t need to be told twice. She spins on her heel and walks, not even pausing for Kylo. He stays several paces behind her the entire way back to his room. He only comes close again to punch in the code and follows her inside.

After the door closes there is no sound but their breathing for a very long time. Rey tries to find a beginning to everything she has to say. Kylo is edging in on her mind but she keeps him out. She’s trying to make sense of all she has heard but fails to. Snoke did not lie about her parents, she can tell from Kylo’s reaction and she doubts he would bother. Still, he didn’t give her quite enough to go on to puzzle it all out. Oddly enough, she isn’t half as devastated as she’d have expected to be, she is mainly...*confused.* And scorchingly mad at Kylo. These two emotions battle inside her mercilessly.
She wants to know everything he knows, everything about her father and him being a Jedi, everything about Kylo supposedly saving her the day the academy got destroyed, everything Snoke alluded to.

But then again, she also wants to blindly rip out his throat with her teeth and tear him limb from limb for the secrets he kept from her. In spite of everything they've been through, despite their time on Wayland where they gave each other all they had. But not this! This he kept from her.

_How dare he, how could he?_ How many of her dreams of being reunited with her family has he looked in on, how many times has he been quietly listening when she gazed out into space and wondered where they were and why they never came back for her. He knew all of this, knew how huge the hole in her life and the hole in her soul was and he'd had the answers all along. And never told her.

That settles the score in favor of being angry at Kylo. It's not so much his past actions than his current betrayal that stings so sharply. It's enough to make her clench her fists in a feeble attempt to reign in her temper hard enough to draw blood.

“You,” Kylo starts, awkwardly, now that he's become too antsy to wait for her to say something any longer. He is fully aware that he is kicking off an avalanche. “You did well in there.”

“HA!” She barks, “Only because I learned from the best.”

“Rey,” he is trying to defuse a bomb that has already exploded.

“How _could_ you?” She pounces on him, fist hammering on his chest and twisting into his robe.

“Rey, I…,” he says, not even trying to fight her, he just holds her by the shoulders and lets her hit him.

“You knew!” Another punch, harder than before. “You knew what happened to my family this whole time and you just lied to me, every day! And then turn around and say you _love_ me!”

“I do,” and only now does he grab her by the wrists and bows down to look her square in the eye, “And I didn’t lie. I never lied to you.”

“Lying by omission is still lying,” she half spits in his face. How can he not understand this? He has seen her loneliness, seen how much she’s missed her family every day, how much all she ever wanted was to belong somewhere and he’d still let her go on believing there was a chance to see her parents again.

“I was just doing what -” he starts and then stops. “It was better for you, not knowing. Which was your wise Master Luke’s idea, by the way.”

“Well, it wasn’t his call either,” Rey bites and shakes his hands off of hers. “I am sick and tired of everybody making decisions for me, I’m not a child.” She paces the length of the room, nerves fraying and heart pounding in righteous anger. “You should have told me. After _everything_ we’ve been through! And I fall in love with you like a stupid… and you’ve been watching me running around, making a fool of myself still believing, still _hoping_ they were out there somewhere. But they were dead, the whole time. How could you not tell me?”
“I didn’t know how,” he says as if that cleared up the whole thing.

_That’s not nearly good enough,_ she thinks because spoken words seem too easy for him to dodge. 
_Tell me the truth!

“Because I didn’t want you to know,” he all but yells back at her.

“Why?” Rey stares at him, wide eyed. Her frustration spreads through her whole body, through her legs that spring into a fighting stance all the way to her tensing arms, gesturing wildly at him.

“At first, when I realised it was you,” he says. “I just, didn’t care anymore, couldn’t care. Then, when Snoke found out, he wanted me to hold on to it and use it at an opportune time and … _after_, I couldn’t bare the thought of you knowing that it was me who killed your family.”

“Snoke killed my family,” she says but Kylo shakes his head weakly. She watches him walk the room, from the door to his bed, and sink down on it as if he carried the weight of the galaxy on his shoulders.

“He would never have gotten to them at all if it wasn’t for me, he would never have known about you until you were old enough to properly train,” he says into the space between them. “Everyone there died because of me, I killed half of them myself. If I hadn’t turned, none of it would’ve happened. I took everything from you.”

A bitter laugh breaks free from her throat because he is so, so wrong.

“No, not _everything_,” she says. “You left me with my life. Just nothing else beyond that.”

He cringes under her scrutiny but takes it, his head high and eyes locked on hers. She won’t scan their connection, doesn’t want to know about him being sorry, doesn’t want to know how it kills him to see her like this, to know it’s his doing in part. He’s going to have to take it.

“You knew, you knew there was a little girl on a giant piece of shit planet waiting and waiting and waiting for a family that was obliterated,” she closes the distance with heavy steps, stopping just an arm’s length away. “Fourteen years! Fourteen years all by myself. With no one to sing me to sleep, no one to wish me a Happy Birthday, no one who even cared to ask me when my birthday was.”

She wants to shake him but she can’t move, her voice catching with the memories. So much time on her own with no one who cared. The only people that talked to her wanted something of her, scraps or portions, her labour or her help. No one had ever offered anything in return.

“And I forgot,” she says and she can’t stop the tears brimming in her eyes, “I think it’s in summer but I’m not sure. _I don’t even remember my own birthday._”
At first she had known, counting the days but after a while, she had missed some days and then a week once when she was sick and thought she would die all alone in that ATAT. After that, she stopped keeping track of the year passing.

By the time she understood that the numbers and letters at Nima outpost indicated the standard time, she’d already forgotten the date. Sometimes on a very sunny day, when enough time seemed to have passed, she would line up her most prized possessions; the little doll she had fashioned out of scraps and the old pilot helmet and a couple of other little playthings, and pretended they were her family. And she’d eat her portion and pretend it was a cake her mother baked.

She hits her forehead with the palm of her head to keep from crying, to get herself together. It’s no use crying now, it’s all over and done with.

“In the fifth month,” Kylo mutters and reaches out for her hand. She doesn’t withdraw it. “On the thirtieth day. That was summertime on Yavin 4.”

He draws circles on her skin, pulling until she budges and sits beside him. She can’t stop crying. And it’s not just her birthday anymore. It’s everything, the whole dismal affair. She wants to go home and the worst thing about this is that she doesn’t even know where home is anymore. Maybe Jakku. Go back to the start and never find BB-8, never go with Finn. Never meet Kylo.

“We came to see you, Uncle Luke and I,” Kylo says, trying to reach her with his body and his mind, “a day after you were born. You were tiny. You looked so frail and I held out my pinky finger for you to hold and you turned out to have quite the grip. You didn’t have a single hair on your head. And huge eyes. You look exactly like your mother when you laugh.”

“You have to tell me everything,” she mutters, looking up from their hands.

“Rey,” he tilts his head, reluctant.

“No,” she says, adamant. “I need you to tell me. You have to. Tell me exactly what happened to them, what happened to me.”

Kylo lets go of her and scoots up on the bed, higher until he can lie down. She can feel his exhaustion mirror her own. Rey watches him and is torn between staying at the edge of the bed, angry at him and keeping him at a distance, and joining him. She shouldn’t even feel the impulse to but she should just give up trying to puzzle out how she keeps wanting him despite everything he is and does.

“What did Snoke mean about my grandfather?” she asks, deciding on the compromise of lying down but at the edge of his bed. “I know my grandfather’s name wasn’t Kylo .”

“No, it was Ben,” he says and she feels the sigh of relief he holds in. If she hasn’t run yet, maybe she won’t after all. “You’ve never met your grandfather though. He died long before you were born. When they talked about him they only called him Old Ben, because I was Little Ben… I was named after him. Always had to live up to it, good Old Ben. Before, they’d called him Obi Wan.”
“Kenobi?” Rey turns to her side, wide-eyed. He can’t be serious. “The Obi Wan Kenobi?”

“Yes,” Kylo says merely, as if this isn’t the most outrageous thing she’s ever heard.

“He’s my grandfathe r?” She can’t believe it, she almost wants to hit him. “Shut the front door!”

“Do you want to know about him?” Kylo shifts so that he is lying on his side too, propped up on an elbow. He wants her to say yes.

“No,” she says. “I mean, later. Start at the beginning.”

He wishes he didn’t have to. Rey knows it’s because the past hurts him whenever he thinks about it. It’s a world he destroyed, one he’ll never get back and whatever part she and her family have played in it, is one of the worst to recall.

“What do you remember?” He asks her, opting to start with her, not with him.

“My name is Reyna Brightstar,” she says and it feels good to say it out loud. Two years of being Just Rey made her past seem even more distant, her own grip on who she’d been even more fleeting. She repeats everything she knows about herself, like she had as a child when she was afraid she would forget, like she forgot her birthday. “My parents are Dune and Anjali. I was born in the summer and I liked to dance.”

Kylo smiles at that, it’s the saddest one she’s seen on him yet. It’s at least two thirds Ben.

“You liked to fight,” he corrects her, “with practice sticks. It always looked like dancing though.”

“I was at the academy?” She asks him and gets just a little bit closer. To hear him better.

“I’ll just,” he starts, “tell you from the beginning.”

Kylo moves from his side to his back and stares at the ceiling and then he talks, very likely longer than ever before in his life. It seems like parts of this story were taken right out of Luke’s mouth, as if he had told him this as a boy, again and again.

“Your father grew up on Tatooine with his mother. She was a nomad. She wanted Old Ben to join her tribe but he was very dedicated to keeping watch over Luke growing up so he didn’t. Dune was five years old when our grandfathers met one last time in battle.

After Endor, Luke found Obi Wan’s journals and learned about a seven year old boy somewhere on Tatooine who was Obi Wan’s son and strong with the Force. By the time he was nine, Luke had finally found him and made him his very first Padawan. Considering that he himself had little to no actual training, they kind of developed their own curriculum. Meditation, practice and repetition. That awful hovering blaster-ball and the blindfold. Running around with a backpack full of bricks.”

“The one-handed handstand,” Rey throws in, already enthralled and still hardly believing that her father had been a Jedi.
“All of it,” Kylo nods, “and Dune had a knack for all of it. He was growing up to be a calm man, wise beyond his years and him and Luke turned from Master and Padawan to Master and Right Hand Man. They started building the New Jedi Academy together, right next to the rubble of the old one on Yavin 4. He met your mother there and they had their bonding ceremony a month later. I started my training with Master Luke when I turned nine but most of my schooling was done by Master Dune. He taught me the mind tricks, taught me about the directory, the fortress, everything I taught you. He called me his prodigy sometimes, before I knew what it meant. He was the only adult who ever said I was going to do great things. Well, until Snoke came around. When I was ten, a couple months after I started training, Dune and his wife had a baby, a tiny, tiny thing. I’d never seen a human so small before. I held you, just for a minute but you fit on my forearm entirely, you were so little. Until you weren’t.

Master Dune would bring you over sometimes and each time you were a little bit bigger. Then you crawled, then walked and then you started babbling and never stopped again.”

“I don’t remember any of this,” Rey says sadly and realizes that she’s closer to him yet, close enough to feel his body heat warm her in the chill of his empty room. “I remember my father but I don’t remember you, or the academy.”

“You weren’t even supposed to be at the academy, not that early anyway.” Kylo says and she feels how badly he wants to touch her, to wrap her in his arms and make it better but it seems weird to him because it’s all his fault in the first place. “You were too young by a whole year but you’d already started letting things fly and Dune wanted to channel a bit of your strength. He brought you to my lessons and had us compete at Force levitation. One day, you actually got his lightsaber faster than me.”

He thinks about them going head to head for the first time in the snowy woods of Starkiller Base. Of how he had known it was really her once her father’s lightsaber had answered her call just as it had so many years ago.

“But it was Luke’s lightsaber,” Rey asks, perplexed.

“Only until Dune started training,” Kylo says. “Luke did not want to wield it anymore after all the harm it had done. He thought it was better kept in the hands of a Kenobi.”

“How did it end up with Maz Kanata?” Rey asks, trying to reconstruct the long ways her weapon had traveled to find its way from her father’s hands into hers.

“Luke,” Kylo says and then pauses, speaking on with a lump in his throat. “He hid out with her for a while after …”

Ben writhes with reluctance to go on. Kylo would like to dissipate. This is the part of the story he doesn’t want to tell her.
“I know who you are,” she says and finally touches him again, running outstretched fingers through his hair lightly. “I know what you did. I am still here.”

He sighs, pained, unable to fathom how she can be this calm in the face of what he’s done, unable to navigate the guilt he hasn’t allowed to come to the surface for so many years. Ben is crying and bleeding inside him, thrashing about with self-loathing and all Kylo can do is try not to crumble under it all. Rey’s hand is like a cold compress, soothing the fire within. When he goes on, Ben tells the story.

“I had been instructed to lower the shields and let in the older Knights of Ren past midnight. We would strike together at multiple sites and then burn the academy to the ground. Everything went according to plan. Until you appeared in the corridor. You were supposed to be away with your mother, I’d believed you were gone until I saw you there and I panicked. You were running toward me, startled and scared from the noise and you half knocked me out and -”

He stops, swallowing hard, attempts to go on but can’t. Rey moves in closer, puts her head on his chest and pushes gently into his mind, finding the memory fresh and cutting.

The little girl that looks like her lands in his arms. They are less defined, less strong than today but they hold her all the same.

“Benny, what’s happening?” she asks him and Rey knows that her little-self trusts this lanky, big-eared boy with her life.

“It’s…” he begins but can not give her a satisfactory answer. “I'll take care of it, okay?”

And then he dips into the next room and stuffs the little girl in a closet.

“Stay here, I’ll come back for you.” And then he leaves her, running through the academy that’s already burning to find Dune and Anjali rushing through the halls looking for their daughter.

“Ben,” Master Dune exclaims when they see him, “What’s going on? The great hall is on fire!”

“There’s no time,” Ben says meekly. “Come on, I know where Rey is, you have to go.”

The three of them run and run until Dune crashes into the closet Ben has put her in and sweeps her into his arms.

“Hurry,” Ben says, looking over his shoulder like a madman, “you need to leave.”

“We’re taking you with us,” Anjali says to him and Ben nods because he can’t think of anything else to do.

“Just hurry,” he says. He should be with his fellow knights, proving his allegiance to Snoke, help destroy the archaic, self-indulgent Jedi order for ever. Instead he needs to get stupid Rey out of harm’s way who wasn’t even supposed to be here in the first place.
Dune’s ship is in a side hangar, off from the main one as it’s mostly used for training exercises. Ben can see the end of it, see the ship already clear out before his mind’s eye, they’re almost at the hatch but then -

“Ben,” Master Luke’s voice is urgent and grave enough that Ben is sure he knows this is his doing. He turns to the voice and ignites the lightsaber he built himself. It’s a little rough but he didn’t have enough time to properly polish it. He needs to make some modifications to the hilt because the crystal that powers the thing is a little unstable. Just like him, he’d thought, and that’s why he wants to keep it as it is. It sizzles at his side, red and dangerous.

He is dimly aware of Anjali freezing behind him and Dune coming up short, saying his name in shock.


“I’m not holding them,” he says, incredulous. He knows Snoke wants all the Jedi dead but Dune needs to be alive to protect Rey. Surely it’ll be believable that he got away from him and Master Luke too, if he is smart.


“Benny.” It’s Rey’s clear, high soprano that throws him off. “Benny, why are you so angry?”

He turns around to her and must really look manic because she jumps in shock and flinches against her father who has stepped in front of his wife, staring at Ben like the whole world has ended and he was the one to make it so. Rey starts crying and Ben whips out his hand, willing her to stop. For a second, he holds her child’s mind in his hand.

“Get her away from here,” he grits out and then sees Dune’s hand ghost over his hips where his lightsaber sits. Kylo takes a step forward, keeping Rey in the palm of his hand.

“Drop that.”

Master Dune complies, letting his lightsaber fall to the ground with a metallic clunk. Rey’s mind is a chaotic, terrified mess and Ben wants to get out of there. He can’t stand what he’s doing to her.

Make her forget, Master Luke’s voice loud and clear, as if he was standing right beside him but Ben knows this sensation well. He is ordering him around from afar again, not even bothering with exerting himself with speech.

If you really want to keep her safe, you have to make her forget everything she knows about the Force, about us, about everything here.
Ben knows that he could, he can feel her mind mushy and pliable in his hands, he could mold her, easily. And he might have to. For once, Master Luke might actually be right about something. Fine, if he wants Rey’s Force sensitivity, everything that has to do with it, to be a secret, he can do that. If it’ll keep her safe, he can keep that secret for him. He can make it a secret in the first place.

“What are you doing?” Dune asks panicky as he undoubtedly feels the flurry of the Force, a connection springing from his daughter's head to Ben’s.

“Mind-wiping her,” he answers, curt and brisk, and plucks out every knowledge of the academy, of Jedi and of Luke Skywalker out of her brain. Then Dune’s eyes glaze over and Ben has a pretty good idea that Luke is just talking at him as well because he lets him proceed.

Until Ben struggles. There is only one more memory left in her.

There’s still Ben Solo, the lanky, big-eared, awkward youth. This huge boy that lets her ride on his shoulders and lets her win at holo-chess. In her eyes, he is perfect. A little sad sometimes but still good. He can’t bring himself to erase the only mind that had ever thought such a thing of him.

“Deep breaths,” Master Dune says in an absurd twist of the whole situation. “In through the nose, out of the mouth. If you’re doing this, do it right, boy. Like I taught you.”

And Ben pushes his hand out further, finds himself in her mind, finds every moment, every smile shared with him, every time he made this remarkable little girl laugh, every time she’s looked up at him and wanted to be exactly like him...he finds it all and then he takes it away. He wishes so bad something could linger, that anything at all could stay with her. Even if it was just a shadow of a tall boy with big ears and no name, who only wants her to be safe.

“Go,” he says to Dune when he is finished, “hide her somewhere. They’ll come looking for you.”

His old teacher doesn’t hesitate. His lightsaber lies by Ben’s feet and when he attempts to pick it up, it swooshes away from him, into Master Luke’s outstretched hand.

Ben poises his home made weapon when Dune Brightstar’s shuttle sets out for the sky. Kylo doesn’t best Luke. Truthfully, he barely scrapes by with his life. For whatever reason, Master Luke foregoes the deathblow he could land on him and flees instead. Kylo lies on the floor for a second as the flames from the main building come closer and closer yet. He can hear screaming and slashing in the distance. His fellow knights call out for him. Soon it will be morning.

Rey pulls out of his head, away from his body and sits up. Looking down on him, she finds him with eyes shut tight and face twisted in agony. She thinks something glistens all the way from the corner of his eyes down to his ears. He is trying to be empty but he fails thoroughly.
“It was you,” she says softly and when he doesn’t react, she goes on, “My imaginary friend. It was actually you.”

“Rey, I’m so sorry,” he mutters then and his voice is so thick she can barely understand him.

“Why didn’t you kill me like the others?” she asks him, matter-of-factly, more curious than anything.

She doesn’t know what she should expect. Somehow she is aware that she should be angry with him, the way she’d been going into this but keeping up any kind of rage in the face of his utter defeat is challenging at the least, if not entirely impossible. It would be one thing if she’d only see him crushed by all the guilt he’s kept hidden deep inside but things being what they are, she can feel every single thing he does. The self-loathing, pathetic self-pity, the hatred of everything he was and everything he is and the unspeakable pain of knowing in his heart of hearts he can do nothing about any of it now. And just how much he loves her. There’s that too.

“Because I couldn’t, I never could have,” he replies, eyes still shut tight. “You were kind to me when you didn’t have to and I...you didn’t deserve it, none of it.”

“Is that way you didn’t kill me on Starkiller Base?” She wonders softly. “Why instead of pushing me down the ridge you made me use the Force?”

Kylo doesn’t say anything at first. Then, ever so faintly, he nods.

“I told myself it was a waste of your talents,” he says, “Someone so strong with the Force shouldn’t die so uselessly. But it was because of who you were, who you are. And because of your parents, because I owe them at least this. They were good people.”

“How did they die?” she asks and he shakes his head. Rey lies back down and makes him turn his head to her, pushing at his cheek and his mind until he opens his eyes. They’re red and screaming with anguish. “How did my parents die, Kylo?”

“I couldn’t hide it from Snoke,” he strains to speak. “I didn’t work hard enough, he found out that your father and Luke had gotten away. He sent troops out after them. Luke was nowhere to be found because Maz hid him in some cave in Takadona but your parents...they brought you to Jakku to hide you away until the smoke cleared. Some bounty hunter recognized them. They’d just left the system when a First Order ship intercepted them and blew them out of the sky.”

He has kept his eyes on hers through all of this and he is bracing himself for her fury, for the accusations and the pain. But Rey is too full to feel just one distinct thing, she can’t grasp the anger and rage he expects of her. She can’t blame him for their deaths, not when she’s seen what that night had been like for him, what his whole life before that night had been like for him. He doesn’t seem to process how much compassion for him she has in her heart, not even after all this time, not even when he can feel it emanate from her like shockwaves. He doesn’t believe he deserves a shred of it.

“It felt good that you didn’t know, that I got to be someone else around you,” he mumbles, nothing
more to uncover within him. He has turned himself inside out now. She knows everything. Will never un-know it. “I didn’t want you to realise that I’ve failed you so terribly. That it was *me* all along. That you had a family and a legacy and I helped take it away.”

Rey’s eyes swim. She grieves for Luke, for her parents, for herself, for Ben Solo and for Kylo Ren. She knows she should detach herself from him and run as far as she possibly can. Away from this broken, damaged man but even now she can’t. In moments like these, loving him feels like ripping off parts of herself, taking her wholeness and patching up his wounds with fragments of her very soul. There is so much of what she has learned in the last hours she can’t even begin to understand but it’s a task for another day. Now, she is all thought-out. There is nothing left to do but content with this man she loves despite everything.

She knows that - for better or for worse - she belongs there by his side, bound to him by something greater than even that wretched Force bond. Something that feels terribly like fate. It’s the balance of it all, her light to exercise his darkness, his edges sharpening her curves. There has to be some rhyme and reason to all of this, she *knows* it. There will be a reckoning, a be-all and end-all of this great big war between the Dark and the Light and Rey feels like they are at the beginning and at the end of it. So she moves in closer, with fatalistic abandon and touches his nose and lips softly like a feather. Then she speaks those words that start to feel almost like a mantra.

“I know who you are. I know what you did. *I am still here* .”
I'm Falling Around You

Chapter Notes

Here we go again. Thank you all of you reading!

Beta'd by vicious-rhythm and double-checked by Vici. You two are most precious.
Rey's of sunshine and you don't deserve the pain I put you through. Thanks for taking it anyway!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Rey falls asleep with her palm over Kylo’s heart. Until her dreams take shape, she floats through raw emotions; fear, pain, longing and multiple fractions and facets of it all. He is with her but figureless. There is only his presence like an anchor to keep her from dissolving into the mess.

When finally, she feels solid ground beneath her feet, she finds herself on a green planet, much like Takodana. She walks aimlessly through halls, thinking, always thinking about everything Kylo told her and she tries to remember the things he took from her but fails to. Whenever she thinks she knows something, it’s just Kylo’s memories. She gathers as much as she can from them but they’re foreign and tinted with his pain. Still, there is her father and mother and whatever Kylo recalls of them. It’s enough to dull the frustration.

Dune Brightstar was not a tall man, but he’d commanded respect all the same. Her mother was a genius, smart and witty and the most nurturing woman Kylo had ever known. Sometimes he had wished that she was his mother, or that his mother was a little more like her. A little less always-gone, a little less trying to unite the galaxy with politics, a little less convinced that he was spiraling into something she couldn’t control.

On the edges of those memories Rey tries to make hers, is the knowledge of the Force, ancient, profound, and carried onward from generation to generation, down to Kylo and in the few lessons they’d shared, down to Rey as well. He remembers her well, like a beam of sunshine in a gloomy, dark storm. He did not see her often but often enough to warm to her in a way he warmed to very few people.

Even then, the goodness in her had amazed him. He would wish that he’d gotten a sister like that, a little girl who looked up to him, who believed in him. Someone to make him feel like he was good enough, strong enough to leave the dreaded, agonizing limbo between the Light and the Darkness behind and tether him to the one he felt was right but ever so far out of reach.

Rey treads on endless marble floors past pillars and doors, cataloguing the bits of memory he lets her browse through. This is all he can do for her now, grant her this all-access pass to the past which
haunts him even after all this time. She takes it without a shred of hesitation. Yes, she loves him and yes, he is hurting but so is she. He doesn’t expect her to be sorry either. He just wants her to have absolutely everything he can give her.

Then, the wide hallway she’s crossed opens into a giant hall and she knows she’s been here before.

The Jedi Academy, Kylo provides, a voice in her head. It seems he doesn’t have the strength to supply a body for their revery. Rey wants to answer but before she knows what to say, she hears a different voice, familiar but foreign at the same time. She thinks she’s heard it in a day-dream once, one that had felt more like a nightmare.

“Reyna,” the man says and she turns to make out the source of it.

In the middle of the room stands a man who wasn’t there before. He is pushing his fifties, kind blue eyes under arcing sandy blonde eyebrows and a full, nearly ginger beard framing his face. For a split second, Rey trembles and wants to run to her father but this isn’t her father. Some little features are off; the nose a bit too wide, the lips a bit too thin. The crease between his eyebrows is exactly the same though and Rey takes a couple curious steps towards him.

“Who are you?” she asks him although she thinks she already knows the answer.

“They called me Obi Wan once,” he says softly and there is something so mild about his voice and the way he looks at her, she feels like a little child again, instantly yearning to be held, to be comforted and she decides she trusts this ghost of the past. “I’m afraid we did not meet in my lifetime. My son would have spoken of me as Old Ben. But you already know that.”

“I don’t remember,” Rey says and the bitterness is back with a vengeance. “They made me forget.”

“I know,” he says with grace and a smile so tender that her anger dissipates into thin air and leaves only the bare sadness underneath. Rey is exhausted, she just wants to sleep in peace, just be nothing for a while but her dream won’t let her.

“Are you real?” she asks him, wondering if he is just an inkling or a mirage she can forgo, push away in order to find some sort of reprieve from the turmoils of the day.

“If you’re asking if I’m just a figment of your imagination, no I am not,” he answers patiently, “but I am not real, strictly speaking. I’m what you would call a shadow of a man, the essence of one, I’m what’s left of me, if you will.”

Rey tilts her head and she must look really confused because he almost chuckles.

“It’s difficult to explain,” he says. “The younglings called us Force ghosts when we took shape on Yavin 4.”
“In the real world?” Rey stares at him. Seeing someone who is supposed to be dead in your dream seems mystical enough but to believe it’s possible to see one in the light of day pushes everything she thought she knew.

“It has not been a habit,” he tells her. “It takes a lot of strength and since we are technically just fractions of the Force, without physical bodies to collect and channel the energy, it’s not exactly a past time. But yes, we do on occasion appear in the real world. Dreams are slightly easier to blend into as you can see.”

“Who is we?” she asks because it’s the only question she thinks she will understand the answer to. Everything else is complete and utter mumbo-jumbo to her ears.

“You’ll know,” he says mystifyingly and Rey wants to scream again. She wonders if there is a Jedi rulebook that says ‘Number Three: Be vague about everything. Why? Because you can, that’s why’. She would laugh if her entire life wasn’t in shambles.

“So,” she says, rubbing the bridge of her nose in a move that feels like it’s Kylo’s and looks at her father’s father. “If appearing is so hard, why are you here, why now?”

And in her mind she adds; Why not back on Jakku, when I was lost in the world and had absolutely no one? Or why not at any point within the last two years living through this strange new life of Jedi training and the Force, forced into an intergalactic war between the Light and the Darkness that no one ever asked if I wanted to be in?

“I had hoped it wouldn’t be necessary,” he answers with more than a trace of guilt. “It doesn’t always do much good for the Dead to mingle in the dealings of the Living. I did watch over you, but it was always best not to intrude. Do you remember the first time you piloted the Falcon? The first time you resisted the theft of your thoughts? That...that glorious time you first used the old mind-trick on that Stormtrooper?”

Rey nods, slowly. Then she remembers something else.

“When I touched Luke’s lightsaber,” she mutters. “My Dad’s lightsaber. There was a voice. It said: Rey-”

“These are your first steps,” Old Ben finishes for her. “I couldn’t help myself. It’s an old rite of passage. It’s what you say when younglings begin their Padawan days. I tried to just help from a distance after that. But things being what they are, I do believe I need to be here for you right now. I owe my son at least this.”

Her father.
“Why isn’t he here?” she asks and suddenly there’s a lump in her throat. If there are Force ghosts, wouldn’t her father be one? She comes alive again with hope, with yearning. If she could see him again, just one more time. Just to say goodbye.

“I am so sorry,” Old Ben says, face fallen. “I am afraid he died as one with the force, in your mother’s arms. He did not linger.”

There is a sob stuck somewhere in Rey’s throat and she can not believe how much it hurts when you lose something you did not even know you needed or could have in the first place. Obi Wan’s ghost body moves toward her and puts a soft hand on her shoulder that she can almost feel.

Her pain propels Kylo to take shape and she feels him too, looming, observing from a ways away. She can see him take in the scene that unfolds from the corner of her eye.

“He loved you so very much,” Obi Wan says and then withdraws his hand, looking very displeased with the fact that he can not truly reach her. Then, he notices Kylo’s presence and takes a step back from her.

“Ben,” he says coldly and then with a little less venom, “You’re still alive.”

“No thanks to you,” Kylo says, begrudgingly. In his mind, he is asking the same question Rey has asked earlier.

_Ewhy did you not appear to me when I needed guidance? Why was I left staggering in the Dark for all these years when you could’ve helped me to find the Light?_ 

Rey holds out her hand for him to take.

_It’s no use to linger on the past. It’s all over and done with, _she thinks over to him and he comes to stand by her side, fingers interlocking.

Obi Wan takes yet another step back to look at the pair, dressed in their usual beiges and blacks in their dream.

“Now, that’s a sight I thought I’d never see,” he grumbles, making a face that tells her he is precisely aware of just how together they are. “Anakin said this would happen.”

He shakes his head as if he’s lost a bet.

“Anakin,” Kylo grunts, turning up his nose at him in a very unbecoming, very adolescent way.

“Yes, Anakin,” Old Ben grunts right back, “and if you ever really payed attention when he was trying to guide you, you would know that, too.”
“He told me to finish what he started!” Kylo exclaims, his ears red with humiliation and he grips Rey’s hand tighter.

Obi Wan looks at him like Finn does, right before he calls someone a “dipshit”. It’s completely absurd.

“Exactly,” he says instead, “And as I am fully aware you have been told when you were barely out of your swaddling clothes, he died turning to the Light.”

“That’s not what he started,” Kylo snaps. “He was going to restore the balance to the galaxy. He was the Chosen One and he was going to destroy these petty mortal constructions of Jedi and Sith so that the Force could just be. With his death, the last of the Sith was gone and Luke would have been the last of the Jedi. It would all have ended. But uncle Luke had to go make more Jedi. He has failed his father, he has failed the whole galaxy. He should’ve been the end of it. If the Jedi are gone, there will be no more wars between the Light and the Dark; no more suffering, no more dying for any side or suffering the agony of not knowing where you belong.”

Of course. Everything suddenly makes a lot more sense to her. That’s why you did all of it.

He turns his head to her incredulously, like he can’t believe she hasn’t devoted a single minute of her time so far to learn his motives for anything. She’d have been able to know it all, from the first faint idea to every last thing he’s sacrificed for it. For all it’s worth, she has witnessed him sacrificing the greatest of it all when he killed his own father.

“I didn’t become this because I get off hurting people,” he says to her and his face twists into a giant questionmark. Yet, he wholeheartedly believes what he says next: “I did it because it was the only way to fulfil the prophecy.”

She mutters his name. Somehow this is worse than if he’d just been a homicidal maniac. He’s felt so justified all this time, she doesn’t really have the heart to tell him that he took it all just a little bit too far.

Kylo lets go of her hand and staggers a few paces backward. His forehead has never been more furrowed than in this very moment. He can barely speak because his mouth refuses to unfreeze from where it stands agape in utter dumbfoundedness.

“You fell in love with me thinking that I was a mass murdering monster for fun?”

“Well, you don’t have the galaxy monopoly on being messed up”, she snaps back and they’re standing nose to nose, arms on hips and mouths in snarls.

Obi Wan Kenobi clears his throat and their heads twist to him so fast, he would probably feel the wind of their hair swooshing if he wasn’t a ghost and this wasn’t a dream.
For a fraction of a second something tugs at the corner of his lips but it’s gone quicker than Rey can make sure it was real.

“I think we can agree that what’s done is done,” he says and cordially as he does, it doesn’t quite sound like Kylo has really helped kill thousands, millions of people for some ancient prophecy and that they are trapped in the hands of the evilest creature she can imagine, having to convince him that she has turned over to the Dark Side well enough to let them both go again. “And I’m not one to place blame but -”

“Will you give him a break, Obi Wan?” Another voice bellows through the hall and Rey is sure that she has never seen him before. Kylo goes rigid beside her.

_Darth Vader_ , he thinks.

“Anakin,” Obi Wan says.

_Anakin_ , Rey decides because this young and handsome, whole man neither wears a helmet, nor appears overly threatening as he strolls over to them almost casually.

“How nice of you to join us,” Old Ben snickers but there is no real fire behind it. Rey supposes one gets mellower in the afterlife.

“I’m not in the mood for your jests, Obi Wan,” the man says. “My grandson is trying as best as he can.”

“Misguidedly,” the other retorts pointedly and it’s more an insult to him than to Kylo.

“The measures he took might have been a bit drastic but the aim is the right one,” Anakin says. “Eradicating both the Sith and the Jedi order was and is the best strategy to restoring balance to the Force.”

“But at what cost?” Obi Wan challenges. “The Republic, the Empire, the First Order? Spokes on a wheel that keeps spinning, trying to rule the galaxy in darkness. They are not relenting, thus the Jedi are still very much needed.”

“Who says that?” Kylo speaks for the first time. “They’re just mortals, all of these organisations, neither Jedi nor Sith, most not even Force sensitive - once this tug-of-war between the Light and the Dark is over, one can just rise above, put an end to all of them and the galaxy can live in peace, with rules and order.”

“And who will make those rules, boy?” Obi Wan turns back to him. “ _You?_ ”

“Someone has to,” Kylo says sheepishly.

“That’s just another dictatorship,” Rey says irritatedly.
“As opposed to the benevolent graces of democracy?” Kylo sneers. “Tell me exactly when sitting in an endless senate meeting debating intergalactical hyperspeed-limits has ever benefitted the good of all? People need rules, not a plurality voting system and liquor-taxes.”

Obi Wan breathes out exasperatedly.

“He has a point,” Anakin jumps in.

“Just because you never liked politics, doesn’t mean that it was the wrong way to go,” Obi Wan bickers.

“The corruption -” the younger-looking man begins.

“Don’t start with the corruption again,” Obi Wan half spits. “You were the one who got in bed with the very man who started all of that if I remember correctly and look where it’s gotten us!”

“He didn’t know that going in,” Kylo says in Darth Vader’s defense and Rey shakes her head along with her grandfather.

“It’s absolutely useless arguing with Skywalkers,” he says to her. “Stubborn bastards to the very end.”

“Kylo,” Rey turns to him because this conversation is too bizarre to continue. Two Force ghosts and two bonded Force-sensitives arguing about galactic politics in a dream. It sounds like the beginning of a very strange cantina joke.

“Whatsoever you wanted to achieve,” she says softly, “Snoke and The First Order are not the way.”

Kylo keeps their eye contact up for as long as he can before glancing downward. He doesn’t need to tell her that he knows this. But what can he do about it now?

“The most important thing is that you two get away from this place as quickly as possible,” Obi Wan says keenly and continues with sharp insight. “Snoke has you right where he wants you, he doesn’t care much how Ben got you here, the point is that he did - you might be the two single most powerful Force users in the known universe and he thinks to use you as his puppets.”

Something crumbles in Kylo’s face as if this is the first time he’s considered this.

He wanted you since I first told him about you, he thinks and looks at her panic-stricken. And I delivered you on a silver platter.

He wants to bury his face in his hands and rip out all of his hair by the roots. She takes his fingers into her fist to keep them steady.
What’s done is done, she thinks with grim calm, echoing her grandfather. Now we have to find a way out.

“You will need to convince him beyond a shadow of a doubt that you have defected, Rey,” Anakin says, his voice missing the hint of exasperation he’s had for the entirety of their conversation, ringing with urgency instead. “He will try to rattle you. Snoke is a dark, dangerous creature and he has seen the Empire rise and fall from the glorified tomb he has built himself here. He waited out Palpatine and has managed to survive more fights than you two have lived days. And he didn’t do it by fighting gracefully, let alone fair.”

“You need to prepare her, Ben,” Obi Wan urges on, for the first time of one mind with his fellow spirit. “You have lived more than a decade with him terrorizing you, show her all the ways he will try to claim her.”

Kylo nods and puts his free arm around her, shielding her from the impending horrors of the day.

“Rest now,” Anakin says. “You will need your strength.”

“Remember, I’m never far,” Obi Wan implores, dipping his head to Rey. “Just a little hard to reach sometimes.”

And then he raises his hand and Force-mind-tricks them to comatose sleep right from the grave.

They sleep like stones and wake from the red sun rising on the crumbling wasteland. Kylo is first, jerking up with a start and nudging her gently to consciousness.

“Was that real?” Is the first thing he asks her when she groggily sits up.

“I think so,” she says and enjoys the first couple of seconds after sleep where you don’t know who and where you are. They are far too fleeting.

“We need to train,” Kylo says, instantly urgent. “We don’t have much time.”

He grants them five minutes of time for personal hygiene and then has her sit cross-legged opposite of him on the bed. He’s lucky because his single-mindedness, his focus on teaching her everything he knows about Snoke’s psychological warfare takes his brain off of the fear. Rey, on the other hand, feels it well up from inside her like nausea. It’s a disgusting feeling, like the whole situation, like she could physically be sick from it and she has to focus hard on the calming deep breaths to push it down.

“Are you listening?” Kylo looks at her in mild irritation.
“What?” She looks up. “No, I’m sorry. I just...have a really bad feeling about this. Can you say that again, whatever you said?”

Kylo sighs. “Like I told you, when Snoke wants to probe you, he’ll find a way to touch you. I think you can handle that.”

“Or I could just not let him touch me,” she says.

“That would look suspicious,” he shakes his head. “Also you might not get a chance to.”

“What do you mean?” Rey furrows her brow, the knot in her stomach persists. What other nightmares does this master of his have in store for her?

“Snoke, he -” Kylo begins, “he can make people do things. A little like you can and your family could, only on a much bigger scale. At first, he controls ten or more knights at the same time. To make them fight, just to see what happens. He uses it to break us in the beginning and then, when we don’t need the incentive anymore, he uses it to give orders. But not the kind of orders you heard. It’s the kind you can’t not obey. It’s compulsion, do you understand? He might tell you to crawl up to him on your knees and present your head for inspection and you will very likely do exactly that.”

Rey swallows. She could have done without knowing this was a possibility.

“But that’s not all,” Kylo says. Of course it isn’t.

“His powers go beyond just making you do what he wants,” he says. “He can make you feel pain too. The same way he can gauge your emotions from afar, he can send them to you. Blinding pain, Rey. It burns until you forget your own name.”

She flinches at just his recollection. She has felt this before. Everytime she touched up on any memories of Snoke in Kylo’s head. She’s knows about this. That doesn’t make the prospect on it being used on her any less terrifying.

“How can I stop him?” she asks.

“With your mind,” he replies as if it was just that simple. “The pain isn’t real, the compulsion isn’t either. It’s very strong but it’s all in your head. Knowing that is the first step to withstanding it.”

“Can you?” Rey almost can’t bring herself to look back at him from her twisting fingers. “Can you withstand him?”

“Sometimes,” he answers truthfully. “I never tried much though. Before, when...before you, I welcomed the pain. It helps me focus, makes the hold on the Force stronger. It gave me direction. And killing was nothing under his orders. I didn’t have to think about it.”

“Kylo,” she gasps, her mind jumping to the first logical conclusion of this. “He’ll make us fight each other.”

“That’s very likely,” he says gravely.
“Teach me how I can stop it,” she presses and shuffles closer to him until their knees touch.

“Yes,” he says but his voice is wavering. He thinks he is out of his depth in this. It’s everything he can offer her after so foolishly getting her here, Snoke’s new exciting plaything, and he can’t even promise her his counter manoeuvres work at all.

“I will mind-trick you now,” he announces and poises himself, straightening his back and pulling at the Force. Rey nods and then stretches her neck to both sides while Kylo brings up his hand between their heads.

“You will clap your hands three times,” he says and wipes his hand awkwardly in front of her face. Rey does no such thing.

“Deep breaths,” she says. “Focus. Imagine me doing it, feel it, will it!”

“You will clap your hands three times,” he says again and before she can question or fight it, the empty room resounds with three rhythmic claps. This is the first time someone mind-tricked her in the light of day and she’s conscious after to marvel at the sensation.

“How did it feel?” Kylo asks.

“Like I wanted to clap my hands three times,” she answers. “Like I needed to.”

“But what came before?” he continues. “There is a little push every time, a little Force-shove to your mind. Try to feel it next time.”

He repeats this three times. Nine claps later, Rey thinks she’s felt it. Fifteen claps later she knows she feels it, can even decipher how it works. The shove comes in three smaller waves. The first is raw, pure energy, tangible like a plow, paving the way inside for the compulsing thought. Then the order itself as it reaches in and becomes the only thing you want and need to do immediately. The third is a body binding spell in its way. It makes her muscles tense into just the position needed to execute her order, her necessary act. Any other motion, let alone one to contradict the demanded one is almost impossible at this point.

“The moment to stop is the very first wave,” Kylo instructs her then. “When the shove comes you can push it back. But once it’s inside it’s all but undoable.”

They repeat the exercise until the clapping becomes only a distant echo. Rey learns fast, the way she always does, and feels a little bit better about her prospects facing Snoke. Still, Kylo doesn’t relent.

“He is a lot better at this than I am,” he says gravely and runs a hand through his hair. He is sweating just by trying harder to make her clap once more. Rey doesn’t budge.

When Kylo is at the end of his mental capacity, he lets his hand drop into his lap and breathes
deeply. “This is as far as I can help you with this.”

Rey nods. “Do you want to have a go?”

Kylo is exhausted but he is keenly aware that he can’t just take a nap to recharge and accepts her offer.

He claps so many times it bruises his ego perpetually. She only relents when he manages to push the order away five times in a row and it’s all he can do not to collapse onto the mattress. Rey feels her entire body try and catch his breath with him.

“What else?” she presses on. “You said he’ll make me feel pain.”

“Or fear. Or anything you can think of,” he answers, closing his eyes for a very long time. “I think you can draw from our experiences for that. When you shut me out, it’s pretty much the same thing, the same mechanics.”

“I hardly ever manage to shut out your emotions,” she tells him. “I can shut out your voice but I pretty much always know what you feel.”

“I’m hoping that has to do with the bond,” Kylo says. What he doesn’t say is: If not we might be screwed fantastically.

For the next half hour, they each try to separate their feelings from the others in order to even begin trying to send them back in waves and into the first somewhat successful attempt crashes Snoke’s raspy voice. Rey’s blood turns into ice in her veins and her stomach flips.

_I expect you and the girl in five minutes._

That’s precisely how long it takes to get down to his temple if they leave this very second. Kylo was right about Snoke not giving people time to prepare for his moves.

Rey doesn’t speak for the entire way. She couldn’t if she tried. She is at full capacity trying not to implode, just like the day before. Her heart is hammering against her chest and she is torn between repeating everything she has learnt in this cramped morning and trying to meditate every surface emotion for Snoke to prey on away. Kylo doesn’t fare a shred better, years of dealing with this very particular horror has just made him better at compartmentalizing.

If it’s possible, the chapel is even chillier than the day before and the light even dimmer. Everything about this place screams death and despair, most of all its sole inhabitant. Rey wonders briefly if
Snoke ever gets out of this throne at all. If he does such mundane things as sleeping or eating or bothering with any sort of bowel movement at all. He seems like the kind of entity that could simply elect to pass on such base functions of the living and breathing variety.

He sits, unmoving, and watches them approach the bottom of his stairs. Rey prays to every god out there that he will stay put. She doesn’t have the slightest interest in seeing this creature up close. The air is crackling with something mischievous. That might be the worst in all of it. She can feel Snoke’s excitement bubble out of him from where she is standing. If she hadn’t wanted to before, now she really wants to throw up.

Kylo is perfectly still beside her, eerily composed and for a second she is baffled by his strength until she remembers that this has been his life for the past eleven years.

“You both look sufficiently rested for today,” the creature remarks. “Splendid. We shall begin, yes?”

It’s not a question.

“Since you have requested, little Brightstar,” he begins, “and my apprentice has consented to be your teacher, I will offer you my guidance in the art of teaching.”

This can’t be good, she thinks and takes a very deep breath. And then, to make everything infinitely worse, Snoke rises and descends down with a grace completely at odds with his stunted, broken figure. It’s almost like he is floating. As he comes closer, his presence grows even stronger, more biting than ever before and every last hair on Rey’s body stands up alert. Kylo is raising up walls left and right around the fortress that is his mind and she tries doubly hard to match him.

When finally, the Supreme Leader comes to stand on the second to last step, she realizes that he is short. Very short. He would maybe reach her shoulders if he got on his tip toes, and Kylo towers over him, easily twice his size and wide enough to hide behind. How this doesn’t diminish his terrifying aura by a fragment is startling in and of itself.

“I have a gift for you,” he says to her and reaches beneath his cloak to produce a long black gadget that looks like it’s two lightsaber hilts soldered together. Snoke holds it out to her inconspicuously.

Rey waits and feels like a sand-rabbit in front of a Sarlacc. His hand is pale and already way too close for comfort. Still, she has a job to do and so she takes two steps forward, just to be able to reach the thing he wants her to have.
She has seen it coming, has known it was coming but it doesn’t make the contact any less horrifying. He moves swiftly, like a snake and faster than she had presumed he could, in the very second her fingers close around the hilt. He wraps his ghostly, white claw tightly around her hand and she feels him scorch into her head like a blaster bolt. He is everywhere at once and she knows she would be lost if it hadn’t been for the two years of Kylo constantly in or around her brain. The way he tries to push inside her mind is not unlike Kylo does, although never in their history has Kylo been this malignant in his attempts. Snoke aims to unravel her completely but Rey withstands.

For the first time it occurs to her that having contended with Kylo, who by the default of their bond theoretically has an all-access-pass into her innermost self, and still managed to keep him out and at bay so often, could reap benefits like this. To her own glorious, pleasant surprise, she finds that she can keep him out. Sure, he gets flickers of emotions, some conversations but none of them relevant, none of them lethal.

Upon realizing this, he only tries harder and his own body flutters with the exertion. Something tells her no living thing has put up quite a fight like this in a very long time. She wants so badly to be smug and obnoxious about this but she knows it would be unwise. It’s also unwise to keep on doing it, she realises with a start. She has to give him something.

She thinks on her feet of an emotion, a thought or a sensation he would think she would keep a secret and builds a thick wall around it. He finds it quickly because it offers the most resistance. He pushes and she calculates the time it takes to break it meticulously. It has to be long enough for him to believe what he finds is important but short enough so he believes he has the upper hand in their tug-of-war.

When it falls, he lets go off her and his face contorts into a self-satisfied, hideous grimace that is probably the closest he can get to smiling.

“You are terrified of me,” he states needlessly, just to humiliate her and she does her best to play the part. “How original.”

She wants to spew something at him, just out of petty, childish spite but she reels herself in. Faintly, she can feel Kylo do the same with the sensation of awe at the feat.

“Maybe you will find this a gesture to prove my good intentions,” Snoke says, back at a leisurely stance, and gives the object she holds in her hand a throwaway glance.

She inspects it up close for the first time. It still looks like a lightsaber hilt. It’s just a lot too long for that. It does have a button though and, gripped by her scavenger’s curiosity, she holds the hilt away from her body and pushes it.
It buzzes to life with the signature zing of any common lightsaber but shortly after the first sound, a second follows and Rey turns to see the underside of it ignite as well. The word registers with her before she can process it.

A staff. It’s a lightsaber, but as a staff. The blades are a fierce, glowing red, just a dash darker than Kylo’s. Twisted as it is, she is almost touched. She knows how to work a staff in her sleep.

How thoughtful, Kylo snickers in her head and she thanks him because that’s the emotion Snoke’s gift should have elicited in the first place; utter disdain and disgust.

“You will find it easy enough to wield with your experience,” Snoke says conversationally. “It is an old relic but make no mistake, it’s not a mere hand me down. You see, it was broken once, into two parts. It is now restored to its former glory. Many brave men and women have fallen to its wrath. If you listen closely, you can hear them sing.”

He speaks softly, almost purring and somehow it lulls her in enough to do as he suggested and feels the weapon, beckons it to tell its story. It does sing in a way but it’s a horrible song, inharmonious, like a tritone; a symphony of anguish and last breaths. It sears in her grip.

Rey, Kylo’s soft voice in her head rips her attention away from her new possession. It’s mortifying how right it feels in her hands.

“Very well,” Snoke says and then without pomp or ceremony: “Fight him.”

And suddenly it’s all she ever wanted to do. All she needs to do. Rey has missed the shove and her body goes rigid with the impending movement. It’s too late to stop it now.

Across from her, Kylo’s lightsaber bursts to life and his eyes flicker in alarm. He matches her offensive stance with a defensive one and beneath the compulsion, she can feel him brace himself and her own horror as she finds herself unable to resist the blood lust which wells up at the sensation. He feels her coming before she pounces.

It’s an old dance, one they know by heart but it’s all wrong now. She thrashes at him, the weapon eerily steady and yielding in her hands, she moves it like an extension of her limbs, sure-footed and confident. She forces Kylo onto the defensive from the get go. He pants trying to parry her attacks and when she nearly lands a blow that would’ve cut down his left knee, mortal terror grabs hold of him.
Rey, he tries to appeal to her but she can barely hear it.

They are running circles around each other and before long, Kylo is winded. He uses Niman fleetingly but still without the force blows and then when he falls too obviously into Soresu, the most defensive of all forms, Snoke realises what he is doing.

“Stop dodging her,” he hisses. “Attack.”

And Kylo might have even felt the shove but can’t do anything about it with Rey simultaneously leaping at him. Then he does as his master bid, because he has no choice anymore.

They fight, drawing on their connection, intercepting movements, ignoring feints, clashing beams at the rate of their heartbeats. Flipping through the forms like gold-star Padawan younglings but there is nothing innocent about it. Kylo sears a hole in her leggings, grazing the skin underneath just short of cutting and Rey nearly opens up the wound at his side again that was so quickly fixed by First Order med-droids and lots of synthetic skin.

When one parry of a particularly artistic move of Kylo’s draws them apart, Rey realises two things. One: he has never been bad at Ataru at all and all the times he seemed like he was just too lanky and long-limbed for the gymnastics of it, he’d really only been going easy on her and two: she has absolutely fought him now. Technically the compulsion is over. And this knowledge enables her to step out of it as if it was a loose sling around her feet.

Rey tugs at the bond, to tell him that it’s okay, that she’s out and they can stop now but before she can begin to hope, she feels what is going on inside of his head. Snoke is firing at him - so many emotions, one more unraveling than the next. Pain, misery, anguish, any variation on the theme, loneliness, longing, hate, fear, terror, dread, despair; all in quick succession. Enough to make her go half mad just by the second-hand experience. His brain is a red hot, tangled mess and beneath it all bellows the compulsion - and Snoke has changed the tune.

Kill her, it echoes through Kylo’s manic brain into hers. And he charges.

All Rey can do is try to scrape by with her life. Kylo is vicious and not holding back anymore. Something Luke once said to her comes back to the forefront of her mind and she flinches in terror.

I think you and I both know that Ben has his reasons for holding back when he meets you in battle. He had said, and: You wouldn’t be standing here right now, if he had been at his full strength.

Kylo certainly seems to be at his full strength now, if not aided by scarcely healed wounds or body-
bending exhaustion, then by the raging, soaring state of constant pain Snoke has him in. He pushes her back, relentlessly and she thinks that if it wasn’t for the familiarity of the staff as a weapon and years upon years of experience with it, she would already be dead. Eventually, they’ve circled back into the middle of the chapel and if she had a mind for it, she would be able to feel Snoke loom all around them, nearly delirious with joy at their fight for dear life.

Kylo raises his saber above his head, almost too abruptly to follow but she felt the impulse course through his arm before he made it, and that saves her life as she parries the slash that would have split her head in half. Their lightsabers clash and it takes all the strength she has, and a very deft pull at the Force to hold her own against his pure muscle power that far surpasses her own.

But she holds and she catches his eyes in the red, flickering light of their sabers. His are dark, almost entirely black and glazed over. He is mad, gone, maybe irreversibly. But no, that is not an option.

KYLO! She screams at him internally, wills him away from the place he is in. She tries to take some of his hurt onto her own shoulders but Snoke has a tight grip on them, keeping them trained firmly on Kylo and Kylo only. That’s a very particular way to torture her. The implications of him knowing to do this, escapes her in the heat of the moment.

Come back to me, she pleads, begs. Don’t let him do this.

Their bond sizzles just the slightest bit but she knows all is not lost yet, she puts her weight into it, draws in more of the Force, taps into the darkness that surrounds her because she is desperate enough to do just about anything right now. But then, he does not react to darkness at all - he can barely contain the pitch dark tar sticking to his brain like a tumor.

So she opts for the Light. She focuses hard on her love for him, brings to mind their very first real kiss, the first time they slept together, and the second and the third and every other time and then his declaration of love and hers to boot. She thinks about how much she loves him even now, after everything that has come to light the day before and in this very moment that he is poised to kill her.

I love you, Kylo. She thinks, booming, louder than she could have howled it into the dome. Don’t leave me.

And then she pushes her love into his head and his heart as if it was a real thing, a ball she could throw and he catches it. Thank the gods, he catches it.

With a start, his eyes clear up and he sees her again. He reaches out, with his mind, past the hurt and the pain and she breathes out a tiny sigh of relief. Their lightsabers zing and crackle against each other but the fight is over. Rey feels something in the pit of her stomach ignite in victory but then the sensation dies and crumbles, collapsing in on itself so quickly, she feels space-sick.
Snoke laughs.

It’s a raspy, strangled and downright repugnant sound and the only consolation is that it doesn’t last very long. The lasting, overwhelming sensation of near degenerate exaltation wallowing undiluted from his slim form is much, much worse.

“Love,” the creature says in mild surprise but with a hunger in his voice that sounds almost like a moan and then with a tiny flick of his hand, he throws them apart with a bang.

They are crashing through the air, high and far, until both land a ways apart, lightsabers pried from their grips, useless in the face of Snoke’s power. Kylo’s dies on impact while Rey’s scorches two oblong holes into the concrete before it too sputters out.

Rey’s whole body shakes with terror and the urge to get back to Kylo, to see if he is alright but she can not move. Their tether burns red hot but she can’t reach it. Snoke is prickling holes into her skull and the pain is deafening. Her vision nearly blacks out and like a fist connecting with her jaw, his grave voice booms in her head, nearly shaking with devious, sadistic pleasure.

“You’re mine now.

Next, he snaps the binding spell off of both of them because he doesn’t care anymore. He has what he wants, has the confirmation of something he must have suspected since Kylo got back, maybe even before that. Rey scrambles to her feet as Kylo does the same and they run to each other at record speed, bodies colliding and Kylo’s hands are everywhere for a second until he closes his arms protectively around her shoulders. It doesn’t matter now. *Snoke knows*; he is still blissfully aware of it all.

“Stupid boy,” the monster says with sickening amusement, self-indulgent in his victory like the disgustingly sore winner he is bound to be. “I’ve felt it on you the second you got here. I’ve known all of your petty, human emotions since you were little more than a babe, do you think I would miss an entirely new addition? Something you’ve never seemed even capable of? Her I wasn’t sure about, I will give her that. I needed to make sure that she was not pretending as a ruse to get here. Seems miraculous enough that she didn’t.”

“If you dare-” Kylo grits out, bleeding anger all his own sprouting from his lips with his spit but Snoke silences him with a whip of his hand.

“Then what?” Snoke sneers. “You two belong to me now. I can kill either of you with a snap of my fingers. You will do exactly as I say, exactly when I say it. Now I can finally rest assured that you
will follow my orders instead of losing your head in morals."

Rey can’t breathe. She wonders if Snoke is choking her but it’s entirely possible that this is all her own body. They are lost. Everything is over. She will die here, they will die here and it will be at the feet of this monster. There’s no way this could have gone any worse.

But of course, of course there is.

“Kylo Ren,” Snoke says, any trace of joy gone from his voice as if it never been there in the first place. “My thoroughly disappointing apprentice. You are going on a mission tomorrow at first light to finally finish what you started eleven years ago. You will kill Luke Skywalker.”

“No,” Rey gasps in shock and Snoke rebuts her with a slamming jab aimed right at her forehead and she feels like her head bursts into fractures.

“Take her away,” Snoke bellows. “Your humanity disgusts me.”

Kylo turns without another word and half carries Rey out. She is shattered.

Not Luke, not him too. She has lost everyone already. She can’t be the reason he dies as well. She is in a world of despair and there is no hope, no reprieve. Just an endless pit of darkness and she has already started falling.

As soon as the heavy doors close behind them, she throws up bile and maybe blood until she sees stars and Kylo carries her all the way into his room. Rey is dimly aware that they pass an assortment of Knights of Ren on the way but he must be shooting them a death glare of such magnitude, they scurry apart; their mindless fear a ridiculous caricature of their scary, unflinching masks. Rey can not find the humour in it.

Oh and lest I forget, Snoke’s voice back in their heads a second after Kylo has closed the door is enough to have Rey dart for the ‘Fresher again - it takes Kylo every little bit of fight left in him, not to join her in her retching. You would be a fool to believe that a bond of such magnitude will allow either of you to survive while the other one dies. I hold you both in my hands at all times. Tomorrow at first light.

‘Tomorrow at first light’ is approximately five hours away at this point. Rey waits, her body crouched around the toilet seat, throat burning and she is ready to throw up the rest of her insides should Snoke speak to them again. But he doesn’t. He pulls back, his presence fluttering into the
backdrop of the compound again. The beast is satisfied for the time being. She wishes she could find solace in that.

She ponders if it’s true what he says about their bond, about how it has woven them so tightly together that it would kill them both if one of them were to fall. Considering how deep it goes, how thorough they made it with all their actions, she wouldn’t be surprised. Kylo doesn’t question it all but he also has no intention of finding out for certain. Rey sighs, trying to calm her mind and her body. It seems like everything they’ve done has led them here, into the jaws of defeat and they are like little children who chased each other to the edge of a cliff and they dangle, not strong enough to pull themselves up again.

Mechanically, she brushes her teeth to get the foul taste out of her mouth but it does nothing to get it out of her head. Her clothes go too, everything but the leggings and the undershirt, the thick fabric had just added more substance to the weight of this horrible, no good day. Apart from the small burn where Kylo’s lightsaber brushed her thigh, she is fine. It’s not her body that is broken, it’s everything else.

She trudges weakly back into the room and walks in on Kylo standing smack dab in the middle, in twilight only lit by the cold residual light from the ‘Fresher. He rips off his robe, throws away his shoes and socks, unclasps the belt and struggles out of the frayed tunic as if the uniform itself is to blame for what has happened. On top of all the various layers of dismay now lies embarrassment and humiliation, because he had worked for this creature, killed for him, had hoped for guidance and reverence from his tutelage, for greatness in the shade of his new order. How stupid, how pathetically naive of him. He has learnt nothing. Thirty-one years alive in this wretched galaxy and he is still as stupid as an infant. Blabbering and blubbering away about balance, about peace. It’s laughable how wrong he’s been, how obviously, painfully wrong.

_He is using you for you power and once he is done with you, he will crush you, you know it._

His father’s second to last words hit him square in the chest. Han Solo. His father. He’d been right, he’d been right all along and Kylo killed him for it. The man crumbles under all of this, his knees giving way to heed the call of the ground. He wants to die but he can’t because it would mean Rey would die as well and that’s impossible.

She is by his side right when he hits the floor. Her hands find his face as they kneel and she knows she can’t do anything, only be there for him and try not to fall apart herself. She mumbles his name, two, three times until he hears her and looks up with bitter, unbidden tears in his eyes. He is being ripped apart by what he has to do and by what he wants to do. Killing Luke Skywalker had been his single purpose and focus for the better part of his life and now that he has the definite order and Rey by his side to provide him with his location, he wants nothing at all to do with it. It would crush her to lose her mentor - he feels the dread as if it were his own.
“I won’t do it,” he says under his breath and stares at her, grabbing for her hands and clasping her fingers so tightly it hurts. “And I won’t leave you here with him. I’d sooner die.”

“Maybe that’s best,” she says, almost too quiet to catch and the way she embraces the thought, it’s so disconcerting, Kylo changes his mind in an instant.

“No,” he says. She can’t die and he can’t die either because even if they could do it separately, it means he would leave her behind all the same.

“What if we could warn Luke somehow? If we could reach him,” Rey mutters, grasping at straws. “Do what Snoke does, talk at him across the galaxy and give him a head start. There’s still time to get away.”

“Rey,” Kylo says and then stumbles over the lump in his throat. “Snoke won’t let me back here until it is done. He’ll have you, right here, and I’ll be light years away, completely useless to protect you.”

This is it. The rock and the hard place. They can neither die nor live right. But there is no choice. Kylo has to go and he has to come back with Luke Skywalker’s head before long. And the longer he takes, the longer Rey will be in Snoke’s hands all alone.

“Try to reach out to him,” Kylo says, for better or for worse. “I...I’m so sorry.”

There is nothing more to say now. Rey just gives him a fatalistic, painful shrug and resigns herself to misery. She rises and pulls him up with her, their legs still somehow supporting them. She wants to move them to the bed to lie down and wait to maybe dissolve but he keeps her before him and then dips his head to kiss her. It’s a desperate man’s last resort. One last high before the kill, one last time feeling something other than this. Rey welcomes it with a fervour she didn’t know she was capable of anymore.

They stumble backward, fumbling blindly and kissing each others’ mouths raw. When Rey’s back connects to the far wall, he traps her there between the concrete and his body. His lips feel good on hers, like they belong there and it’s an exquisite sort of pain. Knowing he is there now but will be gone soon and that there is a realistic possibility that she will never see him again before they both die. Should Luke get the better of him in battle, that is exactly the fate they might face. Kylo attempts to focus only on their bodies in motion and frees his hands from where they roam on her to finger his pants loose until they fall around his ankles.

He steps out of them quickly and breaks the kiss to nearly rip Rey’s leggings down her legs and tears it from her body to join his pants on the floor. The heat between them is dim, overshadowed by grief but he kisses her again anyway and she can feel him sticking up between their bellies, pressed flush against the crumbling fabric of his shirt.

It confounds her how he is even hard in his state of disarray and gloom but it seems that their
tethered bodies work in very mysterious ways and she doesn’t have the mind to question it. She just wants him, needs him and doesn’t hesitate for a second to take him in.

It takes him half a second to align them, prop her up by the arms supporting her thighs and bottom but then she’s there and he pushes into her, slowly at first but then quickly pumping without rhyme or reason. She gasps. He is not rough but frantic, trying to get more, trying to get anything and everything he can. She joins him in the effort. Then, after breathless minutes of this, he poises himself for deeper strokes and slower thrusts, leaning back from where he’d kissed the side of her face and her neck to look at her face.

Silent tears run down her cheeks and she makes tiny, broken little sounds mashed up of sobs and moans. He stares into her very soul. It’s not love they’re making, it’s despair. But it’s enough to keep her together for now. When their bodies start to sync with tremors and she can feel it coming, she embraces it, opts to lose her mind in the throes and digs her fingernails into his back hard enough to draw blood.

They come undone together, chasing the high, lingering, bucking against each other until he softens and has to pull out with regret so dense, she can almost touch it. He puts her back onto shaky feet, the ripples of her own orgasm still coursing through her like a wistful reminder of what they already lost.

He kisses her once more, softly like the touch of a feather, and then clasps his hands around her cheeks.

“I love you,” he tells her with the sincerity and gravity of a dying man. “I love you. Whatever happens.”

“I love you too,” she answers and everything hurts. They move to the bed, stripping out of the rest of their clothes, and huddle under the blanket for warmth and closeness. They dream together, drinking in every last breath, uniting in every last heartbeat. It’s everything that matters, anything that might ever matter again.

They resent waking up equally as fervent and Kylo snatches her up in his arms the second she attempts to get up. Another minute ticks by with his long limbs clasped around her but this too has to end. They dress in silence, tense and troubled and when they are finished, the black sky starts to pink with morning.

It feels odd walking through the temple the way they do. There is no one there to stop them, no one to guard Rey who feels more like a prisoner than ever before in her life. She deliberates just boarding the ship with Kylo but she knows with Snoke so close and undoubtedly watching from somewhere, they would be dead before she stepped through the hatch. The monster has her right beneath her thumb and he writhes for this somewhere in the dark of his chapel with sick abandon.
Kylo kisses her goodbye with exactly zero regard for any of the Knights of Ren and the few stormtroopers that came with Kylo’s ship. He doesn’t care. He will kill every last one of them if they only do so much as raise an eyebrow under their wretched helmets. His own is left discarded in his room. He will never wear that thing again.

His mind is blaring loudly with declarations, promises and half-formed plans but Rey drowns them out with just the one emotion she can distill. Love, bright hot and searing.


The juxtaposition of this escapes neither of them and he kisses her one last time. He’s never been in worse shape than this.

She discovers that she hates few things more than seeing his cloaked figure walk away from her as he marches toward the shuttle. Kylo doesn’t turn for a last, stolen look, he knows he will be lost if he turns around. He is leaving her alone in this place and both their bodies are rigid in pain as the distance grows. There is no remedy, no Light, only deep, dark sorrow that will overtake her.

Until - just as the hatch closes and the ship starts soaring - there is something else. It’s glowing deep inside her heart, a tiny, tiny feeling, like a coil or a ball. It’s a dense, bright yellow thing and she knows it’s his love; it’s what he is leaving with her. The strength and the hope she needs to make it through. It’s everything they are and everything she must fight for and will fight for until her dying breath. She resolves this, almost solemnly and there is some small solace in her purpose.

That gleam of hope, small as it is, still flickers dangerously when Kylo’s immediate presence fades as his ship breaks out of the stratosphere and Snoke takes over the freed up space instantly and unbidden. She can practically feel his ghostly pale arm wrap around her neck and hear the echo of his throaty, almost feral whisper, etched into the wrinkles of her brain.

You are mine now.

Chapter End Notes

I am fully aware that this is a nasty place to end this chapter. But it had to be done. I suggest you buckle in now :)

Also..I love hearing what you guys think, so your comments and reviews are truly golden and they help with the writing so so much, I thank every last one of you lovely people so much for taking time out of your day to read this and then tell me what you thought. It is life!
I'm on tumblr too, at jackpotgirl.tumblr.com follow me or drop by if you like.
Until next time :)  

(It's gonna hurt)
Chapter Summary

Snoke has Rey exactly where he wants her.

Chapter Notes

My dearies - thank you so much for all of your reviews on the last chapter, they made me write so much faster and truly made my days. I really hope you know how much every last one means to me and that every notification I get makes my day a little brighter, so thank you for that.

Huge thanks to vicious-rhythm wonderful super-beta, as always. Check out her Reylo-AUs on here, they are absolutely golden!!

Now for the most important, essential thing for this chapter:

TRIGGER WARNING! TRIGGER WARNING! TRIGGER WARNING! TRIGGER WARNING!

There are strong mentions of attempted rape and somewhat explicit torture scenes. The attempted rape scene is in TWO sets of *** so you can read around it. (Both are around the middle).
While there are no all too heavily gore-y or gruesome details, the psychological effects of isolation and torture are explored in depth and if that triggers you, please be aware or neglect to read.
This chapter follows what I feel was inevitable given the character's developments and so I didn't pull any punches. Please be aware of this.

If you choose not to read but want to know in safe words what happens, don't hesitate to contact me.

DISCLAIMER: Not sure if needed but with the fandom nowadays you never know. - I do NOT in any way condone torture, nor did I particularly enjoy writing these scenes. But the are necessary and logical within the bounds of this story.

That said, if you brave this chapter, I hope you like it despite the pain and I hope you can find it in my heart to forgive me.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Rey barely notices walking back to Kylo’s room. He’s told her the combination before he left and even punching it in where he had done so before hurts in a bizarre way. She can’t fathom yet that he is really gone. How did she get here? She half asks into the empty room, feeling more alone than ever before - and given the way she lived on Jakku for all the life she can remember, this is saying a lot.
She should have been more careful, faster, smarter when she ran from Hux and his minions on Wayland. Or maybe she should never have gone to Wayland at all. She and Kylo would still be this weird hybrid of mortal enemies and entangled souls endlessly at war.

_No_, she thinks, _that wasn’t a life either._

That’s the worst thing; for all the terror she is in right now, she would still probably do it all over again because it brought them together. Yet, where has it left them? She is literally in the lion’s den, waiting for a time and place to be eaten and their love is what unraveled it all, made it all possible. If they’d never been in love in the first place, Snoke never would’ve had the leverage. And still…

Then, with red, hot anxiety, she remembers Luke. He is completely alone on AHCH-To, with no one to warn him, no one to prepare him. He can maybe contend with Kylo when he finds him. Although even this is doubtful considering his age and Kylo’s incentive. Still, even if he did manage to defeat or come to some sort of understanding with his old Padawan, he certainly can’t fight a storm trooper battalion all by himself. She has to warn him, to reach out and give them all a fighting chance. She has a pretty good idea that Kylo, even past his earlier resolves, would survive killing him but Rey doubts _she_ would. And if Luke kills Kylo instead...well, if Snoke is right about their bond, neither of them would survive it. There is no smart decision to make, no tactics to put in motion. There is just the question of wrong or right. And she does what she has always done - choose what is right.

_Luke_, she thinks hard, not at all sure how to go about this far-distant mind-communication Kylo proposed. It used to work with him but she’s always known he was there, can feel him even now, getting away from her. He has closed off his side of the ongoing conversation for reasons she understands all too well, but he is still there in the back of her head. Luke is _nowhere_.

So she looks. Trying to remember his energy, his signature within the force, and when she thinks she has him there, somewhere in the periphery of her mind, she calls out again. To no avail. She tries again and again, tugs at the Force, begins panting from the physical strain, runs circles in the bedroom, starts crying and pulling, wishing for something that’s not happening. She isn’t strong enough. The Dark Side calls out to her and she takes as much from it as she dares, feeling tainted and dirty in the process, the sizzling sensation sending shivers down her spine that are horrifyingly pleasant.

_Luke_, he’s there somewhere, she knows it. Just a bit more of that energy, of that untapped static that flurries all around her.

_Luke_, a little more. Her hairs stand up and her body is warm. She feels every muscle tense, every sense heightened, feels somewhat less out of control, somewhat more apathetic to what is gnawing at her.

LUKE.

And nothing. Just the white noise of the Force, rushing past her ears.

So much power. A voice says in her head as she trembles with it, feeling instantly sick again, just the way she did the night before, as she realises it’s Snoke. He has felt the quiver of power, has felt another Force-sensitive grasp at the corrupt powers he commands in these halls. And he revels in it.

Rey shakes her head fervently and with it all ties to the Dark Side. She will find another way, she has to. She steels herself against that filthy whisper, raising her inner voice to drown out anything he might say to her and fights the bile rising in her throat. The queasy feeling in her stomach persists. She knows it’s Snoke’s doing, she can feel him shove it at her but at least he stops talking.

Think, she tells herself. Think of something, of anything.

And then she has a crazy idea. Well, maybe it isn’t so crazy at all. She needs to warn Luke, in any way she can and when she can’t deliver the warning herself, she needs a messenger and since there is no soul left in this forsaken place who would help her, she turns to the Dead.

“Obi Wan,” she says into the silence. She doesn’t know if he can hear her or if this will work at all but it’s worth at least trying. She still understands very little about this Force ghost business and she has no idea if they are hanging around on standby or if they just fade in and out from the Netherworld but she also doesn’t have time to ponder the specifics. All she needs to know is if it works. So she calls out his name again. And another five times until the air ripples around her. This little sign of good fortune is almost enough to make her cry.

It’s a weird sight; a force ghost appearing in the real world. It’s like a part of her vision suddenly blurs out and then something takes shape out of nothing but it’s not solid like in her dreams. Obi Wan sort of fades in, translucent, seethrough and glowing blue around the edges. His face is still clear in its disdain.

“Rey”, he says, pained and she wants to run to him and hug him but she knows she would fall right through. “What did you get yourselves into?”

“There’s no time,” she says, opting to neglect his question because he must know anyway. “Can you get a message to Luke Skywalker?”
He wrinkles his forehead in thought.

“Technically yes,” he answers, “but it would draw away my powers, my hold on the Force here. It will take time to get there and longer even to get back to you.”

“How long will it take to get to him?” she asks.

“Hours in your time,” he answers. “I have to find him first.”

“He’s on AHCH-To,” she supplies freely.

“That’s not how it works,” Old Ben says regretfully with a sad smile, “the physical location doesn’t mean anything here. I need to find his energy and he has kept it well hidden away.”

She shouldn’t be surprised. Luke Skywalker knows how to disappear.

“But I can feel him in the Force,” she says, remembering the faint glow, the light blue aura from earlier, “don’t you?”

“Yes,” he nods, “but it’s different for me. I’m like the wind, Rey. I can find you because we’re tethered by blood - Luke is a different story. I suspect we don’t have time for specifics but trust me, it takes the time it takes.”

“Well, then do it,” she urges. “Find him and tell him Kylo knows where he is and he is coming to kill him. And tell him Snoke didn’t give him a choice, tell him -”

She wants to say that she might die if Luke kills Kylo instead but that would probably result in Luke giving himself up to save her and that would still mean his death so she stops to rephrase it.

“Tell him I don’t want either of them to get hurt,” she says. “Tell him to get as far away from AHCH-To as fast as he can.”

“Rey, I won’t be able to come here for a long stretch of your time,” Obi Wan floats toward her gravely and there is another choice in his words.

He will not be able to provide guidance, to be there for her in whatever horrors Snoke is devising for her, probably in this very second. But the alternative is Luke and Kylo meeting in battle and that’s a risk she can’t take either.

“Do it,” she says, pushing away the consequences. They are problems for Future-Rey. Honestly, there was never really a question, anyway. She can’t be the reason Luke Skywalker dies.

“Rey,” Obi Wan appeals to her but she shakes her head no.

“Grandfather, please don’t make this harder than it already is,” she grits out, “you have to do this for him - for me. It’s the right thing. Watch over him! And Kylo too, if you can.”

Obi Wan gives her a faint nod, his face twisted in regret, impotence and subdued anger. She knows
the feeling.

“Be strong,” he tells her. “Hold on to who you are. He will try to take that away from you. He’ll try to break you so he can build you up anew, the way he likes.”

“I know,” she says and then, with rigour, “Go, now!”

And her last friend left in this terrible, dark world leaves her too.

He leaves behind a cold and empty room and Rey feeling equally as hollow and freezing. She deliberates lying down on the bed but it’s still crumpled from their last night’s sleep and she can’t have that. So she walks over to the ‘Fresher and gathers up the robe the droid brought for her, the one she had spurned the day before, and throws it over her shoulders. It helps a bit but still feels like a costume and a skin she is not at all willing to get into. She hopes fervently that Obi Wan will reach Luke in time. She supposes she’ll know soon.

There are three equally as unappealing outcomes. A Lose-Lose-Lose situation. Either Kylo will come back to her, having killed yet another member of his own family or she will die a horrible second-hand death if he fails to or none of these things happen and she will stay here in this temple until… until when exactly?

That’s the big question isn’t it? She hasn’t thought about this in its entirety before. Kylo had though, he had told her when she wasn’t in the right state to really grasp what it meant.

*Sn*oke won’t let me back here until it is done.

Just how long will that be? If what she wants is for Luke to not die at Kylo’s hand, could that mean forever? Until Luke dies of old age? Until Snoke decides he does not want to bother with her anymore? The result of the latter would be death either way, she guesses. So what are her realistic prospects? She half wants to stop thinking about it immediately because her body falters even under the vaguest assumptions. There’s no doubt in her mind that what her grandfather said about what Snoke plans to do with her is exactly right. He will try to break her, even more now that he knows she never had any intention of joining the Dark Side. The creature strikes her as the sort of being that will now try all the more fervently. After all, there’s more satisfaction to be gained turning an unwilling victim than susceptible, easy target. More resistance to crush, more thrills to be had, more pain to exude. Thus, logically, Rey will have to appear easy to unravel as to not engage him too much.

But how to appear to be breaking without actually breaking in the process is a daunting task she would rather never have to find out if she can master.
Little kriffin’ choice does she have, though.

*Deep breaths*, she tells herself as panic edges in on her, clawing at her heart and making it jump to her throat. *In through the nose, out of the mouth.*

She has to think methodically about this. She is resilient, she is a survivor, *she can do this* . If she can hold on to her wits through whatever he does to her, she’ll be fine. She is strong, she has endured pain before, so much of it. If that hasn’t prepared her for what is undoubtedly coming, what has it all been good for, anyway?

So she props up her chin and gets to work. She sits down on the floor, cross-legged and meditates. She doesn’t have an inkling when Snoke will call her to him but it won’t be long, she can feel him crackle with sinister anticipation from where she sits on the cold, bare floor. She works hard to keep from feeling too much of it and tries to close in on herself, breathing and calming down enough to feel somewhat like herself again.

*My name is Reyna Brightstar, my parents were Dune and Anjali, I was born in the summer, I liked to fight with practice sticks. And I love Kylo. I will be strong. I can survive this.*

This is what she knows in her heart of hearts to be true and she’ll hold on to it.

*Any minute now*, she thinks after an hour of drilling herself, trying to rehash the training with Kylo and Luke, bit by bit. But nothing happens. She is glad for the respite and focuses doubly hard on the drills, although they are harder to do on their own. She tries to reach Kylo for assistance but her heart sinks when she finds that he is physically too far, almost too faint to feel. She can’t hear his voice, just get an idea of the emotions he tries hard to keep in check. It’s every negative one on the spectrum and it does nothing to steady her, so she lets them fade into the backdrop. Somehow she had expected, had *hoped* their bond to be stronger now, to be able to breach any distance but to her absolute heartbreak, she has to accept that it isn’t. She is effectively and for all accounts and purposes, *on her own* . It takes her quite sometime to breathe through *that* revelation.

Another hour of her meditating and she thinks Snoke might burst from excitement but he still *doesn’t* send for her. Another hour yet and she starts to think he must be planning something very big and very gruesome for her if it takes this much time to prepare. Meanwhile, he doesn’t do anything but keep her in a constant state of physical discomfort for the rest of the day and when the night comes, she can’t sleep.

When she does manage to eventually, it’s just an extension of the fearful anxiety of the past hours and the following day this bad night bleeds into is no different. It holds nothing but the Snoke-induced nausea and him wickedly exalted to have her stuck in her room like a sitting duck. She doesn’t touch the food she is given in fear of throwing it back up and because she can’t even remember what having an appetite feels like. She hasn’t eaten in four days. By the end of the second day, she feels so weak, she sleeps for twelve hours and doesn’t dream at all.
The next morning she throws up bile because nothing is *happening*. When she finally eats, out of simple sustainment needs and without satisfaction, she gathers enough of her wits to realise that he is doing this on purpose. The torture has already begun. When her bitter resentment and spite registers with the creature, the tactic loses it’s appeal immediately.

*Attend to me, Brightstar.* He rasps into her head and she wonders when this particular sensation will stop twisting her stomach into a painful knot that never quite wants to untangle.

Rey is not ready. She thought she was but she isn’t and she realises this with a pang sharp enough to make her have to sit down on the bed.

*Calm down,* she orders herself.

*Now,* Snoke barks, undoubtedly feeling her resistance.

Rey shivers, raises up her walls first and her body second and then she walks. It feels like she’ll never return from this dwelling of his. The way down is familiar by now but the echo of Kylo by her side still hurts. He’s been faring no better than her, insomnia mingled with utter dread doesn’t do much to keep him stable. She thinks he might have killed one of the storm troopers but she isn’t sure. She checks in on him as often as she dares but his emotions are fickle, shaky things and he must be so far from wherever she is, she can’t be certain of anything but the strongest feelings. Those are the same as her own; worry, frustration, anxiety, longing and agitation.

Snoke awaits her with a strong emotion of his own; a fierce and bubbly exhilaration almost like that of a child that gets to unwrap a birthday gift. Rey has no intention of being anything remotely like a *gift* and walks into the dome-shaped chapel with a grim front and withering nerves, hidden behind a wall of deflection. She stares him square in the eye, won’t let him see a trace of her disquiet, at least not with his eyes.

“You look in bad shape,” he says as greeting and as if it was a personal affront against him. She refuses to engage so he continues. “You probably wonder why I had you come here.”

“Not at all,” she says spitefully and he almost makes that smiling grimace again.

“Well, I will explain anyhow,” he says. “Since your teacher is away on business - which he to my chagrin has yet to attend to - I graciously offer to step in during his absence.”

“I politely decline,” Rey says flatly and she is somewhat baffled by herself that she manages something akin to a joke right now. Snoke seems pleased with her.

“Oh, my dear,” he says, his eyes turning to slits and insidious apprehension wallowing over to her. “I *insist.*”
And so it begins.

“Lesson number one,” he declares. “To know the Dark Side, to truly know it, you must first learn pain.”

This is the only warning he gives before she feels a Force-shove, a punch with it, hit her square in the chest like a ton of bricks. Then, without even the slightest chance to catch her breath, she is ripped from the floor and up into the air, several feet above the ground. It’s instant, all-consuming agony.

Yes, Rey has known pain. And she has felt this very particular kind as a shadow in Kylo’s head but it didn’t do the excruciating torture of it any justice at all. She tries to remember that this is all in her head, that the pain isn’t real, that her body is still intact, but if feels like she is being torn apart by her arms and legs like a starfish while being engulfed in flames that disintegrate her flesh, eating away at it, into her heart, into her very bones. She spasms in the air, trying to contain it, trying to stop it and come free, willing herself not to scream as to not give the monster what it wants. She has expected this but to even think for a second she could have been prepared for this is delusional.

She holds up as long as she can but that just makes it worse. Snoke wants her to scream, he wants her to thrash and cry and if that will do anything to alleviate even an ounce of this feverish terror, she will do it and so she screams, from the top of her lungs. It doesn’t stop anything. The pain is blinding, maddening, and she screams until her throat is raw and it could be minutes or days. She forgets what time is, she forgets her name, she is nothing but hurt and thrashing woe.

When it ends, the first things that come back to her are humiliation and the sharp, slithering certainty of failure. She couldn’t have even hoped to stop him, not before and certainly not now as he lowers her down to the ground upsettingly gentle. His satisfaction is almost tempting to latch onto, the only emotion in this dark chapel that isn’t dread and anguish.

“I must say, I quite enjoy the sound of your screams, little Brightstar,” he says generously and Rey could be sick again this instant. Yet she couldn’t fight or even say something coherent if she tried. Her voice is gone. And she is bereft of words as well - she knows only screaming.

“This will suffice for the day,” he says, making a show out of contemplation. “Best to start slow on the lessons, we don’t want to overwhelm you. But do not fret, girl, you are just one in a very long succession of students to walk this path and your scream took a lot longer to acquire than most of the others. Now go, I will see you on the morrow.”

Rey wants nothing more but she can’t move, her limbs are numb with residue pain.

“Leave,” he says and she is unable to stop the compulsion, can only get up onto wavering feet and
walk all the way back to Kylo’s room. Every step has hurt and it doesn’t really stop even when she has arrived. All that’s left to do is collapse into a ball of tears and defeat.

What has she ever done to deserve this?

The night is dark and full of terrors and Snoke calls her in early the next morning to continue her lessons. They last for the next seven days in a row. On the second, she works herself into the delusion that she’ll do better and half stomps with spite to meet him. By the fifth, two Knights of Ren have to drag her from her room, kicking and screaming. She tries to mind-trick them but their heads are already fully in Snoke’s hand.

They are the only humans she sees in that whole week. Her doors won’t open at any time unless Snoke wants her and a droid brings her food through a hidden slit in the walls and even if she was granted contact to another living thing, the Knights of Ren feel like ghosts to her and emit nothing that even resembles regular human emotions. She isn’t sure if she wanted their company of she could have it. Her nights are short and horrible, the pain just goes on and on, carried over from the moment it occurs into her physical memory, echoes of the wounds inflicted haunting her all through her dreams. She could lose her mind to this alone. But it isn’t even the worst of it. Her body is failing her, more and more each day. She wakes up belching out the scarce food she has forced into her system every morning, every time she swallows it hurts like hell because she screams her throat raw and the bile burns what’s left of it. She feels half dead even in the safety of her room and down in the chapel, it’s only ever worse.

Her single refuge is the thought of Kylo and the memories of their time together she has a hard time holding onto. But they are there, they are everything. After the third day, she has given up trying to find solace in their bond though. This is because Kylo is aware of her turmoil but he doesn’t have the capacity to turn it to strength. He just plays her suffering right back to her, only more fervent, more desperate even because there is nothing he can do to help. She was the one of them who supplied the light, the positive. Without it, he is unraveled and unstable. She wants to spare them both the pain and doesn’t look for him anymore. There’s a terrible emptiness in that. It’s almost like he is gone entirely. Like he was never even there. And there’s been times when she’d been glad for that, would have sold an arm and a leg for it but now it’s the worst thing. She is so terribly alone. It’s a wonder that she even has tears left to cry.

The days fizzle together and most of the time she feels disoriented and hazy. Until he calls for her, she just lies in bed, trying not to feel or think anything and just holds her arms wrapped tight around her body, searching for that little yellow ball inside her. When she finds it, she cries because it’s some little shred of proof that she is still capable of feeling anything other than pain. Each time this happens, time becomes a little more tangible, her senses a little more collected. It’s then that she can process what is happening to her. The fact that she starts missing time, that her thoughts skitter away from her, that the pain Snoke keeps her in, chip away parts of her sanity quicker than she can gather them up again.

She tries to remember the things about herself she needs to.
My name is Reyna Brightstar, my parents were Dune and Anjali, I was born in the summer, I liked to fight with practice sticks. And I love Kylo. I will be strong. I can survive this.

But it’s so hard.

She longs for Kylo so badly her bones strain with it. She wants him, needs him back and every now and then, in terrible, disgusting and intrusive episodes, she just wants him to neglect everything they agreed on, find Luke Skywalker, put his saber through his chest and come back to her. She shakes these thoughts off as quickly as she can but they keep coming anyway. Because every day is another day that Kylo does not kill Luke Skywalker.

On day four, Snoke asks for the first time.

“Has Kylo killed Luke Skywalker yet?” Snoke wants her to feel for disturbances in the Force. Rey feels only Darkness.

“No,” is what it tells her.

“Just right,” Snoke says. “Let’s send him a little reminder.”

And up she goes.

On the eighth day, Rey enters the chapel thinking this will be the day that she dies. She hasn’t been able to keep food down in days and her body is crumbling around her, too tired to sleep and too broken to heal. She is still functioning, she knows it. Her skin is soft and rosy and despite the fact that she barely eats, she has not lost any weight. She feels so brittle but everything she sees in the mirror that could attest to it are the bags under her eyes and the vacant look in her eyes. If her body would just fail her entirely, maybe that would be better - but she still gets up every day and keeps returning to that place. What choice does she have?

When she sees the holding chair, she gasps at the memories it brings and sends an apology to an unresponsive Kylo that this is where she has to leave him. Maybe it’s better this way. She treads forward, handing herself over to death’s very hands and she gets into the chair voluntarily. What does it matter now? If Snoke wants to humiliate her so badly let him have it. She won’t care about that when she’s dead. Maybe she can become a Force ghost like Obi Wan and Kylo could too. Then she could be with him and Snoke couldn’t hurt them anymore.

Yes. Maybe dying is a good thing. She does regret for a second that she can’t leave anything of hers behind, for Luke, Finn, or Poe. But what good is a death note with no one to read it? They won’t know that she died, maybe not ever. It’ll be just two bodies at opposite sides of the galaxy falling and ceasing to exist. It can’t be that bad, really. Rey nods, if only to herself. She can die now.
But Snoke doesn’t let her.

He force-shuts the clasps and when she closes her eyes in acceptance of the end of her very short, very challenging life, he snickers.

“I think you have mastered the first lesson, and well, my hopeful apprentice,” he says and the word makes Rey open her eyes. “You are very strong, very resilient. Kylo Ren was ready to die two days before you. But then again, women tend to withstand a lot more pain than those fickle boys anyway. I am very pleased with you. Let today be your reward, little Brightstar.”

He sends her a very strong emotion and it feels so alien in its goodness that she nearly stops breathing. It’s not quite joy, no, more like indulgent, self-important triumph but she latches onto it for dear life all the same.

“Imagine Kylo Ren by your side as you rule the galaxy,” he orders her and the compulsion meets no resistance. It’s an odd thought at first but his emotion supplies the fodder. She sees it before her mind’s eye, has to see it.

There is Kylo, wonderful and glorious, clad in blacks and tall, his broad shoulders shielding her, protecting her from every bad intention anyone could aim at her. He slashes through their enemies, anyone who could ever think to hurt her and she is by his side, whole and sane and beautiful, scarlet red robes flowing in sizzling air. The Dark Side of the Force is all around them and it promises strength and shelter. No one can hurt them, no one can hurt her. There is no more pain, only power. Only him and her, the two most powerful Force-sensitives in the galaxy, ruling it the way they see fit.

This can be real, Snoke purrs into her mind. You can have your lover back. Once the last Jedi is gone, you can be together and all this torment can end.

Yes. She thinks and for a wonderful second, she feels whole again in this concession. Until she remembers who she is and what is happening and that this is all wrong and terrible and she recoils from the bottomless pit in her heart.

Snoke snatches her right out of her fantasy after that.

“I see,” he says. “There is still a little work to do. Let us devote the foreseeable future to understanding how you can use the Dark Side to your advantage, precious apprentice.”

He lets her go then, guessing that the shame about being so thoroughly tempted would be just as effective as making her suffer through another delusion of grandeur.
She dreams of Kylo that night, for the first time in what feels like ages but he’s all distorted, power hungry and gruesome. It’s Snoke’s version of him, the dream he had Kylo chase that she doubts now was ever truly his own.

In the morning, she asks herself for the first time how the boy that had been Ben Solo had survived this. What could Snoke have offered him that he would’ve lived through these lessons? How many times has Ben suffered any variation of what Snoke is doing to her until he became just that stunted, stuck little ghost of a person and how had the goodness and brightness that was still in Kylo managed to stay alight? How had he not died or gone completely insane? How strong was he truly? How much stronger than her?

In the face of all she has endured so far in mere days, she is baffled by the fact that Kylo has spent the better part of his life under Snoke’s thumb. Sure, he moved about freely for probably the last ten years but before that…if a week could turn Rey into this, why hasn’t Kylo fallen to dust after what must’ve been at least five years of this so called training.

*The Dark Side*, whispers her own voice inside her. Of course. How can one handle so much pain unless the pain itself can give you strength. Is this really the only way she can survive this? No. There has to be another way.

*Think of the ball*, she thinks, *feel it hum. Listen to the murmur of it. It’s all still there, it’s bigger now if you want it to be, feel around the edges, protect it, Rey. Fight!*

She jerks up with a start. Someone is talking. A woman. For a wild, unhinged moment she thinks it’s her mother, maybe a Force ghost too, somehow, but then after a few breathless heartbeats as she comes back to herself, she clasps her arms around her shoulders and starts rocking back and forth in bed. It was her voice.

She is talking to herself now. Rey is slowly losing her mind.

Back in the chair the next day, and the next and the next, Snoke talks. He, who usually does not bother with too many words, paints pictures of greatness with a broad brush, praises the powers he can reach until she chokes on his metaphors and uninterrupted paragraphs.

Shameful as it is to admit, his visions are drawing her in and the feelings of pristine calm he shoves at her along with them do nothing to strengthen her resistance. She feels like she’s becoming translucent, like he could pass right through her. He makes her close her eyes and there is no light and no sound but his voice, no feelings but the ones he wants her to feel. Rey can’t hold a single coherent thought for any stretch of time, any notions she has of disproving his sticky promises
dissolve into weak, stoic apathy as she listens and tries to remember the real truths of who she is. Dimly aware that she is slipping more every day.

She spends her days with Snoke and her nights trying to reconstruct the parts of her he tore down with his suggestive masses of monologues. Days bleed into weeks and weeks into what could as well be months as she loses all sense of time.

She has taken every single item of clothing, every sheet she could find in Kylo’s dresser, and has put it on the bed. She showers only so that the things don’t smell and she prays they never stop smelling like him. It’s everything she can do. Everything from before Kylo seems light years out of reach and now, in the dark of the night, she wishes fervently that he would just find Luke and get it over with.

After all he did have it coming, insisting on keeping that wretched Jedi order alive. If Kylo got to him now, it would truly be over. She won’t kid herself into thinking she was going to be the last Jedi after him. Evidently, she’d never been one in the first place. As she reaches for that little ball of light inside her and tries to keep nurturing it because it’s the only real thing she has left, she knows that these thoughts are not truly hers but she lacks the strength to fight them anymore.

“You’ll get through this,” she whispers, pretending it’s Kylo talking to her. And she repeats the things he said to her she can remember best. “I love you. Don’t hide. You’re different. It’s like falling into the sun. Hold me. You’re mine.”

And she cries and cries and cries.

Rey’s feet drag as she makes her descent and she wants to laugh bitterly at the metaphor one morning that she is lucid enough to reflect on what she has become. That day, Snoke tells her about Kylo, about what a good apprentice he was before he was undone by her charms, as he puts it.

“I don’t blame you, sweet Brightstar,” he says amicably and he wants it to feel like a caress. “He is a deeply ordinary creature at his core.”

“Leave him out of this,” she snaps, finding the fight in herself at the slight against Kylo. Snoke’s face changes from smooth apathy to something twisted and angry in a heartbeat, fast enough to get whiplash just from looking at him.

“After all this time?” he asks her, almost incredulously. “After everything I showed you, of how great you can be, you still hold on to that weak, pathetic, human delusion of love? Kylo Ren does not truly love, he can not love. He thinks he does now but you’ll see soon enough that you cannot save him. Once he has killed Skywalker he’ll return to his true purpose.”
“Never,” she spits, unsure where exactly her strength comes from but it’s a fiery place. Fiercely protective of the man she loves, the man this creature has taken so much of, has used so selfishly with only ever delivering pain in return. “You don’t know him. You believe he’s only what you made him but he is so much stronger. He does love. And he has always loved and you will never own him, never! He is mine, not yours.”

Pettily, he bites at her resistance. “Imagine just how yours he’ll be.”

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He sends her fear and then whispers something unspeakable into her head and this time, she feels the push of the compulsion but it slithers past her weak hold on it and spreads in her brain like thick, blinding fog. She can’t run, can’t hide from this.

Kylo is there, twisted, angry, a glare in his eyes that is feral and dangerous. She has never seen him like this. He runs to her, face blazing and catches her wrists in his arms.

“You’re hurting me,” but he doesn’t hear it, he runs her into a wall, pins her hands above her head by the wrists and starts undoing his pants. “Kylo, stop.”

“No,” he grumbles and it doesn’t sound human.

And she echoes the word and fights. She won’t let Snoke do this to her. Never, Kylo would never! She thrashes in his grip and then screams at herself.

This isn’t real, this isn’t real. And somehow it works. The nightmarish, faux Kylo halts, the image of him becoming fainter and fainter until he is gone and she wants to wake up and stick it to the beast but he has other plans.

He hisses at her, a new fantasy, much worse than the last and she falls from the wall to the floor and again, she is unable to move but this time, it’s a force-hold, so strong her phantom limbs tremble with it and then it spreads her out, vulnerable and naked and there are pale, white, scarred hands on her body and his disgusting broken face looming over her.

No, no, no.

She fights and struggles. Snoke in her forced fantasy is repugnant up close, shriveled and reeking of clotted blood and decay.
Don’t touch me, don’t TOUCH ME!

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Rey needs to be stronger, to end this horrible, terrifying dream before it breaks her. So she reaches, above her body, above everything and she finds the pitch black tar, the sinister flurry of the Darkness and for the first time, with open arms and no hesitation, she grabs it.

She lets it course through her, set all her wounds on fire and lets it open them up anew. The pain is at once everywhere, drowning everything out but then it starts to change, to transform. It sharpens her senses, makes her thoughts pointed things, her mind ready to attack and it feels almost like coming home, like reclaiming her own, charred soul.

She rips into whatever hold Snoke has on her mind and the mirage he is blinding her with ends at once. She is wide awake and her eyes dart open to find his bulging with exertion and something akin to shock. She has shut him out, locked him out of her head before he could destroy the last thing she had. Her stomach is tight with the barely averted horrors and she finds the yellow ball in there still intact to her grim satisfaction.

The darkness flows through her like a current and she only needs to flex her fingers for the shackles to spring open and she lunges out, free from the restraints. Snoke has to catch his breath for the first time since she’s known him and then he gives her a force-shove that she feels coming a mile off.

Rey lets it catch her and carry her far and, in meticulous calculation, she waits for just the moment she would’ve hit the door with her back and catches herself, using her new power to conduct the air around her, bending it to her will so it carries her down to the ground like a docking ship.

And so the balance shifts.

“LEAVE!” He screams at her as if he still made the rules and Rey wants to rip his throat out with her teeth.

But then with a pang, the doors clash open behind her and too many arms to fight off close around her body and carry her away.

She gets half thrown into her room and inside, in her own little reprieve, the darkness that had saved
her becomes unbearable. It has felt so good to be this powerful, Rey is disgusted and appalled by herself in equal measure. Had this been his intention all along? She has used the Dark Side, used it swiftly and expertly, as if she was made for it. She didn’t even have to think, she could just command it.

What is she? What had she become? What has he made of her?

She barely makes it to the ‘Fresher to throw up and gets from the toilet seat right into the shower, scrubbing her body off until she bleeds in patches and wishing harder than ever before that she could just sleep and never wake up.

When she does, the night turns out even worse than her day has been. She is stuck in a nightmare of Kylo and his blazing face as he runs towards her.

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She recoils and she hates him, hates him, hates him. She knows what he wants to do to her but she won’t let it happen, won’t let him near her.

“No,” he mutters, “no, that wasn’t me, that wasn’t real.”

Liar, he is trying to trick her. He wants to hurt her. It’s not Kylo at all, it’s Snoke, it has been Snoke all along and his ghostly, pale fingers tick some unknown rhythm against her skull, grinding her down, gnawing at her brain like a worm. He will not have her, will never have her.

“Get away from me,” she screams, “you monster!”

And she shuts him out again.

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Rey can feel the darkness linger like a protective blanket for the rest of the night.

Snoke doesn’t want to see her again. Rey wills herself to have that feel like a triumph but all she feels is defeat, crushing and encompassing. She spends three days in bed, eating what they bring her but she’s never satisfied. The newly awoken hunger is just another uncomfortable thing in a long list of
many things that hurt and it barely stands out.

She has episodes, nightmares even while she is awake and it’s only then that she realises it’s a very different kind of torment she endures. Now that Snoke does not call for her anymore, the time alone is filled in by her own mind playing tricks on her. She can hear his voice even though she knows he’s not speaking to her. She feels ghosts of touch and jabbing pain even though he isn’t engaging, not even to send her the odd nausea, she sees him although he isn’t there and when she dreams, she dreams of killing. And it’s not just him she kills, it’s Knights of Ren, Stormtroopers and in one very terrifying dream, it’s Kylo. When she sees the life leave his eyes, she screams herself awake, feeling dirty and broken. That’s when she lets the dark in again. She has to if she wants to make it through the night.

*My name is Rey. I love Kylo. I will survive this.*

Yes, she will do what it takes to survive. Anything at all.

It becomes somewhat of a habit. When it all gets to be too much, she opens herself up to the flurry and the darkness finds her quicker each time until it’s a second skin she puts on, a shield from her own mind wherein anguish becomes strength and fear sharpens her senses to almost clarity.

She wears Kylo’s blacks draped around her and stops looking in the mirror. Rey doesn’t want to see herself anymore when she feels nothing like the girl she knew. She is someone else now, *something* else. A shadow, a broken demon or a lonely ghost, haunting herself.

One day, in a pitiful childish tantrum brought on by anger, her new powers have her break the room and unlock her prison door. She deliberates fleeing, trying to make a run for it but she can feel Snoke command the darkness at once and she knows every knight in the compound is instructed to fight to kill her so she doesn’t.

Instead, she roams around, her dark clothes blending into the temple walls and her feet carry her about the place as if they know every corner and she doesn’t meet a single soul for the whole day.

To test herself and to prove that she isn’t as weak as she thinks, she follows a downward staircase, just like the one leading to Snoke. Her heart beats faster with every stair and she pulls at the Dark Side for support until something curious grabs her attention away from her own head. There is *something*. Lingering in the darkness at the end of these stairs. It bubbles, dangerous and ancient. Propelled by curiosity, she treads on, surefooted and finds some small part of herself return to her. Her scavenger senses tingle with a new discovery to make and she relishes in the almost forgotten sensation.
Rey follows through on the path she is set on and it takes her down and down until there is heat welling up in the cold ground. It beckons her closer. There is power there, serenity even, and she comes upon a smaller, cave-like corridor and then turns a corner and finds herself in a giant volcanic cave and Rey knows instantly that it is just a few years younger than the planet itself. It’s where the flurry of darkness is strongest yet. It emanates from the fog on the still water. It spans the entire cave, leaving only edges of solid ground. Rey stands on one side and there is another little bit on the far side, across from her. The other place seems to mirror hers, there is a little opening in the stones she can make out faintly and she can feel Snoke’s presence thick as a wall. With a start, she realises that this is where his chappel leads. It makes sense. He would want to be close to this terrible, heinous pool. It helps calm even Rey down with its horror and she is trying to fight it. What it does for Snoke who welcomes it, is evident by the scars on her soul.

She thinks for a second, because something that feel so evil must hold some sort of darker secret and so she tugs at her sleeves and rips out a tiny piece of fabric and throws it into the still water. As expected, the fibre comes apart upon impact with a hiss as it disintegrates. Acid. A whole sea of it and evidently as deadly as everything else here.

For longer than she will care to deliberate later, she wonders if she should just go into the water but the thought of Kylo holds her back and makes her turn around.

It carries her all the way back to her room. She doesn’t go exploring again after this. Falling back into an old habit, she has taken up marking her passing days again. She has missed the first two weeks or so, but now she makes another cut into the headboard of Kylo’s bed with her fingernail and counts.

It’s been almost two months. And if she is this after two months, what will she be in another? How long will Kylo be gone? How long until the woman he left in this place is gone, entirely replaced by this thing she is becoming. For an anxious second she wonders if he would still love her, broken like this.

He’s loved and latched onto her warmth, her light. She’s been the one to draw him back to it. And now it’s all but lost. Does this mean they will be too? Will Snoke have them after all?

Rey needs to fight, needs to find the little yellow ball and remember who she is but she is so tired. First, she’ll sleep. She’ll fight in the morning. In lieu of a lullaby, she mutters Kylo’s name, babbling and continues to until dreams take her and make her suffer all the pain freshly, all over again.

More days pass idle like this, trapped inside a prison all her own. She doesn’t get worse but she doesn’t get better either. The darkness is always present, always a thin layer between her and the rest
of the world. It helps with the pain, helps to focus when stringent thoughts skitter away and her heart jumps and constricts in her chest in panic from something that isn’t really happening.

Sometime in a more lucid hour, she is trying to decipher how it works, the mechanics of turning pain into power, when there is a knock on her door.

She expects new linen for the bed and one of the plain service droids but when she has it swish open with a flick of her wrist, there is Hux standing before her, his ginger hair combed pristinely.

She almost starts crying because it’s the first time she has seen a human face in months. He takes her in and she must look bad because the emotion that crosses his even features registers as pity. It’s gone as soon as it came though and she feels better in the face of his heartless snarl.

“I don’t take well to being drawn from the frontlines to contend with rebel scum,” he says as if she had called him in personally.

Rey guesses Snoke’s discomfort with her must go deeper than she thought if he sent for his lapdog to deal with her. She doesn’t care. There is nothing Hux can do to her that could make anything any worse. So she rises from the bed as gracefully as she can, considering her caked hair and her tired limbs.

“What do you want?” she snaps, not about to humour him even for a second.

“I want to know why Kylo Ren hasn’t killed Skywalker yet,” he hisses with pure, undiluted contempt for her. “He keeps getting away, as if someone was warning him, like someone knew every move.”

“He’s a Jedi,” Rey deadpans and looks at him as if he is the most pathetic mortal she has ever seen. “They feel things. You wouldn’t understand.”

A vein pulses dangerously in his forehead. Hatred looks ugly on this pale face of his.

“I can’t prove it to Supreme Leader Snoke yet, but I know it’s Ren. And you’re going to tell me everything you know.”

It’s almost adorable that he thinks he can extract information from her. Rey tugs at the Dark Side, habitually at this point and lets it course from her head down to her toes, feels it sizzle in her fingertips and zero in on her fulfilling her commands.
“No,” she says and wonders if Hux has any idea at all what is going on, with her, with Snoke, with Kylo, with anything. She doubts it.

“So it’s true then, what they say,” he tilts his head. “He really did it. He made you his whore.”

Anger crackles inside Rey but she bites it down. Let this ridiculous man think whatever he wants.

“What was it?” he continues, evidently not knowing what’s good for him at all. “What seduced you, was it his infantile temper tantrums? His insanity? Or the stupid, out of shape face he chooses not to hide anymore?”

Rey stays unresponsive but it’s challenging. The Force flashes in her mind’s eye, feeding on her anger at the taunts.

*That imbecile. This stupid, stupid man.*

Then, he makes an even worse decision when he barges into the room and stops only when he is way too close for comfort. When he speaks, he sounds husky, hungry and disgusting.

“Or was it the darkness itself?” he whispers hotly and touches her shoulder. “Did you just want someone dangerous to give it to you good, you little rebel *bitch*?”

And this is where she draws the line. He has had this one coming a mile away, she is hardly to blame for what happens next.

Buzzing with vicious energy, her fingers dart up and she knows exactly where she has to push to close off his throat, knows where to lift him so he goes up into the air, raised by the grip she has on him until it’s all that holds him up.

It’s exhilarating, Force-choking someone like that, feeling his lungs longing for air, his heartbeat running away from him, trying to get the blood to his brain where she blocks the way. And the best thing is seeing his stupid face twist in agony, panic and utter shock because he didn’t know she could do that. She pushes harder and she knows it won’t be long now.

Hux is fighting for his life and therein loses the battle for his bowel control. The stale air fills with the stench of urine as he pisses himself and it drips from his feet in the air to the floor in a pathetic illustration of just how powerless he is in the face of Rey’s rage. She snarls a wicked grin up at him that doesn’t feel like it’s hers.

*Any moment now*. So this is the cue Snoke takes to make his reappearance in her head and then two
things happen at the same time. First, she knows that the beast sent Hux on purpose, as a sacrifice to her darkness he means to bring under his control and second, Rey breaks the hold on Hux’s throat and lets him hit the floor hard.

“If I ever see your face again, I’ll rip you apart,” she declares and he scurries to his feet faster than she can revel in it. He can be heard racing, panting and coughing down the corridor for quite some time.

Rey swallows hard and tries to will her body to be still. She has almost killed someone - in cold blood. Just because she could. Snoke’s pleasure is back with a vengeance and he rasps around in her brain again.

*Very well, Brightstar. You are ready for your initiation into my order. I expect you in my chapel tomorrow at noon.*

A month ago, she would have run to puke her heart out now. But whatever is left of Rey can’t work up enough terror for that. Fine, so the monster wants some ceremony to bind her to him, he’ll get it. She doesn’t care. She doesn’t care about anything anymore. She is all but gone. What she has almost done less than a minute ago just brings that home. A couple more weeks in this place and all that will be left of Rey will be memories in other people’s heads.

She thinks she’s gonna need a new name soon.

The initiation is a brutal thing. All the Knights of Ren are gathered in the chapel, unflinching, unmoving masks and they could as well be props if it weren’t for the violent energy that radiates off of every last one of them. They are a unit, controlled by Snoke, and Rey knows if she were to raise the lightsaber staff they bring to her against him, she would be buried beneath bloodlusting men, tearing her apart. She wonders if they are always present for initiating or if they are simply Snoke’s protection, that would just be interesting to know.

“We have gathered in these hallowed halls to lift another up into our midst,” Snoke declares for exactly no one’s benefit. “You fight a fellow Knight to the death and should you use the graces of my guidance well enough, you will be alive by the end of it to join our ranks.”

Rey nods. Fatalism and exhaustion. She’ll do this as well. He wants her to kill so badly, she wouldn’t be surprised if the whole fight to the death rule was just a ploy to begin with. It hardly makes a difference on the outcome though.
Her opponent steps forward, a tall and burly man, but when he removes his helmet, Rey flinches. There is nothing kind in his eyes at all but his features are soft, young. He is nothing but a huge boy. He looks even younger than her. And it’s all on purpose, it’s all a deliberate farce to make her kill her very humanity herself. Because this is her own personal hell, she obviously has no choice but to do it.

They start out with base Ataru stances, him on the offence, her on the defence and she can feel him steady himself, draw from the Force but it’s such a little reach he has, it’s almost pitiful. He is no match for her, not even close.

He starts attacking her and she parries, then attacks herself and makes him run circles across the room. She draws it out. Thanks to Niman and Soresu, she can fight him and hold him off without killing him. Quite some time into this, Snoke bristles with impatience because he can tell what she is doing. He sneers a compulsion on her opponent and his face splits with murder and abandon.

He gains ground on her then, if not for skill then for simple vigour and Rey loses her head to the fury of the fight. They dance, ungracefully and unrefined, at least on his part. The knight flings himself at her, again and again and he is so intent on piercing her body, he lets down his guard, opening up the perfect spot on his torso. Before Rey can think, her limbs move from mere muscle memory. Kylo would have blocked her slash. This one doesn’t.

In a terrible wave of fear and despair, he realizes that he is done with and somehow he remains on his feet while his stomach falls open. With an almost dumbfounded look, he drops his saber and gathers the intestines in his palms as they come free, no longer held together by skin.

Then he dies, without throes, without even rearing up one last time. He simply topples over and bleeds slowly out over the concrete. Rey recoils from the expanding pool of blood licking at the tips of her boot and comes back to her senses just in time for Snoke to yank them away from her again.

It isn’t even a conscious act of his this time. His sick elation is merely too loud to focus on everything else and she half loses her mind in his ecstasy. It’s a sickening feeling, unclean, pushing her into overdrive and she feels Snoke racing towards something. It’s huge and terrifying and he draws from the Dark Side, from her pain, from the cloaked figures in the room, the stench of blood and death and works himself up to a shuddering, appallingly gruesome and revolting climax. And it’s nothing other than that, nothing more sinister. It’s just feral human release and somehow that’s so much worse as if he was just pure, distilled evil.

Because he isn’t doing any of this because he has some dark master plan, no. Supreme Leader Snoke would lay the galaxy to waste and has eradicated entire planets, entire civilisations all to get off.
And this breaks Rey finally. She staggers backward, a blinding pain, fuelled with repulsion and bare, naked dread and topples over, vomiting on the cold ground before her vision starts to blur and she feels Snoke come down to hazy, self-satisfied content before everything is darkness and she slips.

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Kylo is on the outskirts of the galaxy, asleep on a First Order star destroyer when he finally pushes through Rey’s foggy, dazed mind into her dreams. He aches for her with a fervour he has never known and despite all the pain, when he sees her, his heart floods with joy.

He has only the one desire to hold her, to make it better, to tell her that he almost has a plan, a way out of her terrible suffering. But as he runs to her, her face twists in a rage he has never seen on her before, not even when she was attacking to kill him all that time ago. It’s the worst way she could ever look at him and he doesn’t understand until he finds the horror in what she has endured.

“No,” he mutters, “no, that wasn’t me, that wasn’t real.”

“Get away from me,” she screeches and it doesn’t sound human, “you monster!”

He is catapulted out of her mind and left with only her burning hatred and he knows he has to do something immediately.

Breaking away from his troops isn’t hard. He is in a position where he can just leave them, feigning special orders from Snoke himself who is, predictably, too preoccupied destroying everything that has ever mattered to Kylo to care. Going unnoticed on Tatooine requires a bit more effort but is hardly a challenge either.

Buying a rusty old protocol droid and programming it isn’t hard. Bribing a crew of smugglers that deliver goods to the Resistance is even less of a hassle than he would have presumed. But the words he speaks into the holo-lense of the battered can of tin they sold him as a “droid” are the hardest he ever had to pry out of his own lips.

“You have to meet me on Tatooine at the enclosed location as soon as you can. This is not a trick. I will be alone and unarmed. Snoke has Rey. I need help. Please come alone and please hurry. General Organa,” he says and with great effort, he cuts the awkward formalities and puts it all in there; his fear and pain and the one wish to have just someone left to turn to in the world. And who if not her would heed his call? The word rolls from his lips and as soon as it does, it doesn’t hurt so bad anymore.
“Mother, you are my only hope.”

Kylo prays to every God constructed that whatever motherly love and trust she still holds in her heart for her only son, it will be enough to bring her to him.

He can feel her presence on the desert planet three days later and she would have found him, hiding out in Old Ben’s old cave, even without the coordinates. As she gets closer, his nerves start fraying and everything he has pushed so far down comes bubbling back up. He has spent years of his life devoted to hating this woman and he never quite managed to but oh, what has he taken from her in the process? Is she truly alone as he’s asked or did she come with angry villagers, ready to take her monster son away and burn him alive? Would she watch on as he died, with grim satisfaction that the man who killed the love of her life was given to the flames? Or would she weep for him because all of her politics couldn’t save him after all?

Yet, as she gets closer, he can feel that she is alone and all her emotions are consistent with a mother who is traveling to meet an estranged son she has all but know to be lost.

Feeling them is different than Rey’s or even Snoke’s. Snoke doesn’t filter and at times pushes them onto him. Rey’s thoughts and feelings feel like his very own but his mother’s are cushioned, decked by some invisible cap. He thinks that it’s her doing, a protective shield around them, so only surface information seeps through.

He knows she is as aware of him as he is of her and when she has arrived at his hiding place, he stays in the old, dusty living area and waits, standing in the middle of it, until she finds him.

“He is not a trick,” she says and it’s a prayer and something else entirely. She looks older, more tired, more resigned, but what kills him, is that the love she feels for him is still just as strong as ever. Even with everything that he has done.

“Thank you for coming,” he says with a lump in his throat, unsure where to look and then he cuts right back to business before he can do something stupid, like cry. “Are you alone?”

“I shouldn’t be,” she says, wearily and scanning the room, “but I am. Don’t make me regret it.”

“I told you, this is not a trick,” he promises and knows that there is another conversation to be had instead of this, something entailing apologies and explanations but there is no time. “I need your help. I need to save Rey from Snoke.”

“What in the Force’s name has happened?” his mother says, following him down the path of practicality. “What did you do to her?”
“Nothing,” he snaps, temper flaring but he reels it in. She is right to ask, she has no way of knowing what has happened after all. All she remembers of him is his heinous crimes. “I...I followed her to Wayland to talk and then the shuttle crashed and we stayed out there for a while, trying to find a way off the planet but Snoke collected us. I tried to keep her safe, I really tried. But I failed.”

The failure is bile in his throat, and self-loathing at astronomical levels, even for him. He loves Rey more than anything and this is how he proves it. By leaving her to rot in the hands of a filthy creature who wants nothing better than to taint her to the core and make her his. All because he can’t bare to kill the only thing remotely like a father she has left.

But what good will Luke do her if she goes insane? Will he patch her back together when she’s broken beyond repair and the darkness he feels licking at her, threatening to overcome her, wins? It’s doubtful. Luke Skywalker has failed a child too close to the dark once before. Spectacularly.

“And then you left her with him?” his mother asks, incredulous, echoing his own thoughts.

“I didn’t have a choice,” he hisses because it’s true.

“As opposed to, you did it on purpose,” she hisses right back, so much fight in her for such a small woman, “hand-delivered her to him.”

“No, I would never have done that,” he half screams, feeling himself slip. She doesn’t understand, he has to make her understand. “Something has happened, mother. With Rey and me. Please, I don’t have time to explain. We need to get to her, to save her.”

His mother takes a tentative step back, as if she is only truly seeing him clearly now, maybe for the first time in both their lives.

“What happened to you?” she asks him after a long while of this and he can feel her testing the air around them, feeling the changes in him.

“I love her, Mom,” he says. That’s what it boils down to. He loves Rey and it changed everything. “I don’t feel torn anymore. I know where I belong.”

Something splits her face open and he can’t say if it’s triumph, hope, affection, disbelief, or a mash-up of all four. She hovers, in a half-taken step for a second, deliberating, but then she decides and closes the distance between them with purpose. The last time she hugged him, he’d just turned fifteen.

“I’ll see you on your birthday, next year,” she had said. On his sixteenth birthday, Ben’s name was Kylo Ren and his home the spartan room Rey now inhabited.

He grants himself a minute to sink into this hug and drink in and accept all that it means and could
mean. Love, maybe forgiveness, maybe even redemption. There is no small shame in recalling everything bad he has ever wished upon her or done to her and Kylo wants to place the blame entirely on Snoke but that wouldn’t be sincere. He has loathed this woman all on his own many times; because she’d abandoned him time and time again. Because she was afraid of him, because she had sent him away.

But worst of all, because she would just never stop loving and fighting for him. He was and is undeserving of her stubbornness. Of her love, her help, or this embrace. So, by withdrawing from the unearned affection, he starts his penance and plucks her arms from his frame. He squeezes them once, twice with his large hands and the respite is over.

He still has a job to do.

“I need to get her out of there,” he says and Leia takes his hands in hers. The whole motion seems foreign, the feelings elicited like memories of ancient dreams.

“Where is she?” she asks softly.

“In the unknown regions. I have the coordinates,” he tells her. “We need an airstrike, every last ship in your fleet. Snoke will call in the First Order - but if we hit hard and quickly, he’ll be dead before you’ll suffer too many losses. Once he is dead, I can stop the fighting.”

She lets go of his hand and the loss of contact hurts and he is a little boy again, yearning for his mother’s love. She reverts back to the scepticism that has been his constant observer growing up.

“And after that?” she almost scolds him. “If you manage to kill Snoke and save Rey the way you claim to want to, what comes next? Will you take over for him? How can I know this isn’t a trap or that you’re using the Resistance to throw over one tyrant only to step into his shoes?”

“Look inside me, Mother,” he says and her doubt hurts but isn’t surprising. He lays himself bare, his emotions, all of them, but emphasises Rey and everything that has to do with her. And he thinks about his mother’s question. Of what comes next. He doesn’t know but he sure as hell has no intention of becoming the next Snoke. All he wants is Rey to be safe and to keep her thus until he dies.

“How?” his mother asks, breathless, when she emerges from scanning his feelings. He has a good idea that she probably tries to reconcile the man before her with the boy who so foolishly destroyed his life and family.

“I don’t know,” he says truthfully and then adds, “and I have no idea what comes after, if there is an after at all. All I know is that I can’t spend one more day trying to give Uncle Luke enough time to evade me again and again while this monster has her in his clutches. I have to do something now and I can’t save her by myself.”
Leia finally nods and Kylo manages to smile, from gratitude, relief and hope but then something ugly rips him out of the moment.

Rey, stronger than ever before from such a distance, pushes to the forefront of his mind. She feels disgust, pain, repulsion and dread and it’s such a very particular set of emotions that he has a pretty good idea what happened.

Kylo loathes Snoke, despises him with a fervor brash even for his capacity for hatred. It only strengthens his resolve. There’s no time to waste and he wants to pry his senses away from Rey so he can focus but then the unfathomable happens as Rey disappears from his mind into oblivion.

His fists clench as his heart spills out and bangs up into his throat and he expects to die. When he doesn’t he searches for her, manically and wants to weep when he picks up her trail again. She is faint but still there. Yet, there is no way she is awake now, no way she can protect herself.

No, no, no, he thinks. Wake up, Rey, fight!

She doesn’t and he knows his time is up.

“I have to go,” he says to his mother without ceremony and brushes past her.

“What?” She staggers backward, shoved out of the way and is completely confused. “But we need a plan.”

“No, there is no time, I just felt her…” he begins but it’s too difficult to explain. “She is not well. I need to leave immediately.”

Kylo tries his hardest to get the urgency across, to make her realise that she has to continue on without him if there is to be any chance of survival.

“Come to these coordinates, bring every reinforcement you have. Who knows, this could turn the whole war around. Don’t leave hyper-space until you’re on the planet or they’ll know you’re coming. Be quick, please.”

With this he turns around, his robe flowing dramatically around his feet from the momentum.

“Ben,” she calls his name and it stops him short. It sounds like she is calling him for dinner.

“Yes?” he says and turns around to see her face soft and amicable, if a little heartbroken as well.

“May the Force be with you,” she half whispers and a single tear runs down her face, “my son.”
“Thank you,” he bites and leaves her behind. The sub-zero desert air freezes his own tears on his cheek as he walks out into the night and toward his ship.

*I’m coming Rey*, he thinks. *Just hold on for me.*

Chapter End Notes

I would be eternally grateful if you'd drop me a line because I was very anxious about this chapter, so if you could just tell me if you're alright, that would be amazing :)

Also, if you are super down and sad now, I absolutely suggest watching this: http://starwarsh0e.tumblr.com/post/137839395479/undercover-boss-starkiller-base-bts-for-anyone

It's the light of my weekend!

What's left? 2 more chapters! Let's do this together my lovelies, yes?
Once I Hold On...

Chapter Notes

My precious vicious-rhythm is the best beta in the world and you should all read her AU fics because they are golden!

As for you, you marvellous readers, this is no finally the most well-recieved fic I've ever written and I'm a little proud ball every waking hour and I'm so glad you're all enjoying this ride with me.

I truly hope that this chapter rises to your expectations and I'd love to hear from you if you liked it. (I'm a bit nervous about this one tbh). Anyhoo, I hope you enjoy the read and thanks again to everyone who takes time out of their day to leave a review, they are life!

The first thing Rey notices before she becomes aware of her limbs and the specifics about who exactly she is, is that Kylo is back. It’s a sensation so entire and so wonderful in it’s out-of-placeness among everything else she feels, she is crying before she even opens her eyes. When they fly open, at first all she sees is grey and she blinks once, twice, and brings up her hands to rub the sleep from them.

There are two reassuring things she knows before she conquers the task of sitting up straight. First, she is in some sort of Med bay, on a cot, unrestrained, and appears to be in one piece and second, Kylo is everywhere and so close that she can pinpoint his location. Still, as she tries to adjust her spinning head to her new upright position, she dreads where exactly that location is and what passes through their rejuvenated connection. Kylo is down in the chapel and he is in agony. It’s Snoke’s doing which is hardly surprising.

Kylo is preoccupied trying to shield and protect himself against the onslaught and so he can not feel her come to, become aware of him. Rey hates it, she wants him back instantly. And then, when the grogginess of her episode slowly fades from the immediate and makes room for more general concerns, she flinches as she remembers what his return means. He has completed his task; Luke Skywalker is dead. Torn between feeling relief at the end of her turmoil alone and grief-stricken about her Jedi master’s demise, she reaches for the Force, ignoring the surge of power that mends her exhausted body bit by bit and looks for changes. For the lack of one specific signature within the Force.

Nothing is amiss. The ever so faint light blue aura that is Luke’s is still intact and suddenly it makes sense that Snoke is punishing Kylo with the kinds of tricks Rey’s body hardly even registers as intrusive anymore. The numbing pain he sends him which Rey can feel burning through their connection has almost become physical ambient noise to her. An underlying current of pain she just
works around. For Kylo it’s been a while that he had to deal with this and he doesn’t take well to it. She can sense his tension and resistance, feel him fighting to hold on to his mind like a rabid dog with a bone he refuses to give up. She aches with and for him, standing up from the bed.

The sparsely decked med-bay room spins before her eyes, blinking and beeping machinery blurring in and out of focus as her feet threaten to give way under her weight and she sits back down again. Rey takes a deep breath to steady herself. She needs to take this a little bit slower. She can see her clothes lying on a metal table at the far end of the room, as they have been replaced with a paper cover of her body that is shaped like an oversized t-shirt and is open in the back, only held together by two sets of knots; one at her neck and one at the base of her spine. This unsettles her because it means that someone undressed her and can only fervently hope it was the med-droid that trudges in just when she tries to rise again to get to her clothes.

It’s a humanoid bot, a little like 3PO and he waddles closer to her as she strains to keep on her feet.

“You need to rest,” he tells her, his mechanically modulated voice humming.

“No, I need to go,” she says and then points to the pile of her clothes. “Can you hand me those?”

“I must strongly advise you against interrupting your medically recommended rest of…” and then a different protocol sets in for uttering the number and thus his voice changes, “- three - day and night cycles.”

“Thank you but I don’t have that luxury,” Rey says sadly because really, she would like nothing more than an eternity of sleep and would still gladly settle for just three days. “Please hand me my clothes.”

The droid does without any more resistance. He doesn’t leave as she gets dressed either and so she has to twist her body stupidly under the med-shirt to cover up her naked body underneath. It’s silly because it’s just a stupid droid after all but it feels better like this anyway. Like she is still in control of who gets to see what of her. It’s a welcome change after everything Snoke has watched her do these past months.

When she is done, she tries reaching out for Kylo again. His presence here alone is strengthening the hold she has on herself as well as the grasp on who she was when he’d been around last. The darkness lingers on her like a sheen, like a layer of extra skin, but she can almost make out the borders of it, can almost tell where the dark begins and she ends. This is good.

Kylo is fighting to keep on his feet and she knows she has to hurry. She sends the droid away and gathers her wits. She must go back down there again. Has to, to get to Kylo and only then can she begin to specify her next course of action. With resolve bursting out of her, Kylo’s pain ceases when Snoke’s attention shifts to her awakening. He is meeting it with grim tension that is neither here nor there. He is not exactly scared of her, because he is too old and too powerful for such a human emotion but there is caution in his feelings. But there is also something else too; a small but biting, acidic anticipation that Rey can’t explain or place. The one he gets when he has some new play in
his backhand. She should run some quick scavenging diagnostics on what that could be but as Kylo comes back to himself and their corridor of communication opens up again, there is only that one thing she can concentrate on.

Through all of it, her feet carry her down to Snoke’s chapel without needing direction.

*Kylo*, she thinks into their bond and he comes alight with it, thinking, booming her name in return.

*Are you alright?* He asks her although he knows the answer, can feel it on her. *I have a plan, Rey.*

And he remembers the talk with his mother. A scene so unanticipated and unprecedented, it nearly makes her halt in her steps. *The resistance*, it registers, *an airstrike*. *Hope*, foreign, flaring then blaring and a searing promise of escape threatens to take over her and she has to nip it in the bud as to not alert Snoke. She stifles it as quickly as it spread, pushes it down until it’s gone. It isn’t too hard to do. Her mind has warped in the time Kylo was away and few things come quicker to her nowadays than negatives and despair. Even if General Organa managed to rally up her troops to fly bravely to the hornets nest, who’s to say they will win, who’s to say Kylo and she will be alive to see it even if they do?

Kylo follows her train of thought and there is a bit of a fight in him. He wants to argue with her, to not give up and beneath that, he is shocked at how quickly she is willing to. Rey’s legs carry her closer. The tether between her and him flares up brighter with every step and she could cry for days with how good it feels, how normal and reminiscent of better times. She knows she would have lasted so much longer with him in her grip. Things being as they are, their connection might be the only real thing of hers that is left.

The huge portal is guarded by two Knights of Ren who remain unmoving but glow with antagonism as she approaches.

“You will let me pass,” she says to them with just the faintest tug of the Dark Side needed and they echo her words and do as she’s *suggested*.

Snoke, sitting high up on his throne, is not surprised at her entry. She keeps her eyes trained on the creature while her mind rushes to close in around Kylo’s and she thinks she hears him gasp when he sees her. There is horror in his head and she thinks it’s got everything to do with her. How she looks, exhausted and unhinged, decked in black layers to hide pale, dusty skin and a decaying soul. She tries to play down her perilous state briefly but it’s no use, everything he fears to have happened to her, has happened.

The girl he knew is gone and he’s left with this broken shadow of her. It should touch her more and she can feel it rumble in her chest but the darkness is too strong, too thick to get through. She has led and kept it there to protect her and now it has festered into something she cannot shake. The fatalistic apathy it powers is all that kept her from disintegrating, it’s kept her together and now it’s *keeping*
She breaks her focus on Snoke to look at him, to say sorry she has let it come this far, to remember how his face moves over his bones, how his wide, full mouth looks in thought and how his brow furrows. She gets half a second of feeling like coming home, something piercing and shattering a little bit like joy and then Snoke has ceased the opportunity, the vulnerability of them rediscovering each other, and put a binding spell on them both.

She tries to struggle, wanting Kylo and nothing else, but she is still too weak from fainting to break the hold. Fear dances on her lover’s features and she finds him changed. He is still in pain, still wrecked, still in anguish but the hope he holds for them burns brightly beneath it, as if he’s been hit by lightning and caught an unextinguishable fire. He thinks her name with a thickness and density it feels like she can touch it and she hates Snoke more than anything for keeping her away from him.

“I trust you notice how wonderfully she is progressing.” The monster turns to Kylo, thoroughly contradicting how wrecked she looks and with an icy voice grave like death itself, eyes all but crimson slits. “She nearly got rid of your dearly detested ginger comrade for you.”

Kylo turns the head marginally so he can face his old master and glares at him with a hatred that seems more feral than anything she has ever flash across his features.

“Doesn’t the darkness look wonderful on her?” Snoke says with calculated exhilaration and it’s just to provoke Kylo. She wants to tell him not to engage but he is already gone.

“You will pay for this,” he grits out, spitting on the consonants and his rage is boiling up hot and familiar.

“I think not,” Snoke replies and almost purses his thin, scarred lips. As it is, it’s just an ugly scowl. “I think you will tell me why you have come here unbidden and still have not brought me Luke Skywalker’s head.”

“But I am done being your errand boy,” Kylo bites and Rey can taste the bile in his throat. “If you want it, go get it yourself.”

“We’ll see about that,” Snoke says and sends them both a shot of stabbing pain that ping pongs to and from their minds. “Or I could just put you in a cell for a while and get our little Brightstar to do the honors.”

“No,” Kylo breathes, horrified by the mere thought of it. Not because he would be tortured but because Rey would be sent to kill her Jedi master. That would be the last straw, he knows. It makes sense, it’s not like Snoke hadn’t made others kill what had once been akin to fathers. It’s what he does to turn his creations. Most of the time it does the job, too.

Rey isn’t sure what she wants. She has half a mind to just say yes, give Luke a quick, merciful death and return to Kylo but then again, what will come after? Snoke won’t stop after the Jedi are gone...
will always keep one of them by his side to make the other do his bidding, like a cruel, lazy puppet master. It’s perfectly clear now. Kylo’s old plan of just waiting until Snoke trusts the darkness of their hearts enough to let them go somewhere together eventually is in charred shambles.

*So we need a new plan*, Kylo frantically bellows into their connection, following her train of thought. It feels so impossibly good to have him back inside her head, she would fall to the ground if Snoke didn’t have her pinned in place.

*The resistance is coming*, Kylo beseeches her, desperate to believe it, *this is our chance, right now. We kill him right now!*

Rey wants to be swayed, wants to join in his fervour and *believe*. But how can she? None of it’s right, he doesn’t even know if his mother will come and even if so, they are not here now, they can’t help them. If Snoke wants, he can activate his legions of Knights and pour them over them, before they even get close to attacking.

*And attack him with what?* She ponders. She is unarmed and Kylo’s saber can be shoved out of his hand with a push of the Force he may or may not be able to fight, reeling with blind fury as he is. And even if he did, Rey is in no state to stand up to the monster, her body and soul weakened by weeks and weeks of being ground down, turned brittle and scattered with holes.

*We have to*, he sears through their brains. *You’re strong enough, we’re strong enough, together we’ll defeat him.*

And he plays out the scene for her, the plan of the charge he hastily puts together. It’s them shedding the binding spell together, with a shove of their own, Rey pulling the creature down from its throne and onto Kylo’s saber which he is itching to ignite. It could work. If Snoke doesn’t notice the pull. If she is quick.

Rey finds Kylo’s eyes, desperate enough to try and exhausted enough to accept the very real possible outcome of dying with him should they fail. She nods, almost imperceptibly and they are one as they pull for the Force to give them strength.

Rey is reaching and feels just about prepared when her grasp on the power crackling through the chapel is severed by a surge of excruciating pain and Snoke perfectly understanding what they are up to.

“That would be unwise,” the beast hisses and every hope of salvation cripples in Rey’s heart. “Just think of the exertion such an ill-advanced attempt on my life would have. Even if you managed to scrape by with your lives, the girl is in a precarious enough state. So much to lose in a fight like that.”
“What are you talking about?” Kylo grits out, hatred, irritation, and desperation twisting his gut even further. He is as taken aback by the instant unraveling of his half-formed plan as Rey is.

Snoke almost cackles at this, wicked joy flaring up between the three of them and it’s all his, feeding on the despair emanating from the two humans at his feet.

“Listen, Kylo Ren, feel,” Snoke taunts and gives him a force-shove towards Rey who has frozen, bracing herself for yet another of Snoke’s moves. She feels it coming, his elation slithering down her back like a snake. It’s almost enough to make her retch again. Whatever he has up his sleeve, it nearly undoes him just having it there alone. She has no idea what perversity he has in store for them and she would rather never find out at all.

Kylo flies across the distance between them and is almost with her now. Their bond pulses more than ever, rippling, becoming tangible, a living thing stirring in the pit of her belly.

Once their skin finally connects, she longs to weep because for the first time in months the pain recedes, if only ever so slightly. Kylo wraps her in his arms but his mind isn’t in it, he has his eyes trained on Snoke, his focus sharpening and buzzing in Rey’s head as she allows herself to fade into the embrace. Just for a little while, just so she can remember what being alive felt like. He is steady and warm and smells like reverence, so much better than the pathetic rest of it that clings to the fort of robes and sheets she has made of his bed. She might be dying just from touching him again. It would be okay.

Then something shifts in the energy around them startlingly and Kylo’s hands stiffen on her back, then dig into her skin.

Something is different about her, Snoke rasps in their heads, dark and lustful. Find it, my wayward apprentice. It’s your doing.

“No,” Kylo gasps in horror and then both their hearts stop.

Rey’s head snaps up and she can’t believe it. It’s not possible, it simply can’t be. She would have noticed, surely. Snoke is lying, he has to be. He wants to confuse them, to save his own malicious life. Kylo’s face falls. He doesn’t indulge her panic, her wild assumptions, he doesn’t even try to because he knows. There is no deception necessary for Snoke to entirely undo them on the spot.

Kylo’s rage makes way for defeat, so crumbling it weakens his knees and has her staggering in his
arms. Rey shakes her head vigorously, knowing it’s coming anyhow, tries to push away the unimaginable but he nudges her on, towards it. It’s the little yellow ball of hope, of love that she has clung to all these week and it’s pounding, pulsing hues.

It’s a heartbeat.

How did she not know? She’d known it was his love for her, had known it from the first time she’d felt it whispering - why didn’t she think just a little bit harder? It’s their love.

Rey is carrying their child underneath her shrivelling heart.

Snoke is soaring in triumph somewhere on the outskirts of her perception as everything crashes and tumbles in on her.

“Be very smart about this Kylo Ren,” Snoke turns to Kylo because Rey has turned into a wraith in his apprentice’s embrace. She is sufficiently lost to the disastrous revelation. “She can only take so much more until this child of yours crumbles with her.”

Kylo’s arms pull her impossibly tighter and he tries to reach her through the avalanche rolling through her mind.

We can still fight him, he says and it hurts him beyond belief to finish the thought because of what sways along in it, I need to get you away from here.

The deeper meaning is a ghost floating through both their minds; I can’t give you up for the sake of the child. But Rey goes rigid just at the implication.

No, she bellows, the only clear thought she can manage. Everything is different now. She can’t risk it, can’t put that small, little life growing inside her in jeopardy. No.

And this leaves them with nowhere at all to go. Snoke has won.

“I expect you have a lot to discuss,” he says in mock generosity, his condescending tone is even worse than his glowering, gloating triumph. “You may go until I have need of you again.”

Rey withdraws into herself, puffing up the darkness around her in a desperate attempt to stop feeling or thinking anything at all. Kylo turns, shields her from the offensive presence and makes her walk before him. She hardly notices the movement.
Kylo’s thoughts are all over the place, so dense that he completely misses how she recedes and bunkers herself in. He is searching the different notes and hums of her body, zeroing in on the yellow aura of what she now knows to be their child’s life’s energy. He wants to run headfirst into the corridor wall they’re stepping out onto, leaving Snoke behind in his ungodly chapel.

How could he be so stupid? He hadn’t even bothered to ask her about her months-cycle, hadn’t even considered any means of protection at all. And he’d known this could have happened; it wasn’t like he never got the talk. At least this Han Solo had taken care of, if not much else parental advice was ever really offered. Kylo knew that if you slept with a woman, she could end up pregnant. But he wouldn’t have thought that it could happen so quickly, that it could happen at the first time. It’s unfathomable, too colossal to make any sense of it. Little over two months ago, he’d never even had sex before and now he is going to be a father.

How did this happen? He has ruined her, taken her future, brought her right here into the clutches of the beast with an anchor in her body that would grow until it destroyed her. And the poor baby has no fault in any of it. Kylo hates himself feverishly for having been being so reckless and so foolishly wrapped up in his own selfish greed. He abhors himself for having left her to rot here for so long too. He should have come back earlier, or never have left at all. He’d been so wrapped in playing the hero for her, to make sure Luke Skywalker stayed alive that he nearly let her die in the process. His hand twitches, longing for his lightsaber, yearning for an outlet for all his raging hatred and scorching self-loathing. His grip is so tight on her arm, he cuts off the circulation. Rey can’t handle this in face of her own turmoil.

Because she is no better. She had learned about sex, on holo-shows at least. But had all that stopped her, had it even given her pause? No. And now they were all paying for it; herself, Kylo, and the little flurry in her belly that had sprung from their selfish passion. She can’t deal with the guilt, can’t contend with Kylo’s self-deprecation and least of all with Snoke’s writhing pleasure at their undoing which howls through the halls they are braving. So she shuts it all out as best she can and decides to dissolve into the shadows.

By the time they reach Kylo’s room, entering it pierces a little hole into the apathy she has pushed herself over to. The last time she’d been in here, the universe had seemed a horrible enough place as it was but now it’s simply unbearable. Before, she’d at least had the refuge of death, at least the inkling of a choice. That she could just decide eventually that the pain was too much and that Snoke wouldn’t have any more of her but now he has taken that too. She can not even die on her own terms anymore because how could she, knowing what she knows? She is a mother. And she has but the one purpose to keep her baby safe.

On autopilot, Rey leaves Kylo standing by the door, undoes her robes and lets them lie where they fall, changes into a pair of faded grey shorts and a shirt she found in one of Kylo’s drawers weeks ago and climbs into the sheet-decked bed. She just wants to sleep forever and she is about to reach for the darkside-blanket to drown out everything else when Kylo finally notices what she is doing in
her grasp for emptiness.

He says her name and she doesn’t even look up from the pillows. She can hear him strip out of his own clothes and sees a flash of naked skin, only interrupted by a pair of briefs covering his modesty, get into bed next to her. She doesn’t check to see what he wants from her, she just waits for her soul to die entirely so she can focus on how to keep her body alive. She is just a shell now, an incubator for this child of theirs and once it is born, she will be a self-contained protection unit for it. This is all she will ever be again. Rey is dead and gone. Snoke has annihilated her. It’s all over.

Kylo gets in close, lying on his side mirroring her position and says her name again, the name that doesn’t mean anything to her anymore. She catches his eye and takes in agonized, twisting features but she is bereft of a reaction. He is trying to climb her walls but until he brings his hand to her face and tucks some stubborn strands of hair behind her ear, she can’t even feel it.

The contact however stirs something dormant alive inside her, its tenderness almost as painful as the absence of it had been. Her body sighs into the touch without asking her brain for permission and Kylo’s heart skips a beat at the surge of electricity.

*You’re not lost*, he thinks and she can hear him again. She disagrees. He has no idea just how wrong he is. Her reaction is just an reproduction of past, stolen moments; a physical reflex. This too will fade into oblivion in time.

*It doesn’t matter anymore*, she thinks and then she scoots closer to put her hand on his heart. His pain echoes dully through their bond and she meets it with an idea, a suggestion. *Join me here*. It says, *it’s better not feeling this*.

Kylo’s temptation to heed her call is palpable but he fights it, struggling to find some hold within himself. This notion to forfeit all emotional, human responses is familiar to him, trained and tried. He has ached and longed so many times to get to that place so dark and deep, it became easy to just swim down and obliterate but now he *can’t*. Doesn’t she see that? How everything has shifted? How nothing can ever be the same again? How they need to fight?

Rey just shakes her head, a resigned, deeply desponded little gesture and his heartbreak rips a hole into her defences. He feels everything so strongly, always has, despite all his attempts and to her great suffering, it’s strong enough to push through her detachment. Her hand clutches into a fist against his body and she pinches his skin in protest and reproach.

“Don’t,” she pleads and speech escapes her. *Don’t make me, just let me go.*

*I can’t*, he says without words and cups her face, holds it there, making her find the grave determination simmering behind them. He won’t let her fade away, won’t let her turn herself over to the darkness that is consuming her thoughts. He couldn’t do it if he tried.
I know. It slithers from her mind to his, the acceptance of his struggle, the forgiveness for it but most of all the apology, that she still can’t stay, even if it kills him.

“Rey, don’t you dare,” he mumbles hotly, pulling her in. “Don’t you dare leave me alone in this world.”

She is about to shake her head again when he kisses her. He has no control, no aim and no clear pace when he does, he just wants the connection and it enhances their bond, making it expand and encompass them and more of Rey’s aloofness falls prey to his overwhelming emotions. He is afraid, like a child, of Snoke and the immediate future, the bottomless pit that is everything that follows it and most of all of how he can witness her dangling from a cliff by a threat, prying her own fingers loose one at a time. There is defiance too, loathing and regret but stronger than everything else, it’s love that rings through his head into hers. It’s almost like a light shining. Therein is hope and adoration and beneath even that, a swelling, mindless pride.

You are having my baby, it says. We are having a baby.

It nearly kills Rey. She doesn’t want this, has no room for his out-of-place joy in the face of the forlornness of their situation, for his paternal instincts kicking in like an eruption. She doesn’t want his mind building a fantasy of the three of them together in peace somewhere, a little baby boy pressed against her chest, with dark curls exactly like his father’s. They will never have that, they will never be happy again. The rest of their lives will consist of doing Snoke’s dirty work, killing whatever humanity they have left and trying to protect their child from his wrath. She can not handle that if she hangs on to the capacity to feel anything remotely real.

Don’t you understand? she asks him, desperately begging him, while they are still kissing, turning and twisting their bodies together. I can’t do this, I can’t stand the pain, I’m not strong enough. I can’t be me anymore.

Yes you can, he insists, deepening the kiss and putting his weight on her body as she lies on her back with his hips wedged between her legs. Rey wants nothing more than to disappear into the current stirring from one beating body to the other and never return.

She grabs his bottom, tugs down his underwear as far as she can from her angle and then rips apart the pants she is wearing. She needs him now, one more time before she’ll fling herself off the edge. Just once more to crash and burn and then offer what is left of her to the Dark Side for strength to endure without a soul inhabiting this body of hers.

Kylo would rather hang on to his wits but he is powerless in the face of their gravity, the pull that
brings their flesh together. He is buried inside her before he can begin to think. He has been craving this with such intensity, he half loses his mind with how she feels around him. This is how it all started, truly, their unraveling. Two solid shapes in space that hunger for the other, holding two minds that gravitate like planets and moons. It’s a force as old as the galaxy itself.

Their connection flourishes even more now, consummated and perfected by their bodies moving as one and in a half lucid moment, Kylo reclaims his intentions. Rey’s head booms with their actions. With every push in and out of her, he makes her remember who she is and how much he needs her.

*Your name is Reyna Brightstar*, he thinks, searching through her coping mechanisms of anguish the past weeks. The things that got her this far.

*Your parents were Dune and Anjali*. He kisses the soft skin of her neck, making her buck upward against his groin in a purely instinctual reaction.

*You were born in the summer*. Her breath catches as he nibbles up the side of her face and finds her lips again.

*You liked to fight*. He ups the pace of his strokes and thrusts until she moans, low and unhinging and she feels the hold on her walls slipping.

*And you love me*. He claims her with this, whole and entire. She is his and he is hers and for better or for worse they will go on like that, awake, aware and feeling everything. That is what he wants, what he demands of her and she is crumbling.

*You are strong*. He brings his arm around her arching back to change the angle in order to drive even deeper inside her. *You will survive this.*

Rey comes undone around him but it’s just her body, he knows this in his bones because she still won’t desist from the hovering darkness looming around them. She does not dare to come back yet and holds on to what little he has left of her defences. Her mind bleeds into his as the intensity of his own feelings overflows.

Kylo strains in her and in himself, to find his own light. It’s his very last resort, the very last thing he can think to try.

And if this adamant, clinging *brightness* of his, the one that tugged and pulled at him through all of his miserable life won’t help him with this, what was it ever good for? Thus, he prowls on in search for it. When he finally finds what he is pining for, he pulls it from every hiding place, every crevice of his heart, digs in tightly then drags it out into the open and along with this, reclaims the past he’s tried so long to bury.

He reaches for Ben, beckons him out from his crouched, terrified stupor and pleads and begs for his
split soul to become one again. He can feel it now, the edge, the detested in-between of good and evil and makes it his. And then the sudden unraveling of his pleasure, the surge of an unanticipated climax clashes it all together, the Darkness and the Light, Ben and Kylo and the force of it is a supernova that catapults him out of his body.

In a shift so tremendous he can feel the universe come apart under it, it sears into his bloodstream, the wholeness, the reunification of himself and he realises with a start that this is the truth.

The Force that flurries through their bodies, through all three of them, isn’t plural, isn’t the black and white of night and day - it’s a solid, everlasting grey. It is one; it just is. The way he himself has always been, not one or the other, just endless hues in between. And he remains a part of it, unraveled and unified at the same time.

He sheds the name Snoke gave to him like shackles that crack loose around his heart and Ben grows up, in an instant, into a man finally strong like he was supposed to be. He is finally strong enough to take hold of Rey, of everything she is wrapped in his arms and holds her very essence inside him, bringing it closer, making her see.

We can stay alive together, he tells her. We can be invincible.

And in a grace too encompassing to name, she finally concedes. Their eyes fly open in the face of Ben’s revelation and disentanglement and he jerks on top of her in the slowly fading ripples of his release and they push each others souls firmly into the other’s. Rey remembers who she was before and Ben remembers everything Kylo does and it makes him better for it.

They breathe through his hummingbird heartbeat as he pulls out and he wants to roll off of her but she holds him in place, enjoying his weight, his gravity, how solid he is now, in body and in spirit.

Rey relishes in how lightheaded she feels and tries to hold on to the feeling. It seems like she’s woken up from deep slumber, as if she had been gone for a while and was back now. Ben - and he is Ben now, a new Ben but Ben all the same, by his own choice and certainty - has brought her back and she remembers everything in perfect clarity. Every step of the way, every word and touch. Everything that has made her who she is. She doesn’t kid herself into believing that she is all better now, not at all. The things Snoke did to her will never truly fade, will never stop haunting her but at least she feels like herself again. She reclaims her name, much like Ben has and finds a spiteful reassurance in knowing that she is Rey, whose parents were Dune and Anjali, who was born in the summer and who loves this man more than anything in the galaxy.

Still, sickeningly and irreversibly, with every heartbeat, the direness of their situation crawls back to
the forefront of her mind and the hold on his back goes from gentle to rabid. Her heart picks up steam, hammering against his chest through the fabric of her shirt. With the padded layer of apathy stripped away from her, Rey is slashed open finally, vulnerable and bare. Exposed as she is to everything she has refused to feel before, she tumbles right back into despair. Because apart from the reclamation of her sense of self and survival instinct, nothing about their circumstances has changed.

They are still stuck being mere chess pieces for Snoke to move and use as he pleases and she still carries a baby under her heart that might never know a truly good day, see its parents smile in earnest or walk freely beneath a blue, peaceful sky.

“I won’t accept that,” Ben says and kisses her deeply before rolling off of her so he can look at her face. Even the ghost of satisfaction has left his features, making way for somberness as he catches up to her thoughts and adds to them what he himself has come to realise. “You know what he wants out of it all, don’t you?”

“Our compliance,” she says because Snoke has made that much pristinely clear and her stomach twists with the certainty. “To use us as his puppets.”

“No, Rey, after that,” he says and it’s even worse than she imagined. “Picture the future; what he will do, who he is. He’ll keep me running circles trying to keep both of you safe and then when you have the baby he’ll kill us. It’s so obvious, it’s everything he ever wanted. He’s wanted me to be this child but I was never really his, despite everything - imagine what he could do with our baby if he had it from birth. No one to love it, just Snoke and his distorted fantasies to shape its mind.”

“No,” Rey gasps because he is right. And both her hands fly to her stomach so fast, she thinks she pulls her shoulder in the process. Her belly is a little bit harder than usual but apart from that, you wouldn’t be able to tell what was happening inside her. She just wishes she would have known before Snoke had. Maybe she could’ve done something to prevent all of this then.

If she’d only noticed the changes. She is dimly aware of the basic tells of a pregnancy and she has ticked every box, now that she thinks about it. The nausea, the tiredness, the not bleeding for kriiff’s sake. But, strained as her body had been, she never attributed these things to something going on inside her and placed the blame on Snoke’s insidious lessons. Eventually, she had just felt so dissociated and at odds with her own body, she stopped listening to it. She has been nothing but a walking, breathing vehicle for pain and suffering for the past two months. She would never have even begun to think that she was carrying anything else. Let alone anything precious.

“Of course,” Ben mutters to himself, still in his own head, glancing at the ceiling but not really looking at it, “it’s everything Snoke’s ever wanted. I won’t let it happen, there is no way. This monster will not make an orphan of our child.”
He twists around to her now, propping himself up on his elbow again so he can cover her entire midsection with his arms, covering both her hands under one of his large ones, protective and shielding. A resolution forms in the back of his head, earnest and deadly.

“We fight him and we fight him tonight,” he says under his breath. “Rey, I’d rather die right now with both of you than live to see what Snoke has planned for our kid.”

This is the inevitable conclusion. The only thing that makes sense, she knows it but it’s terrifying.

“There’s no way to go but forward,” Ben mutters, “only two ways this story will end.”

“He dies or we do,” Rey says, dreading what would happen if they remained idle and let Snoke steal their child away and turn it into one of his mindless minions.

“He dies or we do,” Kylo repeats and squeezes her hand.

He is right, of course he is. There is no remedy and no point in waiting this out. Snoke will keep Rey behind padded walls and wait for the baby to grow until he can pry it out of her arms and get rid of both its parents in one fell swoop. And there is no way in any hell she’ll let this happen. He’ll never have her child, never.

“How?” She asks, because they need a plan. “I don’t know if I’m strong enough to fight, let alone keep the baby safe.”

Kylo ponders this and she gets half dizzy following the various strategies he runs through as if they were a rolderdex, like the one Unkar Plutt has to collect comm details of his various scavenger contacts. When Ben finally settles on something, she eyes him skeptically.

“You can shield yourself. No, hear me out,” he pleads, “use the Force, like you did with the ship on Wayland - build a barrier. It can be used to repel attacks, I’ve seen your father do it. Snoke won’t be able to hurt you unless he physically moves and then I can get him.”

“And what about you? If he gets you instead?” Rey imposes, not even daring to imagine the scenario. “What if he compels you to kill me?”

“I’ll fight it,” he grits out all stern determination. She doesn’t have the heart to question him but given their experience, she can’t fully or blindly trust it either.

“So you want us to draw from the Force?” She asks and the thought in itself is apparent and logical, but he might not have thought this through. “If I let the Dark Side in again, I don’t know if I’ll come back again.”
“Not the dark, Rey,” he says, gently but firmly, bringing to mind what he realised, falling apart and coming back together inside her. “There is no Dark Side and no Light either, you’ve seen it. It’s Grey. It can’t sway us either way if we know who we are. The Force only seems dark here because Snoke is all over it. I know we can hold on together, stay in the middle.”

Rey wishes he wasn’t so entirely sold on this new concept of the greyness of the Force. It’s an appealing one and it makes sense too, but for the last two years everyone has hammered into her head that there is the Light Side and the Dark and that people have to choose. It’s what destroyed his whole life and to just stop and believe it was all for nothing seems almost cruel and she can’t quite wrap her head around it yet.

“I know we can do it,” he implores, not entertaining her doubts, “I know you can.”

“Fine, let’s say we do, let’s say we can use the Force the way you say,” she continues, unconvinced. “I protect me and you protect you - how do we fight him? I don’t even have a weapon.”

“We’ll get one, Snoke keeps the staff in the chapel.” He damn well seems to have an answer for everything. “We’ll go in, get it, and fight him together. He can’t hold both of us off forever.”

“His minions can,” she challenges and sits up so his hand falls from hers. She doesn’t mean to contradict him at every turn but she wants to double- and tripple-check this plan of his before they put something in motion that they can’t stop. “149 Knights of Ren remember? He might even call in the cavalry.”

“But I’ve already called in yours,” he remains, steadfast and hopeful in a way that is absolutely new to him but he holds on to it with grim fervour. “My mother’s on her way, I know it.”

“This is still hardly a plan, Kylo,” she sighs while every last cell in her body wants him to be right. However, the fear and doubt sits deep and looms dangerously in the back of her mind.

“Well, what choice do we have?” Kylo snaps, finally impatient and exasperated. He clears his throat, reeling in his temper and tells her his plan again, in a simple clear-cut manner. “We wait until the Resistance is here and use it as a distraction. We go to Snoke and then we kill him.”

“And if we fail-,” she starts.

“- then we fail.” There is a calmness, a serenity in him she’s never felt in him before and it’s exactly what she needs now. “Either way, it’ll be over. I never believed I would get to experience anything like this in my life anyway.”

Rey slips into his head as the bond hums with his words and finds a world unfolding there; things she has known but never really processed before. She knows, Ben has grown up thinking that he was near impossible to love. His mother surely had and remained to, stubbornly so, but he’d always
felt it came with an avalanche of conditions he just couldn’t fulfill. His father, well, he loved him exactly three minutes before he died. Before that, he never really knew what to do with him. To Han, Ben had been a somewhat wimpy kid, afraid of heights, of enclosed spaces, of the tough kind of boy things Han had expected him to do.

And then when little Ben started trying to find a place to belong within the mythology of the Force, the “mumbo jumbo” as his father so less than fondly liked to brandish it, Han slipped effectively out of his life with little grace. Ben, unable to understand why nothing he did ever seemed to please anybody started paying attention the the little, raspy voice in his head that spoke to him of greatness and being special. And he found refuge in believing that Darth Vader, the grandfather everyone likened him to, the mass murderer, would have loved him just as he was. He realised too late that it was all smoke and mirrors and that all the whispers of Anakin Skywalker’s spirit had just fallen on deaf ears with him.

For all intents and purposes, Ben had grown up locked in the back of Kylo Ren’s mind and both of them had been yearning all those years for someone to truly love them. When no one rose to the challenge, he knew that he was probably one of the few creatures who could not inspire that kind of feeling at all. So, logically he resigned to living that half-life of pain and misery and had tried to pretend he was fine with it.

And then Rey happened. And through everything he was, everything he did, she stayed. She fell in love with him anyway. Past the fact that she witnessed him kill his own father, nearly crippled her best friend, rummaged through her brain without invitation time and time again and fought her to the bone in snowy woods, on desert hills, scalding mountains and whatnot. Through all of it, she remained.

Someone had told him, when he was really young, that the greatest thing he would ever learn was just to love and be loved in return. Life had not delivered on this vague promise. Until she’d crashed into his life with a blaster poised to kill him and he was catapulted to an entirely new plane of existence, set on a completely different path. Without it, without her, he would have continued being that gruesome shadow of a man until he died and would have never even lived at all in the meantime.

“I’m not afraid of dying,” he swallows hard then and takes her hand to bring it up to his lips and breathe the softest kiss on her flesh.

“I’m afraid of not being with you,” Rey whispers and finds this is the only thing she is really, truly terrified of now, at the end of all things.

“We’ll always be together,” he promisses, keeping her hand pressed to his cheek. “We’ll be Force ghosts like Obi Wan and Anakin and just annoy the ever living shit out of them.”

Rey chuckles, beside herself. Gods, how she loves him.

“Discussing intergalactical politics?” she jokes because there is some small solace in humour.
“That’s right,” he smiles and it’s the best thing he could’ve done for her.

“The baby,” she mumbles as the moment fades back into worries.

“Won’t want for anything if we make it through and if not,” he takes a deep breath and finishes the truth they both know, “at least he’ll never lay a pale, disgusting finger on it.”

And for Ben, there’s a sense of revelling in this. Snoke is overjoyed at the prospect of their child and obviously wants it. If they die, at least all of them are free - if they do, or Rey loses the baby, he won’t get his filthy hands on it. He won’t have it either way, not ever. They have everything to gain and he has everything to lose. If they play it right, this could be the key to unraveling him. If nothing else can relieve a little bit of the mortal terror they’re in, he’ll take it with open arms. This is make it or break it, his whole life boiling down to this moment and he is done waiting around for a time where he feels like he is finally in control of his own fate, his own mind. He has spent his entire life living for a tomorrow that never came. And you get nothing if you always keep waiting for it.

“So what now?” Rey asks him, somewhat at a loss of what to do now. With this plan of theirs, the consequences of going through with it and with the potential remnant of their lives.

“Now we get some rest,” he says and shifts on the bed, grabs the nearest blanket to drape it over them and opens his arms so she can lie down on his chest. “And train. Try and build a Force-barrier around the baby.”

Rey nods against his heart and gets started right away. The grey surge of Force gives a soft but reassuring weight to the action and it feels like it’s not an impossible thing to do.

*This might really work after all,* she thinks and keeps building walls around their child for hours until Kylo stirs beside her.

"It's time," he whispers and she can feel him recognise his mother's energy flurry across the planes to them.

Chapter End Notes

One more to go. Let's all take a deep breath together, shall we?
...I Won't Let Go 'Till It Bleeds

Chapter Summary

The end of all things.

Chapter Notes

My dear readers. This is it. This is where I leave you.

It's been a wild, wild ride. Thank you all so much for your wonderfully kind words, for the time taken to comment, the encouragement and investment in this story, these characters and by extension me in a way. I've felt golden these past week and it's thanks to all of you in a big way!

Now, I need to thank my room mate Vici for all her real-life encouragement and for doing the dishes while I was off writing and not even being mad at me for it (I think) and most of all of course the magnificent vicious-rhythm (who's stellar AU's I want you all to read!) because she was the best beta, best sounding board and companion in this that I could have hoped for!

She also made the artwork for this chapter which you will find in the text. It's wonderful and perfect, as is she.

.....And now, with no further ado. Let's take this to the finish line!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Rey’s heart leaps to her throat and stays there as Ben rises. There is no question if either of them is ready. They will never be. But this is the way it is and they get dressed in a tense haste. Rey neglects the blacks and opts for the grey outfit they brought her there in. It has been sitting idly in the drawer for months. It feels good having the familiar fabric resting on her skin again, it feels like the last bit of her old self folds and stretches under her fingers. If she should die, she wants to die feeling like herself.

Now, she also notes that the tunic is rolling up ever so slightly around her midsection, the fabric just a bit too thick and a bit too tight across her stomach. Rey puts her hand there, warm and reassuring.

“We’ll be fine,” she mumbles to it, willing herself to believe what she is saying.

Ben halts in his efforts now, neglecting the cloak, and turns to her. With three long strides, he closes the distance and wraps her in his arms, feeling her anxiety mirroring his own.

It’s an embrace old as life itself. They’re trading love and strength and not a small amount of spite.
Everything to gain, he thinks and then kisses her hair like a whisper. She has twisted it into the three buns, another way of reclaiming who she was before.

I love you, she thinks back. Ben takes her face in his hands then and kisses her lips.

If she could, she would stay in this moment forever, with his full lips pressed firmly onto hers, then wedging between them, then tongues darting out to meet and taste each other, maybe one last time before the slaughter. At least they’ll be together. No matter how this night ends, they’ll brave it as one.

Ben breaks away from her much too soon and just has to peck her lips again, once, twice, three times until he can let go of her all the way and her chest constricts and aches when he does.

“Stay with me in there,” he says, “If we keep contact we’ll be fine.”

“Promise me,” she says tightly, clasping her hands over his where they still linger on her face, “promise me we’ll be fine.”

He can’t promise her that, no one can. He does it anyway.

And then he dips his head and kisses her forehead, touching her heart and her mind along with her flesh.

“Let’s go,” he whispers against her skin and what could as well be their last moment of peace ends.

The two of them take a deep breath in unison, untangle their limbs and brave the last feet through the room, Rey leading the way with trembling steps. As the door whooshes open, the first Resistance starfighter blast hits the decaying Sith temple. Out of the way as they are, it’s merely a thud but Ben is quickly puzzles out the location and suspects it to be somewhere around the armory. He can feel his mother all over this move. It’s smart and logical and he wonders if she has just guessed where the Knights of Ren stocked their weapons or if she had used some of the Force-fuelled finding skills Rey had nurtured and developed so deftly. Either way, they are off to a pretty good start, all things considered. Rey relishes in his resilience and they tread on. Soon, they will come upon the staircase that will lead them down to Snoke.

Around them, the compound starts to shiver again and again with incoming attacks and it flurries to life like a poked anthill. Some groggy knights only barely in their robes and helmets run past them as they turn a corner but the men are too distracted to even make note of them. Thus, they continue on.

The staircase winds down and Rey finds strength in knowing that whatever happens next, she will never descend down these steps ever again after tonight. She scans the air for Snoke’s emotions and finds him pleasantly taken aback. She can’t tell if he knows what’s happening exactly but he is on edge and there is even a dash of tension scurrying through the stones as he can feel Ben and her approach.
He is not surprised to see them in the least but he does rise from his throne, rage painting his cracked features an ugly shade.

“Traitor,” he hisses at Ben. “This is your doing. How dare you lead the scum to our house?”

“Oh, this stopped being my house the minute you decided to hurt Rey to make me compliant,” Ben bites, igniting his lightsaber with a zing. “I owe you nothing.”

“I made you,” Snoke snarls and takes two steps off his dias.

“And doesn’t that just make you weep?” Ben says and poises his weapon, past the jab of pain Snoke aims at him in fury.

Get ready, he thinks over to Rey and brings out his free hand, focussing hard on Darth Maul’s old saber, the one Snoke had to generously offered Rey as a gift. It takes a second, his concentration straining beneath the wave of pain Snoke inflicts on him, stepping down further on his stony stairs.

But once Ben has the right grip, he beckons the saber to come crashing out of its trunk, a little wooden box among an assortment of artefacts Snoke keeps in a far off corner of his dwelling. It lands in his open palm, searing in his grip and he hands it over to Rey with a snarl of triumph.

So far, so good, echoes through both their minds as Rey thumbs the saber staff to life and steps into her favorite offense fighting stance. Ben does the same by her side, although he opts for defense, guessing that Snoke’s first attack will be meant for him.

He is right, of course. Snoke flicks his wrist and throws Ben a few feet across the floor. Still, he manages to move within the surge of energy, holds on to his sizzling saber and twists his body to land gracefully on his feet like a sand-cat. Rey scans their connection to find him unharmed but catches the first wave of compulsion Snoke launches at him.

Kill her, it says. And Rey goes rigid, securing the hold on her staff as it turns her vision red with its static glow. The order is lodged in Ben’s brain and his body freezes. She can half feel Snoke take a breath in anticipation, assuming that everything will unfold exactly like the last time he made his renegade apprentice turn his weapon on Rey - and the creature might be already planning his next move, probably on how to immobilize Ben once he strikes and seize control of Rey - when the air around them shifts. Rey feels the surge first, the pull Ben exudes on the Force and it’s true what he said, it doesn’t feel dark or light anymore, now that she is open to the possibility. It just is. And it yields its powers to Ben who bites and fights the compulsion, bit by bit, until his limbs unfreeze and his mind breaks the chains of suggestion. He stands up straight, free from his old master’s whispers and stares him square in the eye.

“No,” he hisses and Snoke has not expected this. In a move so predictable, Rey half wants to laugh, he shoves Ben away with more might than before and turns his attention to Rey. He doesn’t shove her anywhere but she can sense the avalanche of pain he sets off her way before it hits her. When it does, her vision whites out for a second but she holds on, readjusting her hold on the walls, on the
barrier she has built and the pain dissipates. Snoke can feel his attack repel from her and tries again, stepping down more steps until he is almost at their level - even smaller than she remembered.

He is upping the pain but there is a cap on it, she can sense it as she feels it hit the invisible Force field she has raised around her body. It’s strong but it is not nearly as bad as he could make it. At first, she doesn’t understand it but then, as Ben shuffles back onto his feet and runs back to her, she realises it’s because Snoke is deliberately pulling his punches. He doesn’t want to damage her too badly. Because of the baby. It’s exactly like Ben thought and their bond alights with this. Snoke has something other than his life at stake here. He has effectively lost Kylo Ren and will never get him back. Decades of grooming and training lost and actively working against him now. This baby of theirs is his only shot at the kind of power he craves, the only thing that can give him what he needs to get the galaxy under his thumb and make it suffer enough to satisfy his twisted urges.

The creature is desperate for this child. And it will be the end of him.

Faced with Rey and Ben, both back by each other’s side, poised to fight, Snoke reaches beneath his cloak and produces an oblong and slightly bent gadget, something that could be a weirdly shaped hilt and punches it to life. It’s unlike any lightsaber Rey has ever seen and it’s crimson glow is almost black, dark like fresh blood, the blade rounded, slim but wide, it looks like an actual saber, those of the olden days. So he does have one of his own. Rey has been wondering about this.

*I haven’t seen him use this in ages*, Ben provides. *I wasn’t even sure he still had it.*

She nods beside him, puffing up her defences.

*Brace yourself*, Ben issues into their connection. And just when she does, Snoke attacks.

He is on the offence for exactly one blow until Ben parries it and clashes his saber against his in a counter move almost too quick to follow. Then Rey twirls her staff and Snoke has to duck, his small size giving him the advantage of being able to skitter away. Then he shoves Rey out of the way with just enough force to send her toppling a few paces backward and places a binding spell on her before she can fall. In the time it takes her to wiggle out of the hold, Snoke darts at Ben. He seeks higher ground, moving backwards until they are at the base of the dias and Snoke half floats upward, raining blow on cut at Ben, who parries every one in a textbook manner. From this alone Rey can tell he is firmly in possession of his wits. This is a good thing. Once Ben gets winded or emotional, he loses his form and falls into an erratic kind of style jumping between any form he’s ever learned infused with a mindless kind of cantina-brawl hand-to-hand combat. He gets in way too close when he does that and leaves too many openings, Snoke could use this for his benefit.

As it is, they climb the stairs together, striking and darting out of the way, lightsabers clashing with piercing buzzes at every contact. Then Snoke uses the higher ground he has thanks to the stairs, to push Ben down again and Rey gasps when she sees his balance waver, trying to regain control of her body even more desperately. Ben almost falls, almost tumbles backward, but he catches himself and, thank the gods, parries until they are back on solid ground.
Then Rey comes free and lunges forward. Snoke anticipates this and quicker than before, she is lifted off of her feet, dangling in the air as Snoke chokes her, not enough to damage, but enough to make her distracted. Ben attacks him, twisting his wrists and letting his lightsaber make two burning circles to gather momentum and it gives up nervous sparks when it connects with Snoke’s. Rey witnesses as the beast locks him in place with the sheer force of the blade against blade.

“I will destroy everything you hold dear and make you watch,” Snoke glares at him and from her suspended position, Rey can hear it loud and clear through Ben’s ears. He shoves Snoke forward hard, so the stunted creature has to readjust his position in order to parry the overhead strike Ben executes.

“We’ll see about that,” he sneers and the sheer force of his blow requires too much strength from Snoke to keep Rey in the air and she drops, landing on her feet, catching her fall. Quickly, she scans her own body, for pain or unease, but the yellow flickering light inside her pounds and pulses away.

*You’re strong*, she thinks, a current of unparalleled affection and soaring pride coursing through her. *Like your parents.*

Then the moment of respite is over and Rey thrashes head first back into the fight. Snoke would rather keep her on the sidelines, out of the way so he doesn’t damage the baby and can concentrate on maiming and immobilizing Ben. Balancing both intentions as both of them run circles around him is hard. A trio of sparkling, buzzing, twirling and clashing sabers, they cover the entire length of the chapel once until they are back at the base of the steps and push him farther, around them, to the very back of the room.

Soon, they will have him backed up against the stoney, carved wall and then they can end it. Too emboldened by this, Ben lets his guard down briefly and Snoke manages to sear a burning gash into his outer thigh and he falls back, clutching the wound blindly. His hold on his temper wavers dangerously as the pain floods his system and blood drips on the dark ground.

*Stay with me,* Rey urges and pushes Snoke further back. She can see the wall, this is almost over. And then, when he should crash against a solid wall, the monster doesn’t, instead he just recedes backward *further*.

Rey only notices the tunnel opening when the residual light of their clashing sabers alights the borders of it in a red, flickering tint. Ben is right behind her, biting down both his pain and his temper.

It is hard to see what they are doing, the tunnel is pitch dark and barely wide enough for the three of them. Plus, with Ben wedging himself in front of Rey it is doubly hard for her to see, Snoke’s stunted form almost entirely blocked out by his broad shoulders. All she can see is their sabers
locking and swinging. The size of Rey’s saber staff makes it even more complicated trying to help because she is busy as it is trying not to damage the staff or herself trying to fit it through the narrow, steep tunnel. It seems that they are traveling further into the earth and until the tunnel opens into a natural dome and Rey sees it, she has completely forgotten where it leads.

*The acid lake*. She glances over the dimly lit, still pool, flickering red with the cave walls playing back the buzzing clashes of their fight tenfold. And suddenly she can see the end of this fight and it’s so easy, she almost screams.

Ben has to do nothing else but push the monster on, exactly like he is doing already. Just until the creature loses his balance on the edge of the lake and falls. No matter what that demon is made of inside, his shell is skin and bones and this acid will take it apart enough to obliterate him.

*Push him into the acid*, she hisses to Ben and he is already poised to.

Rey’s heart picks up the pace when unanticipated, bright hope floods her chest. This could all be over soon.

But then the air crackles with electricity and Ben loses the hold on his lightsaber, it skitters off, wedged free of its owner’s grip by the crackling Force-field Snoke has cloaked himself in. It’s a ball, sizzling with flashes, tangible strokes of lightning boxing him in. This is his last resort, Rey knows it. But it still renders him practically untouchable. And willing and able to resort to almost anything in his pocket of tricks.

Rey reinforces her mental defences in a flash and Ben does the same. It feels like the might of the Force is split equally between the three of them and they are at a bitter stalemate as Snoke aims pain and despair at them that repels like raindrops on glass and Rey and Ben try to frantically come up with how to proceed.

*What do we do, I can’t touch him*, she bellows internally, nerves spiking.

*Maybe you can*, he replies, thinking quickly on his feet while he calls his saber back to him, it sputters to life, looking even less reliable than before. *Breach the barrier and make him take that step.*

*What?* She doesn’t understand.

*Mind-trick him*, Ben explains intently, *compel him to.*

*What?* She marginally turns her head to him, keeping one eye firmly on Snoke. *How? I can’t, I don’t even know if I can push through the barrier, he’ll know what I’m trying to do.*

*Not if he’s distracted*, he says and she catches his drift instantly.
Ben! Her rebuttal is instantaneous. What he plans to do is absolutely out of the question, it’s much too dangerous.

*I’ll just give him a little opening*, he urges and she can feel that he is dead set on it, as certain as his love for her and their baby, as certain as he’s ever been of anything.

No, she protests but it’s no use.

*It’s the only way*, he beseeches and then promises with a flurry of love that shoots right down into her toes; *it’ll be fine*.

Then Ben drops his defences ever so slightly but considering how focused all three of them are on the Force and how it moves about them, he could as well have screamed it across the flat, black lake. Snoke rears up in wild elation and latches onto it. He raises an arm and shoots out a flurry of the lightning holding his protective bubble out, as if it was an extension of his limb and hits Ben square in the chest. He is thrown deftly across the small space and hits the cave wall with all the more force. With an ugly thud, his body crashes back onto the ground and Rey feels him pass out.

Fuelled by rage and hatred, she does her utmost to hold on to her wits and instantly zeroes in on Snoke’s Force-field. To her grim satisfaction, she finds she doesn’t need to break the electric flurry at all, she can just *sidestep* it and the monster’s face flickers beneath the static when he becomes aware of what she is doing and misses the little immediate shove of the Force that paves the way into his twisted mind.

*You will let go*, she orders, *you will fall into the lake*.

Across his features darts perplexion, then anger and then quiet terror in quick, almost imperceptible succession and Rey can see that he is instantly trying to fight the compulsion. He pushes back fervently, his life depending on it and his face splits open with the effort. The Force surges as he pulls on it but Rey pulls too, snarling and gritting her teeth.

*“You. Will. Step. Into. The. Lake,”* she bites out with all the power she can muster and acquire, feeling the grey hues flowing through her veins like liquid, feeling it broaden her chest and sharpen her mind. And what happens next takes an instant but feels like an eternity.

Snoke loses his footing. And it looks almost accidental. If she didn’t know that it was his boney, pale limbs who fell prey to her suggestion, she’d think he’d simply tripped. His face is falling apart in incredulous shock; his ugly, beady eyes coming alight with mortal terror as he staggers backward in slow motion. His feet catch in the bulking fabric of his robes and then he *drops*.

It’s undignified and simple, how Supreme Leader Snoke dies. As soon as his back touches the
surface of the lake, the acid sears up and licks at him, burning the cloth away faster than Rey can see
and when the liquid engulfs him, it bubbles up and eats away the blue-grey-ish skin of the creature
that wanted to watch the world burn. His overwhelming fear and blinding pain echoes from the cave
walls and then turns into an incoherent mess of desperation and bargaining and then it all stops with a
start as the acid burns its way into his skull while the rest of him has already started to dissolve.

And just like that, it’s over.

Rey has not even processed the half of it when the ground beneath her starts to shake. It’s as if his
presence which has seeped through these walls of the cave, the chapel and even the whole
compound for decades and decades, has held it all together and now that he is gone, they crumble.
And Rey doesn’t even get the chance to revel in her victory.

Ben, she thinks, knowing they must leave immediately. But he is unresponsive.

You need to wake up, she yells at him in her head but she gets no answer, not even when she runs to
him and grabs him by the shoulders. The bond is eerily quiet. And now that she has the capacity to
feel through his body again, it too is still and completely silent.

Surely he is not dead. He can’t be or else she would be too.

Right?

As staggering panic wells up, she switches off the saber staff and puts it on the floor beside her to use
both hands on Ben, searching for his pulse point at his neck and finds it’s unstirring.

No, she gasps, no no no no.

That’s not how this was supposed to go.

He dies or we die, she thinks wildly. Don’t you dare, Ben, don’t you leave me now!

And she twists him around, grabs him by his tunic to prop him onto the floor and starts hammering
on his chest with all her might. CPR, it’s called. Finn had taught her. Bang on that chest, against and
into the ribs and you must at least break one or you’re not doing it right, so she pumps until she hears
an ugly, bone-chilling crack. Then crouches over to cover his mouth with hers and breathe life back
into his lungs.

She does this two, three times but he won’t come back. This can’t be, it simply can’t be. The yellow
ball inside her flurries and it makes everything worse. Their child deserves knowing him. No matter
what he’d done in his life, she knows he wouldn’t want another Solo child growing up with an absent father, without knowing exactly how much it was loved.

“Don’t you hear me?” she screeches, using her real voice because him not answering to the one in her head makes her crazy. “We need you! Wake up, dammit!”

It’s so unfair! She did everything he asked, she killed Snoke, she freed them and now Ben can’t just up and leave her. Weren’t they supposed to be dying together if they did? How dare he even try to go without her? She simply won’t let him! She punches his chest like a madwoman as the cave around them starts to shatter and fall apart. There is no time. She’ll have to leave him behind if she wants to not get buried alive down here. That’s unacceptable.

She screams from the top of her lungs and delves into the Force in a hail mary. She lets it all in, everything she can handle, from top to bottom and then she puts both palms flat on his chest and sends an electric current through their bodies that makes him jolt upwards firmly against her hands. It restarts his heart.

Rey can feel it beat and she half dies with relief herself in turn. She strokes sweaty strands of hair out of his face and searches his eyes in the near pitch darkness. He coughs hard, then breathes long and deep and tries to sit up drowsily, only to find that he can’t and sinks back down.

“Ben, your heart stopped,” she cries and then punches him hard in the shoulder, “don’t you ever fucking dare scare me like that again!”
Ben looks positively dimwitted and winded when he weakly brings up a hand to her face.

“You did it,” he mutters. “You saved us.”

“If by saving you mean I killed our maniac wannabe-puppeteer and now we’re stuck in a crumbling cave underneath a quaking Sith temple that will probably crush us in minutes if we don’t start running this instant, then yeah, I saved us,” she says in a manic moment of completely misplaced humour, running her hand through his hair and recalling how she said something like that to him back after they crash landed on Wayland. Ben grins groggily in reply.

“Help me up,” he bids and she does after handing him their lightsabers, tugging at the Force for help and as soon as he is on his feet, his left arm propped over her shoulder, they move as fast as they can as the earth shakes and falters around them.

The chapel floor is already scattered with pieces of the ceiling that keep falling and hitting the ground with roaring thunder and Rey has a very hard time navigating them around the danger zone. One bit of rock about the size of a Tauntaun misses them by the width of a hair and it propels them onward faster. Ben is still weak but gains back his senses with every stumbling step. The heavy portal is blocked by two boulders but Rey just shoves them out of the way with a flick of her wrist, breaking the door in the process. They breach the short hallway and then brave the stairs while the floor crumbles underneath their feet. This is getting very tricky to maneuver but Rey has not come this far to let something pedestrian as an earthquake take them out.

Finally, straining under the weight he still can’t carry himself, they arrive on the main level and in an absurd twist of fate, they run right into Poe Dameron and Finn, blasters poised, looking like they’re happened upon two ghosts. Rey supposes they know that Kylo Ren has called in the Resistance but she isn’t sure if they have been briefed exactly on why.

Something dangerous twitches in Finn’s even features, crackling in his energy and Rey shuts it down immediately.

“Chill,” she orders her friend while Ben stubbornly as a child attempts to move away from her to stand on his own, a challenging flicker crossing his face that she can not see but feel. “Both of you, we need to get out of here.”

To all of their surprise, Poe Dameron jumps in right then, lifts Ben’s right arm over his shoulder and barks: “Let’s go then!”

The earth rumbles too loudly for any of them to question it and so they run. The compound is busy with people trying to get out. Knights of Ren previously engaged in fighting rebels, varying combinations in varying states of distress, suspend their ongoing duels to get out of the collapsing
temple. As Rey and the men get closer to the exit, she can see that a new day is turning the sky a bright pink and that seems oddly poetic; thrashing through the huge entrance doors of her former prison into a bright new morning of freedom.

But the poem is a very short one because that beautiful pink sky is swarming with X-wings and TIE-fighters, firing at each other like there’s no tomorrow. So Snoke has called in the cavalry before he died after all.

“Finn, we need to get in the air,” Poe bellows and then turns to Ben. “Can you take it from here, chap?”

And Ben is too dumbfounded to speak as Poe ducks away from under his arm. Ben is left to watch the two men hurry toward their X-wings with his mouth agape. Finn glances at them over his shoulder as he climbs into his machine, something unreadable plastered on his face. Rey wants to sit down and talk to him, tell him everything that has happened and beg him to keep her in his heart, but there is no time for that right now.

“Are you okay, can you walk?” Rey turns to Ben instead but doesn’t really see him. She is trying to assess the situation over their heads. “It’s going to get really uncomfortable down here soon.”

They are many people still fighting on the ground as well, too engaged in various battles to notice the pair that has stepped out into the open and Rey is glad for it. If they’re lucky, they can just steal a TIE-fighter and leave immediately.

“We need to get out of here,” she says and pulls at him to keep up with her.

But then Ben twists around and takes her with him. Rey spins and sees General Organa and instantly, leaving is out of the question. Ben freezes when his mother says his name and Rey is somewhat surprised to see not only Chewbacca by her side but Master Luke as well. He has a new lightsaber. Rey wants to run to him instinctively but Ben is still leaning on her and the three figures approaching them in a weary sort of procession don’t really make for a nice reunion moment anyway.

“It wasn’t a trap,” Leia says and Ben’s chin bumps against her head as he nods. “Is he dead?”

Ben nods again and then, faster than either of them could have anticipated, the older woman barges forward, leaving her flanking companions behind and wraps both of the children in her arms in a quick, unapologetic hug.

“It’s good to see you,” she says to Rey after she has let go, a plethora of emotions crossing her face. “Let’s get you home.”
However, this gets instantly and infinitely harder when three large shuttles burst through the clouds above them. Ben twists his head upward, and corrects his stance, taking his weight off of Rey’s shoulders to stand on his own.

“Stormtroopers,” he says and ignites his lightsaber after handing Rey the staff.

Luke and Chewbacca come in closer, with Ben pointedly not looking at either of them because Rey can feel shame welling up at their sight that nearly takes the air out of his lungs. This is all very bizarre and awkward but there is no time to dwell on it, let alone resolve the unspoken tension. The primary objective is just to get out of this with their lives intact. Rey braces herself as Leia takes a blaster cannon that Chewie is offering her from an outstretched hand. And then the first shuttle lands.

The stormtroopers swarm out like bees and join ranks with the few Knights of Ren left standing. Blaster bolts fly left and right, while the ground shakes with the temple crumbling to pieces behind them. Approximately ten troopers dart from the far right across the crumbling, cracking ground and fire at them incessantly. Rey, Ben, and Luke spread out into a protective half circle around their little group to deflect the shots and cover Leia and Chewbacca, who in turn shoot down however many enemies they can.

After the first ten, another fifteen follow, and then another. The fight drags on until even Rey and Ben are winded and it seems like the troopers are a hydra who will just grow three more heads whenever you cut one down. They just keep coming. Soon, the battle field around them thins out, more Resistance fighters either getting on their ships to continue fighting in the air or being drawn closer to the circle of Rey and the rest who seem to be the focal point of the trooper’s attention.

Rey exerts herself to find a means of escape and can spot the Falcon in the distance. It’s a little ways away, but with Ben and Luke covering them, they should be able to get there unscathed. Ben follows her train of thought. He nods, deflecting three bolts at once using one swift sway of his saber and then Force-shoving the assailant out of the way, when Rey feels a surge of hatred bursting from their flank and she sees Hux stomp toward them. He looks unhinged and positively insane, his face as red as his hair and madness glowering in his eyes. She can’t tell who the blast is meant for but he yells: “Scum” from the top of his lungs and shoots.

Rey stops breathing as she does the math, almost sees the trajectory and knows it will hit Ben in the throat, possibly sever his head from his spine. She wants to yell a warning but then, faster than she can process, there is a screeching sound, an agonized cry and the blaster bolt hits a brown mess of fur, square in the chest.

Rey isn’t fast enough to understand what just happened but as Chewbacca topples over, Ben howls and with a shove so powerful, he takes out several stormtroopers in the process, he sends Hux flying high and far until he hits one of the First Order shuttles and his back cracks apart with a horrific
sound that carries all the way over to them. Then Ben falls to his knees, while the rest of their group halts. Other resistance fighters that have joined in their little fighting circle take over and cover them as sheer shock and disbelief rings around their heads.

Ben gathers Chewbacca’s huge frame in his arms, his gloves soon drenched in blood he frantically tries to stop but it’s no use. Chewie rasps something, his voice falling and breaking as Rey’s heart shatters into a million different pieces.

“I’m so sorry,” Ben says.

“For Han,” Chewbacca mumbles in his language that is unintelligible to nearly everyone she knows and gingerly lifts his paw to Ben’s face, gently cupping it, just like his father had such a long time ago on the wretched bridge on Starkiller Base. “And for you.”

And then he dies and it looks almost like he’s falling asleep.

Ben lifts his head up to the sky and screams his frustration into the light of day. His fury is palpable and numbing but the troopers are closing in anyway. They have no regard for what has just transpired between the two beings on the ground.

“Ben,” Rey mutters, voice thick with tears. “Ben, we need to leave .”

Leia touches her son’s shoulder gently and he rises, passing a look with Luke who takes a deep breath and then poises himself to cover him as Ben bows down to reach beneath Chewie and collect his big, lifeless body. He stands, carrying the wookie like a babe and then he walks, without giving their attackers another glance. Rey swallows quickly and orders herself to focus, to help Luke in his attempts of shielding their retreat.

“All units withdraw,” Leia yells past a lump in her throat but stubbornly marches, on as she always has, and the other rebels heed her call, evacuating to their ships and taking out as many stormtroopers as they can on the way.

The Falcon sits waiting and Rey plows on in to get into the pilot’s seat without a question. Chewie had flown it here, she knows it and now he’s gone so she has to. Luke co-pilots in silence, bringing them high up into the stratosphere. The rest of the X-wings flurry to them and Rey thinks she can make out Poe in one of them.

“We’re going home,” she says into the rebel frequency while the stormtroopers in their shuttles and TIE fighters scramble to catch up to them.

Only when the Falcon is in hyper-drive and on auto-pilot, does Rey allow herself one minute of deep
breaths and wiggles some headspace free from Ben’s, who is in shambles, sitting guard over Chewbacca’s body in the main cabin with his mother by his side in absolute silence.

Rey has no idea what to feel. She is infinitely glad to be alive, overjoyed that her little yellow ball still glows safe and sound inside her and that she and Ben are alive and together and will have a chance at this new, completely unexpected life together.

But the weight of Chewbacca’s sacrifice is daunting and with the grief it brings, comes the weight and the trauma of her days at the temple. Still, she doesn’t expect herself to untangle the mess right this second. All she wants is to breathe for a while and get her thoughts in order. She’ll sort through them later. She’ll have time for that now, after all.

“What happened to him?” Luke says quietly after Rey shifts in her pilot’s chair and smoothes out the wrinkles in her tunic to get up. Her Jedi master is glancing backward, indicating his nephew whom he has found so utterly changed.

“I did,” Rey answers truthfully and glances over at him while standing up. He looks older than he did when she left and there is a distance between them that wasn’t there before. “You should have told me about my parents.”

“I know,” he says and sounds exhausted. “I didn’t know how.”

“Well, I’ve heard that before,” she says, “and I forgave him too. Just give me a little time.”

“Anything you need,” he nods and when she turns to leave, he grabs her by the wrist, squeezing. “I am so proud of you, Rey, so proud!”

“Oh,” she quips, beside herself and scrunches her forehead together, “I’d hold off on the pride ‘til you hear the happy news.”

And with this, she leaves him. He can deal with a little bit of cryptic allusion and nerve-grinding vagueness for once. Plus she isn’t quite ready yet to see his face when she tells him that she is having his nephew’s baby.

The air in the main cabin is thick with both Ben’s and Leia’s emotions. Rey takes a second to steady herself as to not get swept away by them and slowly walks over to Ben. He is sitting cross-legged on the floor beside Chewie’s body and she thinks he hasn’t moved an inch since they touched off. Gently, she lays a hand on his shoulder and he sighs, arching into the touch, his mind full.

“I can’t believe he did that for me,” he mutters and in his head are the same memories dancing to and fro, repeating themselves after they have played out in an endless loop.

It’s an avalanche of little scenes with Chewbacca, starting from the earliest fuzzy memories to older
ones, of an older Ben. Chewie had been his favorite playmate growing up, tiny Ben hiding behind his masses of fur, chasing after him on stunted, toddler’s legs, playing hide-and-go-seek, then holo-chess, learning his funny sounding language, listening to him talk about home and joking and laughing until their lungs hurt. Ben’s body is broken in so many places from the battle; his thigh, his rib, his heart that still beats funny sometimes and the splitting headache he suffers - but none of it is worse than these memories.

“He loved you too, Ben,” Rey says and crouches so she is level with him, poised to kiss the side of his face. She’ll work through that with him too but they have something more pressing to contend with right about now.

Rey pecks his temple once more and then turns around to Leia as Luke joins them, eyes darting from Chewbacca to where Ben and Rey sit, so closely huddled together even if Leia hadn’t told him about them yet, he would know now. His face betrays no reaction though. Rey doesn’t really care what he thinks either. She doesn’t care what anybody thinks. Which is exactly the point.

“If we are going back to the Resistance I will need your word that no harm will come to him,” she says to Leia. “If they put him on trial, if they split just one hair on his head…”

She lets the rest of her sentence fade away on purpose, letting it hang there, all implication and danger.

“Rey, that might not be my call,” Leia says and Ben raises his head to listen.

“Well, then you are going to have to make it your call,” Rey insists and stands up to her full height. “Or we are going to let you out at the nearest outpost and you’ll never see either of us ever again.”

“Or your grandchild,” she adds, letting her hand fall to her belly in meticulous calculation, deciding that this is potentially the one ace she has up her sleeve. Ben freezes at her revealing this and so do Luke and Leia.

“Pardon me?” The general bores her eyes into Rey’s skull and then turns at Ben, incredulous. Rey wonders if the pause she gives is actually her deliberating if Rey is lying or if it’s just sheer, undiluted shock. “When did that happen? How far along is she?”

“Two months,” Rey says when Ben remains mum under his mother’s scrutiny.

“Ben, what were you thinking? She is all but a child herself,” Leia scolds her son but Rey is having none of it.

“Hey,” she snaps. “I’m right here, and I’m not a kid. Plus, child or no, I killed Snoke and I expect the Resistance to honor that service and pardon Ben’s crimes.”
“They might exile him,” Leia says, unable to keep her eyes darting from one of them to the other, flickering down on Rey’s hand on her stomach time and time again. Something else mingles into her startled expression, something a lot like joy. Rey believes that it’s only just now sinking in that she will be a grandmother and she has a pretty good idea that Leia Organa had expected many things of her son after all these years, but certainly not a grandchild.

Ben, meanwhile, couldn’t care less about being exiled and he says as much with the grunt he makes.

“Fine,” Rey says and puts her free hand onto his hair protectively. “As long as they don’t try to kill him.”

“I won’t let that happen,” Leia says finally and then Luke steps forward with measured steps.

“Neither will I,” he declares.

Suddenly there are a million conversations to be had. Between Leia and Ben, and Luke and Ben, and Luke and Rey, and they all demand to happen but not right now. Right now they let silence take over again until it gets too heavy and Leia starts telling every funny story she remembers about Chewbacca and continues to until they reach the base.

There, under scrutiny that bothers Ben more than he will ever admit, he is quickly and quietly sentenced to a grounded life on a planet of his choosing, perfect with a chip implanted in his arm which will track his location at all times. He just shrugs that verdict off, letting Rey decide where she wants to live. She briefly ponders returning to Jakku, because it’s all the home she’s ever really known. But then Ben suggests Yavin 4, just so she can maybe get in touch with the past he has made her forget and she quickly agrees, finding something coming full circle in that choice.

They leave a fortnight later, when Ben is healed up enough that his wounds can’t get infected anymore and Rey has been checked, probed, and tested in every way imaginable until every doctor and droid agrees that she and the baby are physically fine. Even though she still wakes up with nightmares, kicking and screaming, Ben is always there when she does and soothes her back to sleep. Sometimes with words, sometimes with memories, sometimes with his whole being, arching and bending around her, into her, until all she knows is his name and the weight of his body moving on hers.

Yavin 4 is even more beautiful than Rey imagined. They land a little ways from the ruins of Luke’s old Jedi academy and Ben stays away from the place as far as his circumstances allow. Meaning, he begrudgingly accompanies Rey when she goes to explore it, but it’s very hard for him, so eventually, she relents and takes the trips alone. Instead of looming around her when she does, Ben restores and renovates what is left of her parents’ old house; a beautiful little cottage beside a clear blue, peaceful lake Rey can almost remember.
He is surprisingly good at the handy work and has a great eye for detail. He cheats with the heavy lifting, tugging and pulling at the Force but Rey doesn’t mind. She does the same, especially when she becomes so big it gets harder to bend and pick up or grab things.

On her birthday, Ben makes a little event of the celebration, baking a cake all by himself which tastes not entirely horrible and joins Rey outside in their little yard after doing the dishes. It’s a wonderful sunset, the best time of day on Yavin 4 where the sky is drenched in splendid hues of pink, yellow and purple. Rey is watching the small back and forth of waves lick at the water’s edge and strokes her seven-month baby belly with an absent-minded smile.

When he comes to stand next to her, taking a deep, relaxed breath, and lets the earthy scent of pine and summer air filter through him, she takes his hand.

“It’s quiet out here,” she says and squeezes his fingers.

“I love it,” he hums and squeezes back.

“I know.” Turning her head to him, she smiles, the simple gesture enough to get the hint and he leans in to kiss her.

His lips are warm and soft, two full, perfect cushions to fall onto. There is hunger in the kiss, as there will always be, but no haste.

They have all the time in the world.

Chapter End Notes

Okay. I lied about the "This is where I leave you"-part. I love the two of them too much to not give them an epilogue, I hope that is fine with you guys.

PS: To further revel in the wonderful artwork (and to reblog it of course) here is the link to the post: http://leavekyloalone.tumblr.com/post/138007738648/art-for-the-12th-and-final-chapter-of
Go give her your love, she is marvellous!
When the time comes, I will also provide you with a playlist of all the songs that were referenced in the chapter titles.

But until then...I hope you are happy with the end of the regular fic and I would Love to hear from you, if you did :)

Ben Solo has known great pain. He has suffered in just about any physical and emotional way a human can suffer, save for losing a limb, but that was only just for dumb luck. He’s been jabbed, stabbed, prodded, shot at, slashed, poked and tortured so many times, pain had once been all but a friend to him.

Yet he has never known this level of anguish. He thinks he is dying, must certainly be, for who could survive this, being ripped open, completely bereft of any control, of any rhyme or reason? He wants to scream and never stop or maybe just quit breathing, anything to alleviate this agony.

*Push it away*, she beckons, straining herself. *I know you can do it.*

“I can’t,” he winces. “I’m trying.”

“Well, then I really appreciate the gesture,” she breathes, then yelps and has to grit out the rest so she doesn’t screech; “But. You’re. Breaking. My. Hand!”

He lets go immediately but now the purchase is gone and he is winded and withering in pain with no refuge - he wants that hand back but he knows that’s very selfish all things considered.

“How much longer?” he asks and forces his eyes to open.

“It’s hard to say, it could be minutes or anything up to another hour,” his mother says, her face red with exertion as she holds Rey’s other hand.

“Another hour?” Ben pants incredulously. *How?*

“Well, that’s labour for you,” she snaps. “You took two days.”

Faced with this pain, Ben thinks this might be the worst thing he has ever done to his mother. Patricide included. That might be cynical to think but he can’t control his thoughts anymore.
“I’m so sorry,” he says to both the women and neither of them accepts the apology.

“Just. Pull. Yourself. Together,” Rey orders, her face crimson and caked with sweat. “Or you’re gonna have to leave.”

“No,” he hurries, reveling in the little reprieve of her last contraction fading and the pain is duller by a fraction. He has no idea how she is not falling apart.

“She can’t have your baby and baby you at the same time,” his mother scolds fervently but if she honestly expects him to step out of this room a second before his son is born and he has held him for at least an hour, she must be completely out of her mind.

We don’t even know if it’s a boy yet, Rey thinks, more coherent than before.

I do, he thinks back, I can feel it.

You are so full of-, and then she screams as the next contraction comes hard and without warning. It’s the hardest thing he’s ever had to do, keeping his mouth shut and not scream with her.

It takes another forty-three minutes and approximately ten seconds, not that he is keeping count, until the last contraction is enough to push their baby out the last bit of the way. It already has a full head of black hair and is caked in some white, flaky kind of grime and some blood. Ben forgets to ask if it’s a boy or a girl because really, it doesn’t matter so long as it just screams to show them it’s okay. Only after it does, does he lift his head further to see.

“You have a son,” his mother says, holding the baby up and Rey’s system floods with a joy that seems inhuman and it dizzies them both. It’s a perfect little baby boy.

***

“We have to name this baby,” Rey huffs, exasperated, three days later.

They have rattled through every possibility. Ben has gone so far as to suggest Anakin - to which Rey merely replied “Absolutely not”. Eventually, they agreed that they do not want their child to carry a predecessor’s name. They want him to have his own life, his own name and his own path. No memories to live up or down to. Still, that leaves the little boy stubbornly nameless.

They are sitting in the nursery while she feeds the baby and Ben is pacing up and down the room, wholly unable to provide aid in her continued brainstorming at this very moment. He is on edge because Finn and Poe are there and he hates to admit how much it bothers him that they mistrust him so much he’d know even if it didn’t seep through the air like a current. They think he is a monster and terribly toxic for her. She’s had to repeat his three sentences a lot, ring them into both their heads for the better part of the day.

I know who you are. I know what you did. I am still here.
She has got her own set of three sentences which he supplies, whenever she loses her grip on reality.

*Your name is Rey. You were born in the summer. You love me.*

They manage like this, the two of them, and when it gets dark, they look at their son and the world lights up enough to bare it all. He is the only thing in the universe beside what Ben shares with the boy’s mother that makes sense. When he cries, Ben falls apart. When he smiles, even more so. If he had any friends, he would parade the child around, tell them “Look at my son. Pride is not the word I’m looking for, there is *so much more* inside of me. Look at this part of me, this good thing I helped make when nobody believed I could ever do something right ever again. Look at him.”

As it is, he can only keep mum and in the background when Rey presents the child to her friends. Whatever distaste they have for Ben Solo, his son wins them over in a heartbeat. They aren’t half afraid that he might end up like his father - Ben himself is terrified of it.

Sometimes, when he holds him, he thinks he should leave. He never wears black gloves anymore but he still has this vision of those wrapped, powerful hands tainting the soft, innocent skin. That Ben and the part of him that will always be Kylo Ren, will destroy this wonderful being in his arms one day, ruin him with his dark past. He finds refuge in the Grey and hopes that his son will never know the divide of Light and Dark.

At night, Rey watches him from the other end of the crib as he puts his son down.

“*Na eisai kalyteros anthropos apo ton patera soy,*” he whispers after he has bowed down to kiss his forehead as he does everytime, without fail.

“What does it mean?” Rey asks, when they’re in bed that night. “What’s that language?”

“It’s the secret tongue of Tatooine,” Ben answers, dragging his fingers up and down her arms. “Your father told me the story once, how his mother would say that to him every time they left Old Ben’s sector and he wouldn’t come with them. It means ‘May you be a better man than your father.’”

Resistance flares up in her, an *argument*. This always happens when he starts to worry about fatherhood, about corrupting or already having corrupted the child by simply siring him. She doesn’t like it when he does that, doesn’t see the point and frankly, doesn’t agree with his concerns.

“You *are* a good man,” she mutters defiantly and levels a glare at him. “Every day.”

“There isn’t much to do wrong here,” Ben says, “the only people I see here are you two and I love you both. Being good here isn’t hard. But he’s still small now, he’ll grow up and I’ll need to be *better*. I’m scared that I’ll fail him, fail you both.”

“I’m right here,” Rey says, “I won’t let you fail anybody.”

***
A week later, Rey brings back new books to read for Ben, for when she is out on Resistance business and Ben is alone with the baby. The books fill his time when his son sleeps and the bed becomes too big without her in it. Among them is an old history, made up of many volumes and in it, Ben finds a name for their child.

One story goes that in the olden days there was a royal family and it had once produced a monarch who was ruthless, unhinged and gruesome. This monarch had three uncles for advisers and they tried their best to control the raging emperor but fell to his anger one by one until only the youngest of the uncles remained. This uncle had a young son, who was assisting his father, trying to do good by the people of the galaxy while trying to soothe the emperor’s temper with kind and smart words. Eventually, the monarch was cast down and killed by a conspiracy made up of what he had left of his family. The young man however, refused to take part in the kinslaying. He remained good and wise throughout the whole ordeal and was recognized after and made the prime advisor for the next leader. And the next and the next. He was never corrupted by power or greed - he remained the voice of reason for as long as he lived.

“His name was Lin,” Ben says after telling Rey the story over breakfast.

“Lin,” she repeats, tilting her head and trying the name on her tongue. “Lin Solo.”

“I think I like it,” he says.

“I like it too.”

***

The first time Lin gets a cold, at almost a year, Ben goes stir crazy with worries. For an hour after they put him down, he does nothing but stalk around his son’s bedroom door, listening for the little coughs he makes in his sleep. They are small, high-pitched, truthfully adorable sounds but he can’t imagine anything worse.

After he has incoherently rambled into their bond for the better part of his time waiting for his son to finally sleep soundly, Rey walks up to him in the hallway and presses her cheek against his shoulder.

“He’s in pain,” Ben says urgently, straining to go to him.

“He is sleeping,” she soothes out the wrinkles of his shirt, stroking up and down his back the way she does Lin after he’s fed.

“But he’s coughing all the time,” Ben argues.

“In his sleep,” she insists and kisses the bit of his upper arm that she can easily reach, “and if we
wake him up now, he won’t sleep again for hours. Let him rest.”

It’s tearing him apart and Rey feels how his muscles yearn to reach out, to cradle the little black-haired head in his palm and mumble some half-sung lullaby. She loves him all the more for it but still she won’t relent.

The following day, their son is better and Ben can breathe again. He has not slept well, even after Rey’s determined attempts to make him forget all but his name. His first act after groggily standing up and stretching is to find his son in his crib. Awake and frugal, playing with his little toes.

“Feeling any better, young man?” He asks the child who gives him a bright smile in lieu of an answer and wiggles his chubby arms; his way of saying he wants to be picked up. Ben complies instantly, gathering his child in his hands and turning him over every way, very careful to check for outward signs of damage - which there are of course none. Lin’s nose is running but apart from that he is fine.

With a changed and wiped down baby in his arms, he returns to their bedroom where Rey is splayed out on the mattress taking up so much space it’s truly a feat considering her tiny form. This is something he has come to know, living with her. She sleeps like someone who never had to share a bed in her life, all star-fish-like, every limb outstretched in every possible direction. Ben is left to the margins of the bed but he doesn’t mind. Usually, when one or the other is rattled awake by some nightmare of gruesome days, they shift again anyway. Sometimes he holds her, sometimes she holds him and together they keep fending off the traumas.

Lin keeps helping with this, tremendously. Content and rested as he is right now, the little boy is a beacon of happiness, smiling at his parents with two perfect little teeth peeking up from behind his lower lip. Those lips of his are puffy and full and both Rey and Ben know where he got them from. In every other aspect, save for the jet black head of hair, he looks more like his mother but his mouth is his father’s to a T.

Rey grins back at them, barely awake, sits up and then moves to free up some space for her two men. Shifting the baby to one arm, Ben climbs in and under the blanket to lean against the headboard.

“I was right about him sleeping,” Rey pipes needlessly, as is her way.

“Yes,” he concedes and scrunches his face up into a wide smile as she brings up a finger to boop their son’s nose. “You usually are.”

“I’ve been thinking,” she says and looks at the baby, not at him.

“I know,” he says because it’s true and she has thought of nothing else since she woke up. “Reading
minds kind of takes the fun out of proposing, don’t you think?”

Chapter End Notes

Sooooooo, as many of you noticed, this fic was packed with Hamilton quotes and references and so imagine my joy when we found a bit of Chinese history that I could model to fit the story and make them name their baby Lin. I hope you Hamilton nerds are as pleased with this as I am.

There is also a reference to JJ Abrams show Fringe in there, which is a wonderful series and I highly recommend it.

You might also notice, that the ending is still very much open and I did this so I could continue writing drabbles set in this universe. If posted here, they will be collected in a series called "In My Bloodstream Verse", so you can keep looking out for that. If i post exclusively to tumblr, you'll find them at jackpotgirl.tumblr.com, where you can follow me if you like.

Now, I am very excited to hear from you. How did you like the epilogue or the whole thing as it is finished now? Do you have some prompts ready or things you would like to have explored?

********BONUS********

At the edge of the forest hover two translucent, blue-glowing figures and take in the scene unfolding before them. A young man lifting a babe up into the air, pretending-throwing him and a woman laughing from a little ways away. Everything about this screams affection and tranquility.

"I win," one of them says. "I knew she was going to fall in love with him."
"And I knew she would bring him back," the other says. "So technically, I win."
"Oh you just be quiet and pay up," the first one snickers and then they fade into the backdrop of Yavin 4.
"From The Author Of"

Hello friends,

this is for all those of you who said they would love to read more from me. I am choosing to do it by means of this chapter to reach at least those of you who have subscribed. For now I have two new works out for your reading pleasure.

- **Stripped [Down To The Bones]**

"Show your face, she thinks and tilts her head. He remains impassive, which strangely irks her. She shouldn’t care, so she flicks her fingers harder against her skin and moans when her vision blurs from the touch. She bucks up her hips and arches her back, not because it feels so much better but because it’s what they want to see. With this though, she must have slipped from the view of the masked man because he rocks forward in his chair. She looks at the visor again, seizing him up, and narrows her eyes at him."

In an unforeseen change of events, Rey has wound up in the Red Light District of Coruscant. Kylo Ren ends up in the crowd one night and things happen.

Shameless smut. || Canon-Divergent. || Two-Parter, Complete

- **Thick Skin And An Elastic Heart**

"For all intents and purposes, he is a mass-murderer. He’s killed, what, 75 men and the odd woman from various walks of crime-underworld-life, can be tied to a mind-bogglingly big drug and human-trafficking operation and he is very likely one of the few people who are alive to tell who and where Snoke is. She is not supposed to have butterflies, is not supposed to feel this tiny glowing light in the center of her body that flares up with the prospect of seeing him. She hates him, hates everything he is and most of all how he deceived her. But her head won’t cooperate. She is about to meet Kylo Ren, the criminal, the murderer. But her hair stands up in anticipation for meeting Ben."

Agent Rey Kenobi is good at her job, has always been. But as she finds her personal and professional life clash disastrously, she has to try and find a way - any way - to not have it all crash and burn around her.

Ben Solo goes by the name of Kylo Ren now. He's not a good man. But he is good at what he does.

Modern-OrganizedCrime-FBI-AU || FBI!Rey and Criminal!Kylo || Based on the one-shot "Freer", now a multi-chapter collab between me and my lovely IMB-Beta ViciousRhythm

Inspired by my onset "Freer."

It's probably going to update once a week with long-ish chapters (plotted for 15 chapters).

Rey's POV is mostly written by me and Kylo's POV is mostly written by ViciousRhythm.

I and we'd be so thrilled to see you in the comment sections and hopefully, you can join me and us on another wild ride. The latter fic is already somewhat plotted and I can already promise you, it'll be a crazy, angsty, sexy and suspenseful (hopefully, ha) one...just, I am very
very fond of it so far and I'd really love for all of you to read.

For now, you can check out the Preface and first chapter if you follow the link and let it be like a pilot maybe, see if it floats your boat ;)

Thank you for your attention and I hope to see you over at Stripped or Elastic Heart <3

Yours, Ellie
Further Reading

Chapter Summary

Hello everybody!
This is NOT a new chapter!

Since I have around 400 subscriptions on this fic (I love every last one of you, by the way!) I thought I could let you all know that after "In My Bloodstream", which was my big continuation fic of 7, I now started on the one for 8, called "Across The Universe".

As of now, it has a prologue (which also works as a stand-alone missing scene) and a first chapter. Below is a little taste of it.
If you liked IMB, it would mean the world to me if you checked out ATU, it's already so near and dear to me and I have just started writing it. I'm really curious to hear what all of you think!

BUT! SPOILER ALERT!
DON'T READ IF YOU HAVEN'T SEEN THE LAST JEDI YET!

Follow "Across the Universe" [here](#).

Excerpt (SPOILER WARNING):

“We put out the call and you came from all over the galaxy, brave heroes and heroines who will not stand for the oppression of the First Order, who will not bow, who will not quietly fade into the night, no!” Poe enthuses, his voice rising to a crescendo that is both pleasant and rejuvenating and Rey straightens her spine, feeling a tug somewhere at her back that makes her see a flash of pale skin between black velvet sleeves and black satin gloves. She brushes Ben Solo from her mind with some effort. But it’s not like he’d acknowledge her anyway.

“We were the spark that kept the darkness at bay, but we have grown into a flame, and we will burn the First Order down!” Poe goes on and people begin clapping. “We are here to fight and we are here to win! I am honored to stand before you as your elected Commander in Chief, your General!”

Rey smiles because she is proud of Poe and because when she does, her brain is way more likely to push the daunting image of Ben Solo to the side. Ben in the skin of Kylo Ren, as he is being celebrated for casting the galaxy into darkness on its newly revived capitol planet, in front of a crowd of thousands upon thousands, cheering the death of liberty once more.
“Those few terrorists that remain who call themselves the Resistance—those scattered, filthy animals who wish to destroy our hard-earned peace and prosperity—are being hunted down this very minute, and we will not stop until they are completely eradicated,” Hux says, and out of the corner of his eye, Ben sees Rey next to him, leaning against the pyramid wall leisurely, shrewdly ignoring him.

A full year after Crait and he still hasn’t been able to break that bond. It eats away at him—the same as it does her, he’s sure, though for different reasons. Rey keeps pulling at him, even when she ignores him like she does now, even when she tries not to, she is still there, tugging at the edges of his mind. Tempting him to open himself back up to her suggestions and her sweetly, softly whispered lies.

What already feels like a lifetime ago, she had told him that he wasn’t alone in a quiet intimacy that had felt almost scandalous. He had been so desperate to believe her that he had went and broken his whole life apart to have her.

And then Rey had turned around and betrayed him, like it was the simplest, easiest thing. Just like everyone he had ever cared about before her—his parents, his pathetic failure of an uncle. To say that he is still bitter would be an understatement. However his efforts of casting her out of his thoughts had been as fruitless as those of severing the mysterious connection that bound them together. And yet, this is not a battle he is prepared to give lost. One of these days, he will tear her out of him. If it’s the last thing he does.

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!