The Force Doesn't Want To Go To School Today
by HerenorThereNearNearFar

Summary

The Force Awakens if it took place in a middle school. Feat. Leia Organa: Deputy Superintendent, Finn the Reluctant Hall Monitor, questionably psychic Skywalker children, a legacy of terror and bureaucratic corruption, Rey's family situation being a hastily glossed over mess, Maz Kanata playing a significant role in the plot, and BB-8 as an actual eight year old.

Notes

I'm actually quite proud of this, even if I don't know where it came from or what it's doing
It's Surprisingly Hard To Accurately Turn A School Into An Evil Empire

The hall monitors patrolled in groups. They always patrolled in groups. It had been Phasma's idea, some whispered, for she ran the hall monitors like a police force. Still other whispered it had been Hux, Student Council President In Perpetuity, who had insisted on bolstering the ranks of the monitors so, and who had made sure they always moved in packs, so no one could escape them. Still others claimed it had been Principal Snoke's stroke of genius that had made the ringing of the tardy bell a death knell for so many. The hall monitors patrolled. The hall monitors saw all.

It was a dark winter day when five of them under the command of Phasma, captain of their fell ranks, moved with purpose towards the classroom of history teacher Mr. San Tekka. It was study hall for the eighth graders, in whose ranks both Phasma and her target resided. But foul deeds were afoot and even a hall pass couldn't have saved the poor souls sequestered in the ratty classroom from the wrath of the school establishment.

The First Order, they were called, by Hux who was both so preppy he was born without a first name and such a burgeoning tyrant all his designer clothes involved boots and greatcoats.

Most of the students called them something much ruder, but as long as the Palpatine Memorial Middle School languished under the tyrannical rule of their principal and his cronies, they dared not voice their opinions out loud.

Of course as with all tyrannical regimes, some brave souls sought to change the status quo.

Poe Dameron, eighth grader, swim champion, head of the Aviation Club, and all around Good Guy. (If you asked the average student. If you were to ask one of Phasma's cronies, or, god forbid, Hux himself, they would call him a troublemaker.) gave a grateful nod to the old man in front of him.

"Thank you, Mr. San Tekka. This could save all of us."

"Are you sure you can get it to her?" the feeble old man, Lor San Tekka, local slightly out of it history teacher, enquired.

"Of course." Poe promised, with the cheerful wink that had charmed so many students. "I told you, I have connections. She's a great woman, a great educator."

"And a great Princess." said Lor San Tekka, his eyes misting over with fond reminiscence.

"That she was." Poe agreed, ignoring the fact that Leia Organa, Deputy Superintendent, had been crowned Nerfherder Princess at the local county pageant long before he had been born. You got used to Mr San Tekka going off on tangents if you spent enough time around him. He remembered the entire town history, it seemed.

There was a panicked squeak from the door and Poe looked over. "What is it, buddy?" he asked the slight, round figure whose head was outlined against the small frosted window.

There was an urgent whisper of "Phasma!" and Poe and Mr. San Tekka both paled.

"Do you think they know?" Poe asked, aghast, and Lor San Tekka nodded sadly.
"You have to get out of here, my boy," he said. "You too," he added, nodding to Bebe Eight who was still standing by the door. "Quickly out the window!"

"They're coming closer." Bebe Eight warned.

Poe shook his head. "We can't leave you!"

Lor San Tekka sighed. "Principal Snoke has had it out for me for years, I can't escape. But you can. Get those files to Mrs. Organa. Get him fired, and rid this school of him once and for all. And tell her, tell her that her brother, he's the key."

If Poe understood he didn't let on, but he obeyed, quickly opening the low window, hijacked years ago to open all the way and rolling out into the bushes beneath. He thanked his stars that they weren't on the second story, and then reached out his arms to help Bebe Eight down. The two children crouched and watched fearfully through the foliage as the door slammed open and Phasma and her hall monitors rushed in. It was too late. All they could do was run.

If they could even do that. Across the quad they could see a figure, tall and swathed in black approaching. Bebe Eight, always brave, didn’t falter, but Poe flinched. It was never a good sign when Kylo got involved. They couldn’t sneak out of the bushes without him noticing, or at least Poe couldn’t. As the hall monitors surrounded Lor San Tekka, hustled him into his creaky old spinning chair, and pushed him into the center of the room, Poe turned to Bebe Eight.

The nearly nine year old seventh grader looked solemn. He was a certifiable genius, after all, he knew what was happening. Poe returned the mournful look, and carefully, almost ceremonially, pressed the little flash drive Mr San Tekka had given him into the child’s hand.

Bebe Eight grabbed the lapel of his jacket, and whispered, so quietly only Poe could hear, “No!”

“You have to go on without me.” Poe said. “I can probably get out, but I’ll have to wait until they leave. If I move they’ll hear. You take this, and wait for me, if I don’t come, find a way to get it to my friends. They’ll take you to Mrs. Organa.”

Poe and Bebe Eight had been together most of the past two years. They had complementary schedules (By accident last year and this year because Poe had pulled some strings) and Poe had taken the bright young prodigy under his wing even as the rest of the school neglected him. But Bebe Eight knew how important their mission was. As Kylo disappeared into the block of classes they were crouching against the outside wall of, Bebe Eight saw his chance. He crawled out from the underbrush, and dashed away, small enough and fast enough to escape without rustling too much leaves or being seen out the window.

All Poe could do was wait.

He didn’t have to wait long. The ominous figure of Kylo appeared in the doorway and Poe felt a shudder crawl down his spine. He didn’t know why. Objectively there was nothing scary about the boy, a whole year younger than Poe, other than his creepy taste, strange talent for predicting what people were thinking, and the fact that he obeyed Principal Snoke’s every order. (You had to give it to their Principal, he’d take anyone who could take orders, supposedly psychic emos, fascist preps, scarily tall and gorgeous jocks, most of the hall monitor squad was made of of kids from the quote unquote, “wrong side of the tracks”.)
Lor San Tekka sighed. “Really, is this the best you can do?”

Poe could hear Kylo snarl. “You’re not in a position to be passing down judgement, old man.” he said. Poe imagined his mother ranting about children and respect these days. Snoke’s Squad were practically the poster children for disrespect. They thought they ruled the school, and Snoke let them because they were easier to control than the teachers. Lor San Tekka might be a bit dotty sometimes, but he had been working at Palpatine Memorial all the way back when it was still called Galaxy High. (It had been the seventies.) He deserved better than being manhandled by Phasma’s interchangeable yellow sashed goons and then backtalked by a thirteen year old.

“And neither are you.” Mr. San Tekka said, with admirable calm. “I know who you are.”

Poe had stopped looking, too afraid of being spotted, but he could hear Kylo’s angry little huff. “Take him away!” he ordered. “Principal Snoke will want to see him.”

“You can’t erase your family!” Lor San Tekka said as one of the hall monitor escorted him out.

Poe had almost started to relax, Kylo and Phasma were talking about something while the remaining hall monitors stood in silence, when Kylo’s voice suddenly echoed from the room.

“I know you’re there!” he yelled.

Poe Dameron had a healthy fear of the supernatural even if Kylo was just a punk kid. But he also knew better than to give away his position just because he was spooked. He hadn’t had one parent in the Air Force and one in the Army Reserve for nothing. He slid further down the rough brick wall, stopped breathing, closed his eyes, and prayed.

A minute passed and he almost hoped he was safe, when a large hand grabbed the back of his jacket and yanked him up, slamming his head on the upper window pane. He was still blinking away stars as he was roughly tumbled back through the window and pushed onto the old linoleum floor. They didn’t even bother being gentle with him. Snoke had demonstrated he could get away with nearly anything, he was almost untouchable. People had been trying to get him fired for years, but he still hung on. The hall monitors could bully with impunity, Poe thought bitterly as he was dragged to his knees to see Phasma and Kylo’s pale faces staring down at him. The other hall monitors, one skinny red haired girl and an African boy with a kinder face than Poe was used to seeing on hall monitors, were posted by the door. The boy was looking away, at least.

Poe smirked. If he was about to get suspended he could at least do it with style. “So, do you talk first, do I talk first?”

Neither Kylo or Phasma looked amused. “Search him.” one of them said. Probably Kylo, the voice was low, but Poe was arguably concussed and not prepared to make a final call on that front.

Poe was pulled to his feet, and the hall monitor behind him gave him the thorough pat down usually used when a student was suspected of having a banned substance, like Ibuprofen, pot, a yoyo, or for one memorable month, a mechanical pencil.

“Thanks.” Poe said as he finished up, and added a wink for good measure. He found himself pushed into a low plastic desk chair with more force than was needed. It was worth it.

Kylo sat down in front of him. “Where is it?” he asked sharply, dark eyes inspecting Poe. Clearly they knew what Mr. San Tekka had possessed, and wanted it before it could get into the hands of someone who could use it. After the incident with the bushes Poe wasn’t prepared to meet his eyes. Psychic or not, there was something wrong with the kid. He also wasn’t prepared to open his mouth
and give Bebe Eight away.

Finally Kylo gave up. “Take him to the office.” he ordered.

“The classroom?” Phasma asked, gesturing to the carefully curated retro educational dustiness that Mr. San Tekka had so painstakingly gardened over the years.

Kylor smirked. “I suspect we’ll be getting a new teacher in here.” he said, and Poe hated him. “Gut it and box it up.”

One of the hall monitors pulled Poe back to his feet and marched him out. Behind him Poe could hear the others start on the room with unnecessary roughness. The sound of paper tearing was like screams but Poe held his head up high as he was pulled away. He hoped Bebe Eight was doing his part.

In the classroom Hall Monitor 21, as his sash proclaimed, watched as his compatriots tore down years of old maps and educational posters, pushed over shelves of books with white and rainbow graphic covers and fonts straight out of the eighties. He had always liked Mr. San Tekka. It seemed wrong to wreck his classroom when he was already probably getting fired. Phasma gave him a look. “What are you waiting for, Twenty One?” she asked. Phasma referred to everyone under her ‘command’ by their hall monitor number. At the beginning of the year, when he’d first been recruited, it had seemed fun. Now it just felt like she was peeling back a layer of his skin. Somebody had found tubs in the nearest supply cupboard and most of Mr. San Tekka’s effects were already being tossed in haphazardly. Hall Monitor Twenty One thought he heard something break. He winced. Phasma gave him a strange look.

“Head back to the office, Twenty One.” she ordered. “And come see me during lunch period.”

He nodded.

She was most comfortable on the edges of the school. The back of the classroom, the baseball field at study hall, the library at lunch. It was a commonly held belief that Principal Snoke ruled the school with an iron fist, but this wasn’t true. He only ruled about three quarters of it. If you were part of the last quarters, smart enough or insignificant enough to escape, the school was yours for the taking, provided you kept your head down.

Rey had learned a lot over the past few weeks. Palpatine Memorial was different from her old school, but not that different. there were still the same bullies who had to be constantly fended off, the same awful lunch ladies who could ruin your life if they didn’t like you (and they never liked Rey.), the same terrible teachers, and the same abused dregs of school society. In fact Palpatine Memorial was arguably worse than Jakku Junior High. Sure, Jakku had been a hive of scum and villainy, but at least the school there hadn’t been run by an actual sadist principal, but your usual gangs and bullies. Technically unallowed child tormentors, Rey had learned were much better than officially school sanctioned ones.

it hadn’t taken her long to realize her magical new life wasn’t much better than her old one, and she had learned to stay out of the way fast. Her cousin had taught her that, at least.
She had her lunch, earliest lunch period of the day was good for something, at least, and she had a little corner around the back of the school that was hers now. And she was perfectly content to eat her quarter portion of sludge. (The lunch ladies hated her already, she was nearly ready to take her aunt up on her offer to help her make lunches, however uncomfortable it made Rey.)

She could nearly ignore one of the usual bullies dragging a little boy who seemed small even for sixth grade over towards the dumpsters. He was putting up a good fight, she had to admit, orange clad arms flailing.

It took her only seconds to make a choice.

Tseebo wasn’t much of a combatant, even if he was wiry. It only took a couple of minutes of Rey yelling at him before he dropped the kid and scurried away.

“Sorry about that.” she told him. “Tseebo was probably just going to try to take your lunch money.”

The kid straightened, shrugged back on his backpack, and looked up at Rey with mistrust. His skin was a light brown and his hair was the colour of travel advertisement beach sand and everything about him, from his round eyes to his button nose, screamed ‘hug me’.

Well, Rey wasn’t about to fall for it. “If you’re lost, the office is that way.” she pointed. “Avoid the gym and the music block, you’ll just get in trouble.”

The boy didn’t move.

As Rey headed back for her section of wall, he started to follow her. Rey stopped short and crossed her arms. “I can’t help you.”

He shrugged. “I don’t need help. I just need somewhere to lay low for a while.”

“Don’t you have school?”

“I go to school here.”

Rey usually tried to suspend her disbelief about things, but it must have shown because the boy gave a world weary sigh. “I skipped three grades. And got into kindergarten early.”

It was a ridiculously big school, and Rey though she had seen a flashes of orange just under her sightline over the past few weeks, in assemblies and the halls. She slid down the wall and back into a seated position. “So why do you need to lay low?”

The boy sat next to her. “That’s classified.” he informed her

“Classified, huh? Story of my life.” Rey grinned sharply and, after some thought, offered the boy a slice of her apple from her measly fruit cup. He waved it off and pulled a granola bar out of his bag instead. Rey choked down a few more bites and said, “I know you don’t have lunch with me. Why are you out here?”

He rolled his eyes. “My teachers don’t care if I’m there or not. They don’t like having me around at all. I can get out of class fairly easily.” Rey nodded, she was getting a clearer and clearer picture of how this school worked everyday.

She held out a hand and mumbled around her last french fry, “Rey.”

“Everyone calls me Bebe Eight.”
Rey raised an eyebrow. “Really?”

Bebe Eight shrugged. “I’m younger than everyone else, I’m eight, I take French, add in some other contributing factors and it was kind of an eventuality.”

“What are they going to do when you turn nine?” Rey asked, intrigued.

He giggled. “It’ll happen over the summer, and then when I come back I’ll be in eighth grade, so…” he trailed off, but Rey got the picture.

“You must be delighted.” she smiled, then caught herself. “After lunch this is over, okay?” Rey warned.

Bebe Eight made a noncommittal sort of whistling noise, the sort that Rey could remember being able to make before her teeth all grew in straight. Rey had a bad feeling about almost everything about this, but it was different than usual. More promising. Besides, hanging out with someone was better than sitting around alone in a new school, sulking about her family.
Poe Dameron had been sitting in the office for almost two hours, he thought. It was hard to tell. His cell, so to speak, was not equipped with a clock. There were a lot of things it wasn’t equipped with, like colours, or comfortable seats, or a window. Snoke may have been a corrupt bastard, but if Poe stayed quiet enough he’d have to let him go eventually. You could torment school children to some degree, but you couldn’t disappear them. Mrs Organa and the school board would finally have his head if Poe never came home.

It was a testament to how mind numbingly boring the place was, that Poe was seriously considering dying heroically at the hands of his middle school principal as a fun alternative. A few people had been in to grill him, to try to get him to hand over the flash drive. Poe had stayed defiantly silent. When Kylo entered the room, Poe was staring fixedly at the white plastic of the table, a cheap folding one to match the cheap grey folding chair he was sitting in. Kylo had the heavy breathing of someone who wanted to be noticed and who took care to step heavily and press against the world around them. Poe couldn’t have missed his entrance. Still he kept his eyes locked on the rough pattern of shadows and harsh light that played out on the textured surface in front of him.

Kylo cleared his throat a few times and Poe finally felt compelled to look at him. He looked the same as ever, too long black hair and long thin face. Today he looked like he had stolen one of Hux’s signature scarves and painted it black.

“Comfortable?” Kylo asked. Poe considered flirting, he found that usually upset people, and he considered swearing, but both would just give them an excuse to crack down harder on him. Instead he made a so-so gesture.

“So,” Kylo asked, “Where is it?”

He swung by Hux’s office a few minutes later. It was really a supply closet off the office, half cleared out so Hux could keep a chair and his binders there, but Hux liked having his own controlled space for times like this when their usual room was taken by staff meetings or interrogations, and everyone was too intimidated by him to point out that he held meetings during study hall next to a couple of mops and that he always came out smelling vaguely of disinfectant.

“IT’s with a seventh grader, the eight year old. Dameron didn’t know where he would be, but he shouldn’t be hard to find.”

Hux looked up slowly, trying to pretend he had more important things to think about. “I see. I think I
remember the boy. We’ll send the hall monitors out, he can’t have gotten far.”

Poe was still in the little room, just off of Vice Principal Plutt’s office. He was starting to think it was his home now. Somebody had carved a rough pictogram of genitalia on the side of the table, Poe had discovered, and that alone made the place feel more lived in.

Besides, thinking about the brave graffiti that had somehow survived the austere cleanliness of the Office, was easier than considering that somehow, for some reason, Kylo had been able to get the location of the flashdrive out of him.

A hall monitor came in, and through the open door Poe realized that he apparently merited a guard, there was another hall monitor right outside. It was nearly flattering.

“You’re wanted down at the guidance counselor's office.” the hall monitor said to Poe brusquely, and Poe realized he recognized him he was one of the ones from Mr. San Tekka’s room earlier, the African American boy with the short hair and hesitant manner. He didn’t seem hesitant in that moment though, in fact he almost seemed rushed.

Poe was too emotionally drained and too smart to fight back in their seat of power, instead he let himself be tugged out of the room by a slightly shaking, very warm, hand on his upper arm. Once they were away from Office- that was to say the administrative offices, the guidance counselor was down the hall a way, he considered trying an escape, but before he could even begin to formulate one the hall monitor pulled him around a corner and into a niche next to a trophy case.

“Look.” said the hall monitor, talking fast. “Don’t make a fuss, I’m breaking you out.”

“Of school?”

He nodded.

Poe blinked a few times. “But why me?” he asked, then it hit him. “You don’t know how to get away from them yourself, do you?”

“I do not.” he confirmed “I figured you would.”

“You could get suspended for this. I could get expelled.” Poe said flatly, his mind already racing. he could use this to get to Bebe Eight before the others.

“That’s the plan.” said the hall monitor, looking exhilarated and panicked at the same time.

“Right.” Poe said. “This way.” their stances were suddenly reversed, with Poe pulling the hall monitor along, quickly down the empty hall, into an empty classroom, through the adjoining door into a class that wasn’t supposed to be empty but was today because the choir teacher had them practicing in the auditorium. Out into another hall, down the stairs, and into the library, then out the backdoor onto the softball field.

“So, do you have a name?” Poe asked, once they were out of the library.

“Phasma called me Twenty One.” he admitted. “Otherwise, it’s Finn.”

“Phasma is a piece of work.” Poe muttered. “I’m Poe, Poe Dameron. Nice to meet you, Finn.”
Poe checked three different places for Bebe Eight, and found him at none of them. Jessika, Snap, and the others were off on a field trip, he should have realized, and he didn’t know if Eight would do to any of his other friends. He was sort of an eccentric soul on his own, he tended to gravitate towards strange people. After all, he had made friends with Poe.

Ten minutes into their endeavor Finn started getting fidgety. “Where are we going, what are we doing?” he asked.

“You’re doing great.” Poe reassured him. “I just have to grab someone before we leave.”

Finn had been exceedingly helpful so far, even if he didn’t quite know what he was doing. And the hall monitor’s sash, Poe had to admit, scattered crowds like nothing else.

“What?”

“A friend of mine.” Poe said. He considered, briefly, the notion that Finn might be a spy, then discarded it. You had to trust people sometimes. “He has information that could get Principal Snoke fired.”

“You have got to be kidding me.” Finn said. Poe stopped scanning the area for any hint of orange and turned to give Finn a reassuring smile.

“Do you trust me?”

Finn shifted, wouldn’t meet his gaze. “I don’t know?” he admitted.

Poe nodded. “I say you trust me, you trusted me enough to break me out. So trust me when I say that we really need to find my friend.”

Finn looked up, not at Poe, but it was a start. “Fine, let’s just do it quickly. We need to get away from here as fast as possible.”

Poe laid an appreciative hand on Finn’s shoulder for just a second, and turned a corner towards the science block turned the corner right into two hall monitors.

He swore. The hall monitors yelled something about stopping. Finn ran and Poe, understanding what an strategic thinker he had picked up, followed him.

“We should have left when we had the chance!” Finn panted as they slid down halls, nearly knocked over a pair of passing students, and took refuge in the library again.

As they (silently) barreled through the low aisles and ducked behind the shelves, they kept close not quite holding each other, but very nearly in contact the whole way.

It was both a blessing and a curse, when Poe tripped Finn noticed right away but wasn’t quite fast enough to catch him. The wheel of the book cart had been sticking out just far enough to make an already addled gangly teen crash to the floor, taking the cart with him. There was a loud noise, and as Finn crouched near his new friend he heard hall monitors rushing in their direction.

“Get up, get up!” he hissed. Poe was cradling his ankle and making a face.

Finn grabbed Poe by the collar and tried to drag him to his feet, but only succeeded in pulling his
jacket, loosely tied around his neck, off.

Poe looked around as the pain faded, and made a choice. “You go without me towards the back
door. I’ll go back out into the hallway and try to distract them.”

Finn shook his head in silent appeal, but Poe held firm. “I can barely walk, and we’ll make it further
on our own. I’m not going to compromise your escape. Just, if you see my friend, you’ll know him
when you see him, he’s smart as whip, you gotta help him, okay?”

“Yeah, of course. Are you sure about this?” Finn asked, a final attempt at convincing Poe to stay,
even though Finn knew better than anyone at this moment that people would do crazy things when
they were utterly convinced it was right.

“I’m sure.” Poe pulled himself up, and gingerly placed his weight on his injured leg. “Thank you for
springing me out, you’re a good guy, Finn, now go!” he ordered. Finn had been determined to never
take orders again, but he made an exception for Poe. He ran.

Poe limped away determinedly in the other direction, toward the hall monitors streaming in. Finn
realized too late he was still holding his jacket.

“Nice job with the hall monitors.” Kylo said as the last patrol reported their failure. “Incompetence
and treason, that’s a tricky combination to get.”

Phasma looked like she was about to hit him. Hux didn’t blame her. Kylo might have been strangely
competent in certain regards, and his fencing background might have made him a better fighter than
his skinny frame suggested, better than Hux, certainly, but he was still a pain in the butt.

“Maybe if you hadn’t been too busy grandstanding with Mr. San Tekka because he pushed your
buttons, we would have had what we needed in the first place.” Hux shot back, knowing Phasma
was too pragmatic to pick a fight. What that said about him, he didn’t want to consider.

“We’re going to have to tell Principal Snoke.” Kylo said, not rising to the bait for once. Maybe he
was worried Phasma would snap and do him serious bodily harm. Hux knew her well enough to
know the chances of that were slim, but she had perfected the art of looking threatening and using it.

For all their earlier arguing, they were all in agreement as they shuddered.

“I’d rather we keep looking.” Phasma opined. They broke the meeting and went their separate ways,
there was a Rebellion to crush, preferably before extra curriculars, and Hux had math class.
All These Kids Are Going To Get Themselves Arrested, This Isn't Space, We Have Police

Chapter Notes

Next chapter, things are predictable. Thanks to all the reviews and kudos, which have kept me moving.

Finn had no idea where he was. The hall patrol only extended so far, and back here in the seedy underbelly of the school, he was totally lost. The hall monitors were practically a clique, Phasma gave you protection and a purpose, she was attentive, she was even kind sometimes, but she also expected you to be totally devoted. Lunch, study hall, after school, it was all hers, and if it wasn’t hers you were supposed to be quiet and not interacting with any undesirable elements.

Apparently to such an extent that Finn hadn’t learned his way around a quarter of his own school.

Hopefully he would be safe at least, that he could catch his breath before trying to sneak of campus and... well he hadn’t gotten that far in his planning yet. He had a vague idea that everything was very messed up and he wanted to get kicked out of school because staying here any longer seemed as attractive as stabbing himself in the spine.

He’d honestly hoped the resident school good natured rebel could help him on that front, but now he was... gone. Practically dead for Finn’s purposes.

Tortured by thirst, half an hour of on and off running would do that to a person, Finn stopped by a water fountain, too tired to care that he nearly had to bend over double to use the shorter one (as far as anyone could tell their water fountains had been appropriated from an elementary school, or a daycare) because the other one was being used by a bulky football player. Once he felt like his throat was made of normal human flesh again, he looked around. He was near the gym, he could deduce that much from the smell of sweat and plastic, and the solid, sandy colored brick of the building around him.

There were only a few people around and they were all of the disreputable athlete type. No shiny lacrosse players here, these were the javelin throwers, the now defunct rowing team, the wrestlers of the school. The sad devotees of the sorts of sports that somehow never ended up very high on administration’s priority list.

Finn was suddenly very worried he might be recognized, singled out as one of the enemy, but as he made his way outside he wasn’t called out wasn’t even given a second glance. The hall monitor’s sash was as good as a mask, it seemed.

Outside the people got thinner on the ground, and the demographic shifted towards the scoundrel side of things.

In fact, no one seemed to care much that a young girl seemed about ready to get into a fist fight with three ruffians taller than her. Finn moved to help her, but realized suddenly that she had a grasp of the situation, as she pushed one of the boys to the ground.

Finn was starting to get a grasp of his surroundings, when someone tackled him to the ground. As he
hit the cement the few lingering souls disappeared like water on a hot griddle. When he rolled onto his back he found the girl standing over him. She had brown hair and steely eyes, and was wearing simple utilitarian tan.

She also looked like she was about to throttle him.

“Where did you get that jacket?” she demanded in a voice tinged with an accent, British, maybe. “My friend says you stole it.”

Finn looked to either side for a friend, but saw no one, then looked up and caught a glimpse of blurred grey and orange, and a solemn face above it.

He tried to sit up and the orange figure kicked him in the shoulder.

“Ow! I didn’t steal it, okay?”

The girl did not look convinced. “Where’d you get it then?”

Finn spun a little so he could see both of them, the terrifying girl and the figure- the kid, really- in orange. “This jacket, I got it from a guy.”

“How?” the kid asked with menace, looking like he was about to start kicking again. Finn finally put it together.

“You, you’re the friend. Look, Poe, wasn’t it? We were working together to get away, but he… he didn’t make it. I ended up with his jacket, I’m sorry.”

“He got caught?” the kid said, more disbelieving than anything. Finn nodded.

The girl made a discontented noise, and stepped back to allow Finn to get to his feet. Still, she looked curious.

“So, you’re with these malcontent dissidents I keep hearing about?” she asked. The way she said malcontent dissidents made it sound like something she was parroting. Finn chanced a look at the boy, who still seemed to be processing, and went for a lie.

“Yes, yes I am. Sort of. I’m not very involved, sort of sleeper agent. But yes, I am absolutely a rebel against authority. It’s what I love, my passion, really.”

Stunningly she seemed to buy it. Her eyes shone, even if her verbal response was more in line with a vaguely disapproving grandmother. “That’s nice.”

Finn offered a hand. “Finn, sixth grade.”

“Rey, sixth grade. That’s Bebe Eight. He’s in seventh grade, I think.”

Finn was used to ‘strange’ sounding names, in this town you couldn’t throw a stone without hitting a Sy Snootles or an Elan Sleazebaggano. He barely raised an eyebrow at Bebe Eight. He was a little surprised by his apparent age, but who was he to judge?

“So are you on this secret mission?” Rey asked.

“What?”

“Bebe Eight said he was on a mission, or something. He wouldn’t tell me the specifics.” Rey explained. Finn saw the aforementioned lad look up from his mourning to give Rey a betrayed look.
Finn out his hands in the jacket pockets, just to have something to do with them. “Poe asked me to help him.” he said carefully, hoping he wasn’t locking himself into anything. “But I have my own stuff to do, you know—”

“Guys!” Bebe Eight yelled.

They both looked up and over at where he was pointing, the door to the gym block, flat with a sort of faded green over metal look, being pushed open by several hall monitors.

Finn tried to grab Rey and drag her away, but he didn’t need to. They all ran. It sort of came naturally.

“Two weeks and the dangerous people hate me.” Rey muttered after shaking him away. Finn didn’t have the breath to ask. He was suddenly very thankful for Phasma’s insistence on regular runs.

They sprinted across the track, followed closely by two, then four hall monitors.

“This way!” Rey yelled and made a sudden swerve towards the bleachers. Bebe Eight followed her and so did Finn. Finn offered the younger boy a hand as they clambered over a few steps, then slid underneath the bleachers, disturbing a few lazing truants. Rey seemed to know where she was going, at least.

There was a chainlink fence around the back of the school, high and menacing and rumored to be electrified. The sort of fence that people built stories about. Finn only remembered them when he had a foot wedged in the links and was starting to climb up. Stress was a hell of a drug.

Rey and Bebe Eight took more time up, and Finn, at the top of the fence, tried to be helpful. As they clambered down the other side and officially left school property, Finn fell. Rey helped him up absently.

“Are we all good?” Finn asked, trying to displace his own concerns over everything by being considerate to others.

Rey nodded. “Bebe Eight?”

“Fine.”

Finn swallowed what felt like spit and sand. “Right, so what do we do now?”

“Hide.” Rey answered.

It wasn’t exactly a full and through mission statement, but it would work. They kept running.

“Do they usually come off campus?” Rey asked. The hall monitors had pursued them. Finn wasn’t very surprised.

“If they have permission, yeah.” he answered. “We’re around fifth period now too. Seventh grade study hall.”

“That means something?” Rey said.

Bebe Eight bobbed his head. “We have a lot of seventh graders in this school, so a lot of seventh
“Did you just move here or something?” Finn asked. She seemed to know her way around, but also seemed to know nearly nothing about how things worked at Palpatine Memorial.

“Or something.” Rey said, cutting off the conversation as efficiently as if she had taken a knife to it.

They were still close to the school, but Finn didn’t know how far away they could get without being stopped. They were clearly children and children sprinting around town during school hours as if a monster was chasing them, that tended to raise eyebrows.

“We need to find somewhere to hide, or some way to stop running.” he said in between deep breaths.

Rey slowed down a little so she could say, “I can hijack a car?”

“Are you serious?”

“Less talking, more moving!” Bebe Eight yelled.

Rey grabbed Finn’s hand and Finn instinctively grabbed Bebe’s and together they swerved into a small parking lot. “We’re seriously doing this.” Finn said with a sigh.

“We’re not going to drive off, just hide for a bit.” Rey said defensively. “The red one looks good.”

“The red one won’t fit all of us. What about the van?”

Rey scoffed. “That van is garbage. I’m not even sure it could drive.”

“Perfect for us, then.”

She opened her mouth to reply, but a youthful monitor-ish yell from nearby made her think twice. “Fine, the van will work.” she said grudgingly.

Breaking into a car was easier than it looked, though Finn thought that the fact that the car in question was from the seventies at best probably helped. As Rey jimmyed the car door open and Bebe Eight helped, Finn got to be the watch. He knew how the hall monitors moved and called out a warning when he saw the signs of the search (slowed down so as not to alarm pedestrians) moving in their direction.

They all squeezed into the backseat and curled away from sight just as the monitors arrived in the parking lot.

Bebe Eight barely seemed to be breathing, Finn noticed, and he struggled to emulate him.

Finally the danger seemed to be past and they unfolded themselves and finally looked around the garbage vehicle. It was old and strange smelling. The back seats were folded down and the trunk was half full of oddly shaped duffle bags.

In an effort to stay away from the windows in the front they silently moved to the trunk, settling in among the duffles. Finn hoped there wasn’t anything majorly illegal in them.

“This old thing has been parked for a while.” Rey said, offering no explanation for how she came to her conclusion. “We can probably afford to stay for a little while.”

“You did a really good job with the car.” Finn said, adrenaline like pop rocks in his chest.
“It was your pick.” Rey said, similarly giddy. “And good job keeping watch, I never would have seen them so fast.”

“You’re really the one who got us away.” Finn countered. Next to them Bebe Eight rolled his eyes and settled down even further into the nearest duffle bag, like he was planning on taking a nap.

Rey and Finn’s smiles faded as the endorphins did, but he found he couldn’t look away from her sharp eyes, the stony solidity of her face. She looked like she was carved out of granite, and it was strangely appealing.

“You are new here, aren’t you?” Finn asked. She looked reluctant to answer and he quickly amended himself, “You don’t have to tell me if you don’t want to.”

“No, no. It’s fine. I moved her a few weeks ago to live with my aunt.” Awkwardly, as if remembering some half taught rules of conversations, she added, “What about you?”

“I’ve lived in this county most of my life. This town since I was six.” Finn said, choosing to leave out the dead parents and drifting between foster home and foster home for as long as he could remember.

Rey folded her legs underneath her until she was sitting crisscross like a kindergartner. “Really, for so long?”

“Where did you live?” he asked, feeling a little uneven, like nothing he said was right.

She pushed a strand of hair out of her face, shoved it back into the rest, pulled back into a messy set of buns that marched down the back of her head like a line of ducklings. “When I was little I traveled around a lot with my dad. England when I was little, Italy for a while, all over the place. After that, after him, I was living in Arizona.”

“Was it hot?”

“You have no idea.” Rey said with a little laugh. Even in the dim trunk of a strange van she seemed to brighten the space around her. “Sand too, we were basically out in the desert.”

Finn shoved his hands in pockets of the jacket, Poe’s jacket. The soft leather was comforting and warm, and it smelled like the cedar wood chips in the wardrobe in one of his old foster homes. “Your dad sound nice.”

The air seemed to grow colder and Rey pulled her knees up to her chest. “He was.”

“Oh, oh, I’m sorry. My parents died when I was, like, two. I’m sorry.”

“He’s not dead.” she muttered. “And it’s not your fault.” Rey sucked in a deep breath through her nose and Finn worried she was about to start sniffling. Instead she looked at him and stayed composed as she said, “I’m sorry about your parents though. That sounds… hard. To deal with.”

“Thanks. I’ve managed, you know. Social services is hard.” Finn tried to look upbeat. “Nine homes in ten years. I’m not breaking any records, but not too shabby.”

Rey considered this. “Three in six.” she said finally. “You have me beat.”

“No way!” It technically made sense, what Rey had said suggested her father had been gone before she had ended up with her aunt. But Finn had assumed, she seemed like the sort of person who would have relatives falling over themselves to take care of her. Of course he thought the same thing
about lots of people who were in the system. Sometimes life wasn’t fair.

She giggled low in her throat. “Yes way! They were all pretty quiet. Boring. Not nice, a little awful, but very boring.”

“Lots of big families that practically foster professionally on my end.” Finn admitted. “No horror stories, they were just more suited for short term placements. The sort of place where no one bothers to learn your name.”

“One old lady just called me girl.” Rey admitted. “She was kind of losing it though. She wasn’t too bad, but she’d been in the game for a while.”

“I convinced one of the other foster kids my name was short for Finnegan once. Six months he thought that was my name.” Finn said, a little guilty. “It was mean.”

Rey looked like she was about to shriek, and was only barely restraining herself. “It was perfect.” she assured him in a voice fraught with the effort of staying quiet.

Finn felt his face grow hot. “It was kind of cool. Can I ask, why are you living with your aunt now?”

“She finally tracked me down, or that’s what she says.” Rey said. She looked uncomfortable, her eyes downcast and her jaw set, but she kept talking. “Apparently she’d been looking for me for years.”

Finn tried to imagine that, having someone looking for you. “Is it nice?” he whispered, like they were talking about state secrets or world ending truths, not something as simple as family.

Rey shrugged. “I guess. It’s nicer than anywhere I’ve been before. But my aunt is really busy, and sometimes I feel like I upset her. She tries to be nice, but it’s still all weird. My cousin is awful, but he mostly leaves me alone. First day of school he made it very clear that we would be better off staying away from one another. And I’ve barely seen my uncle, apparently he travels a lot.” she paused, fidgeted and then said carefully. “It’s not bad. It’s just a lot more complicated than I imagined. And it’s kind of scary.”

Bebe Eight, until then content to stay quiet, leaned over and gently nudged Rey in the arm with his head.

She jumped and drew back a little on herself. “We need to get you where you need to go, don’t we?” she said softly. “Finn, you said you could help?”

It felt like the car suddenly got ten degrees hotter. Bebe, still leaning into Rey, was giving him an almost smug look, damn kid, but Rey only looked expectant.

“Right, yeah.” Finn cleared his throat. “Well, I don’t know everything. Bebe Eight could probably explain it better than I could. Right, Bebe?”

“No.” he said innocently. “You can do it, Finn. You are such a big shot in our little revolution, after all.” The game was clearly up, but Finn knew that didn’t mean you had to show your hand to everyone.

“You know what, I just don’t think I’m qualified.” Finn lied hoped he would play along. “You’re smarter than me, Bebe, you tell her.”

Bebe Eight seemed to mull over the bribe of a compliment for a while. Finn mouthed ‘Please’.
Bebe Eight took pity on him. “I need to get it to Jessika Pava and Snap Wexley, or I can just give it to the General. But I don’t know where she lives.”

“And this Jessika and Snap?” Rey asked “What about them?”

“Field trip for eighth grade Spanish. Poe and I should have known better.” Bebe said, almost disgusted. “If I had a phone we could call them in an hour when school gets out, but you guys know the rules.”

No phones on campus, it had caused quite a stir and even some protests from the mostly cowed mothers and fathers of the PTA, but Snoke had been firm. It had never really affected Finn until now.

“Okay.” Finn said. “We hide out until school is out and then we find a phone. Sound good?”

“I have to get home.” Rey said.

Confusion settled over Finn like fog. “Why, I thought you said they were nice.”

“No, my aunt is nice, too nice. I just, I have to be there. They might get news.”

“News of what?” Finn asked, or started too. Somewhere around what he found a small cool hand covering his mouth. Bebe Eight nodded to the wall of the van, his eyes wide.

“Home then, Chewie?” said the voice.

Another, more indistinct one must have answered, because the first voice continued. “Yeah, I know. Come on.”

Rey gestured to the very back of the van, as close to the trunk door as possible, and the three of them tried to slither there.

There were footsteps outside the van, all around the van, it sounded like.

Han Solo opened the double doors to the back of the van and pursed his lips as Rey nearly tumbled out.

“Chewie!” he yelled. “We’ve got stowaways! Again.”
Hux Is Like Thirteen, Everyone Needs To Cut Him A Break And Maybe Get Him Some Therapy

Chapter Notes

I got a little distracted, but I wanted to get a chapter up. A bit on the short side, I have a lot of exposition to get through. Thank you for reading!

You needed goddamn night vision or something to have a meeting with Principal Snoke. Hux thought. Maybe that was why Kylo wore those stupid face concealing sunglasses whenever he could get away with it. It was training.

Hux only ever wore designer sunglasses, and those rarely. He didn’t like them that much, and besides, his skin necessitated staying out of the sun in the first place.

He wasn’t sure how Kylo had gotten out of this meeting, or why, for that matter. He usually loved showing off for Snoke. But Phasma was running their search and Kylo had a history report to make to Mr. Tagge because he desperately needed extra credit, leaving Hux to talk to Snoke alone.

Mrs. Smith the secretary waved him in with a smile and Hux stepped into the principal’s office and arguably left the realm of mortal men.

The desk was tall and behind it Snoke was even taller, a menacing bald man with a scarred face. No one knew where he had gotten the scars, and few people knew where he came from. He had risen after the old little mourned, Mayor Palpatine had died, some twenty years past.

Not only was the figure into front of him menacing, the room was impossibly dim. In his high backed, throne like chair, Snoke was little more than the outline of an elliptical head and the sense of a skinny body swathed in a dark suit.

Hux folded his hands behind his back and hoped his hair was in place and his polo shirt was clean, Snoke at least seemed to be able to see in his cave, and sometimes military discipline came in handy.

“Sir.”

“Hux, how is the Student Council?”

“Good, good. Datoo is planning the Spring Social, he says it’s going very well.”

“And the other… issue?”

Hux felt his palms itch, pressed his nails into the flesh of his hands to stop himself from making any rash movements. “So far we’ve been unsuccessful, sir.”

“I hope you understand, young man, that if that flash drive gets out it could upset everything we’ve worked for. The whole school, thrown into chaos. You don’t want that, do you?”

Hux shook his head sharply. “No, sir.”

There was a crash from outside the room, but not too far away. Hux felt a sting in his hands as his
nails pierced the skin, and he grimaced. Still, it kept him from starting for the door, that would have been bad form.

He thought Snoke smiled. “You’d better go attend to that. Remember, we need that flash drive.”

“Sir.” Hux said, before leaving the room at a respectable pace. His heart settled down as he exited.

It didn’t take long for him to find the source of the disturbance. They had put back together the student council/conference room after using it to hold Dameron. There was the usual coffee maker, and an assortment of donuts because Mr. Isard had a sweet tooth that couldn’t be contained by the regimented teacher breakroom. Both were on the floor. In addition the table was overturned and most of the chairs were on their sides. Kylo stood in the middle of the chaos looking slightly confused but mostly angry.

In addition Student Council Secretary and volunteer in this great search for the missing flash drive, Dopheld Mitaka was sitting in the floor looking worse for wear. Hux sighed.

“Mitaka, unless you’re actually dying, get up. Ren, clean everything up, please.”

Hux pulled his lieutenant up and escorted him out of the wrecked rec room, closing the door behind him.

“What happened?” he inquired.

Mitaka looked a little shaken, so Hux allowed him a few minutes to get a hold of himself and brush donut crumbs off his jeans before he spoke. “I came to talk to you, about the search. You weren’t here, but Kylo had just come in, and he said I could talk to him, and he kind of freaked out. Things just started flying around the room.”

“What did you say?”

“That the boy escaped from school property.” Mitaka said, flinching a little as if Hux was about to start throwing around folding chairs as well. “With two accomplices.”

“What accomplices?”

“Finn, you know, the hall monitor. And a girl. Sixth grade, new transfer.” Hux was privy to a little more of Kylo’s family drama than the rest of the school, and he started to get a picture of what was going on.

“Right. Keep up the search. keep as many people after school as are willing to stay. We’ll be bringing in more drastic measures as well. Just… don’t hurt anyone.”

Mitaka was a cautious soul, too gentle for the cruel world of middle school. He gave Hux a puzzled look and said gingerly, “Hux, they’re not even teenagers. They weren’t going to get hurt in the first place.”

Hux patted Mitaka’s shoulder once and pushed him on his way. Then he opened the door. Kylo had enough sense to tidy up a little after himself, even Snoke didn’t give him that much leeway. The table was upright again and the chairs were mostly in their places. The donut crumbs and spilled coffee were still going to give the janitor trouble, but if there wasn’t mess and drama it just wouldn’t be Kylo.

They were both saved from awkward chit chat by Mrs Smith, the relentless, ever cheerful, secretary, who had wandered over to tell them that Principal Snoke wanted to see them both now.
Kylo straightened up to his full height, too tall for his age, and held the door open for Hux, probably to be annoying, though exactly how, Hux hadn’t figured out yet.

Back into the office. Snoke looked like he hadn’t moved an inch. Nonetheless he demonstrated a stunning grasp of current events, vis a vis the missing flash drive and its equally missing carrier.

He mostly seemed to be talking to Kylo, so Hux kept quiet and listened, still, he couldn’t help but react when Snoke revealed he knew where the fugitives were already.

“With your father, Han Solo.” Snoke had said. Hux had worked with Ben “Likes to be called Kylo” Organa for a year and a half, and had known him for many more. He knew, automatically, that there were going to be a lot of overturned tables in the immediate future.

Snoke continued, oblivious to the torment he had just triggered in Kylo’s tortured soul and, by extension, the chaos he had just caused.

“Hux, we need a back up plan. Get project Starkiller running.”

Kylo shuddered. “I’m sure we can handle it.” he said.

“Even if you can. I want Starkiller up.” Snoke said, and that was that. Hux felt stunned. Sure, it was his pet project, but it was rather extreme. And illegal. But to see it in action, that would be amazing. He was thrilled and Kylo was sulking as they left Snoke to his darkness.

“Which one of you broke into my car?” the man asked. Rey raised her hand before Finn could even consider taking the blame. Fortunately the man didn’t look particularly upset, considering that they had broken into his car.

The large hairy man, he honestly looked like a viking or something, came back from the front of the van and said something. Finn wasn’t sure what. There were words but they weren’t making any real words Finn knew of. It sounded more like moaning than talking.

“I told you there wasn’t anyone else.” Rey snapped. “It’s just us.”

“You can understand him?” Finn asked, amazed.

The first man, the one who spoke English, scoffed. “Yeah, and he can understand you, so watch your mouth, kid. Now, explain again why you’re in my car?”

“We were running away…..” Rey said suddenly, her eyes intent on the man’s face. She almost looked puzzled by it, like there was something she was trying to remember or figure out. “We needed a place to hide.” she said vaguely.

“You car was closest.” Finn elaborated, trying to ignore Rey’s strange reaction to getting busted and interrogated by an irate middle aged automobile owner. “We weren’t going to do anything to it honest, just leave once it was safe.” He knew Rey, smaller, probably younger, and most importantly, white, had a better chance of getting them out unscathed, that was the awful way things usually worked, but she didn’t quite seem to be in the same solar system as them at the moment so Finn had to step up.

Sure enough, he looked unimpressed with their explanation. “What were you hiding from?”
“Jerks at our school.” Finn summarized for the benefit of their tough crowd. Bebe Eight, who was hiding behind Rey and peering distrustfully over her head at the world, made a face that suggested he disapproved of the choice of phrasing. Finn was quickly figuring out that the little kid could make your life difficult if he didn’t like what you were doing, so he added, “Hall monitors really.”

“Yikes. What did you do that merited breaking into the Millennium Falcon to get away?”

Finn’s brain ground to a halt. He was aware of Rey stammering the beginnings of an explanation next to him, but all he could think, and exclaim was, “Wait, you’re Han Solo?”

“I was.” the man, Han kriffing Solo, grudgingly admitted.

“Han Solo?” Rey asked. “The smuggler I keep hearing about?”

“That was a long time ago.” Han said.

“But you’re Han Solo. The Han Solo. Luke Skywalker and the fall of Mayor Palpatine, Han Solo.”

Rey’s just-walked-into-a-telephone-pole expression grew even more baffled. “Did you just say Luke Skywalker?”

Finn nodded. “He’s kind of a local hero. There was some sort of adoption fraud drama, some anti police protests, also he may have killed our despotic old mayor, it’s kind of complicated. He disappeared years ago, but everyone knows him, right?”

“Of course I know Luke Skywalker.” Rey said, befuddled. “He’s my-”

“Back to the point.” Han honest to god Solo interjected. “My van. Why are you in it?”

Bebe Eight stood up and rested his arms on Rey’s head, until she pointedly removed them. “I have information to get to the General.” he said in his high, crisp voice. “Regarding the illegal activities of Principal Snoke. We need to get it to her as soon as possible.”

“And I need to get home.” Rey added, still sounding a little dazed.

Han Solo sucked in a sharp breath through his teeth. “I know someone who can get you all where you need to go. And I can take you to her.”

“Fine.” Bebe Eight said, making the decision before anyone else could. It helped that Rey still seemed to be trying to unravel the Gordian knot in her head, and Finn was more than a little star struck.

“Little Miss Carjacker, mind coming up here and helping me? The Falcon is a delicate piece of machinery and whatever you did to disable the car alarm did not make her happy.”

Rey nodded and slid out of the trunk, following Solo over to the front of the car.

The brown haired, generously bearded, unintelligible Viking man, began gently herding Bebe Eight and Finn around the other side of the car, towards the middle row of seating. In the front of the car he could see Han and Rey bent over the filthy, confusing, questionably legal innards of the car talking quietly. It had been in a word, a day. And it wasn’t even three in the afternoon yet.
I Wanted Maz Kanata To Just Be Lupita N'yongo, But Sadly Logic Prevailed
So She's Tiny And Old, Still Awesome

Chapter Notes

Computer trouble has slowed me down some, but rest assured, those of you who care,
I'm still going. And for those of you who really do care, I see and I appreciate in the
least creepy way possible. Thanks for your support!

“Uncle Han?” Rey dared to ask, once they were out of earshot of the others.

Han Organa’s face fell. “You’re Luke’s girl then. I was afraid of that. Hi, Rey.”

“Why are you here, I thought you were flying? Why are they calling you Han Solo?”

Rey hadn’t seen much of her uncle in the fortnight since she had been pulled out of her safe normal
world of deserts and waiting, and into a new and confusing one of politics and angry families and
waiting. He was a pilot, she knew that much. And he had been there when her Aunt Leia had picked
her up at the airport, standing awkwardly to the side, and he had slipped into the house in the middle
night a few times, always gone by morning. And she knew her cousin hated him for some reason,
which hadn’t exactly given her faith in his parenting. No child should hate their parent and no parent
should disappear.

“I thought Chewie and I should swing by home, pick up some fresh clothes. So, you and your
friends.”

“They’re nice.” Rey said defensively, remembering how Finn had asked her if she was okay, mere
minutes after meeting her. No one had been that kind that quickly before, with no regard for personal
grudges or blood. “And brave.”

“And their epic quest?”

Rey wavered. “I think it’s important. But I need to get home, not go meet this General of theirs.”

Strangely, Uncle Han laughed. “If you’re really that opposed to seeing her. Tell you what, we’ll get
your friends where they need to go, and I’ll drive you back to the house.” He hesitated, and his
knowing smirk fell away as he asked. “Is there any news about your dad yet?”

“No.” Rey said, trying to keep her voice as stiff as a starched collar. “Aunt Leia says she’s still
looking.”

Han looked back down at the hood of the van. “I’m sure they’ll find something.” he said clumsily,
fiddling with some wiring that sparked in an ominous way.

Rey reached over and removed it from his hands, quickly twisting them back in place. “Your coolant
system is terrible.” she informed him.

“Works.”

Rey looked skeptical. “I think it’s illegal.”
Han scowled. “You’re like twelve, what do you know about cars?” He tapped a section of coiled tubing, and looked alarmed when the car made a wheezing noise.

“Half your radiator is broken, I think.” Rey added as she rummaged around more.

“I’ve been getting around to fixing it.”

“Here, I can-”

“Stop that-”

“Look, it’ll work better-”

“Don’t you break my car!”

“Aha!” Rey grinned and gestured to the slightly altered and very much cleaned up engine. There was only so much she could do on short notice while there was still gas in it, but it looked, in her opinion, slightly less likely to catch on fire at any given moment.

“Huh.” Han said grudgingly. “Let’s see if it runs.”

It did run, more or less, and Rey looked triumphant and grease covered as she slid into the shotgun seat and gave Finn and Bebe Eight, crammed into the back with Chewbacca, a thumbs up.

Finn hadn’t expected local semi-celebrity Han Solo to be quite so old. Angry, that was pretty much to be expected, but the cramped car, the furry copilot, and the sense of faded swagger, that was a bit of a disappointment.

Rey seemed to be having fun, at least. She had a rip in her shoulder, which had her sleeve half falling off, and she was covered in grime, but she also looked more at ease with machine talk than anything else Finn had ever seen her do.

The backseat was much less thrilling. Chewbacca was genuinely terrifying and Bebe Eight was wedged into Finn’s side.

“Where are we going?” Finn asked over the roar of the engine as they bumped down the street.

“A friend’s.” Han Solo answered, unhelpfully, then swore. “Kids, in the back, unfriendly presence coming up ahead.” Rey scrambled over the center console into the trunk without asking questions, and Finn followed her, but not before looking at what was up ahead. It didn’t look like school authority, or even the police, just a group of men in rough clothing, looking threatening.

A few minutes, a lot of jolting later, they heard, “Alright, think we’ve lost them. That could have slowed us down quite a bit, getting involved with Leech and Bala-Tik.”

“Why do so many people hate you?” Finn asked, idly.

“I’m above board now, mostly, but I have a history in this town. People don’t forget easily in these parts.”
“How are you allowed to fly?” said Rey.

Han made a noise in the back of his throat that made Finn suspect he was pulling a face. “Questions, questions, questions. Why don’t you just sit tight and let me drive?”

Rey’s face fell, and to Finn’s surprise, Solo started talking. “No arrests when I was an adult, except the one, but that was illegitimate because of gang activity. Town was kind of a mess back in the day, with Jabba and everyone.”

They pulled into a greener area of town, near the state park, and more than a little off the beaten track. Finn heard Rey’s breath catch in her throat.

“There are so many trees.” she said, wonder in her eyes. Finn had never thought of trees as awe inspiring before, but around Rey they looked much more impressive. She seemed to make the world around her a little brighter.

They tumbled out of the Millennium Falcon, and Rey wandered over to the biggest tree in the vicinity and tilted her head up to look up at the winter stripped branches which that still looked positively verdant compared to what Finn knew of deserts. She had the sort of smile that dimpled and shone.

Han Solo placed a stern hand on Finn’s shoulder. “Look, kid,” he said, almost kindly. “I’ve been around the block. I’d suggest you tell the truth. Women always figure out.” He handed Finn a container of pepper spray without another word.

After that reassuring platitude Han went to stand by Rey, talking to her quietly again. They really seemed to have bonded.

Chewie said something in his low voice, and Bebe Eight tugged on Finn’s sleeve until he looked down at him.

“He says we should head over to the bar.” Bebe Eight said. “He’s going to make sure the car doesn’t catch on fire.”

“Can everyone understand him but me?”

There was more guttural talking.

“He says, yes, mostly.”

Finn gritted his teeth. The pepper spray in his pocket was almost comforting. Phasma had led regular self defense classes, and he knew how to take care of himself, especially with a weapon. He mind slipped, without his permission, to his classmates, his friends, who had learned with him. He tried to brush the thoughts aside. He’d made his choice. He’d had enough of Palpatine Memorial, and he needed to get away. Whatever it took.

“Here.” Uncle Han said, as he handed Rey the pepper spray. She tried to give it back and he backed away.

“I can take care of myself.” Rey informed him. She’d done it for six years.
“I know you can, that’s why I want you to have this. It’s useful, and I don’t have time to be babysitting in there.”

Rey’s fingers curled around the little cylinder and she remembered her walking stick, the one that her father had left her, nearly five feet of oak. She wasn’t allowed to take it to school most places, but it had served her well as a wandering child in less than welcoming locales.

She looked back at Finn, whose dark intelligent eyes were taking in everything, the wildlife, but mostly the building they were aimed at, grandiose and elegant in the way a collapsed castle is. And stone, built to last. It didn’t look like a sight for social gatherings that didn’t involve towering wigs or ominous dark cloaks.

Han cleared his throat. “I was thinking, maybe once we get things sorted out, I could show you around the Falcon? You seemed to have a good head on your shoulders when it came to mechanics.”

“Are you- are you offering me a job?”

“More of a few lessons, since you’re not “legally employable”. Do you know anything about planes?”

Rey gawped. “A little, and I could learn.” Electronics had always come easily to her, and being able to fix things meant being able to take care of yourself, meant power to change what was around you, meant another way to sidle into foster families and make yourself useful. And it was restful, the sort of thing that didn’t get you into too much trouble. “Are you really going to let me help you?”

Han shook a finger at her, “I said I was thinking about it, alright. Now let’s go, we’re burning time.”

Rey kept close to Finn’s solid frame and Bebe Eight’s comfortingly bouncy stride as they entered. Inside the first wall it was less dignified. There was a statue of a short woman, graffiti as deliberate as murals on the walls, showing symbols and names Rey didn’t understand. The pageantry of it was off putting, but when they entered the building itself, it looked more or less like a biker bar.

It was seedy and disreputable and there were hulking figures in half the chairs and questionable drinks on the tables. The sort of place that made her put a comforting hand in the general vicinity of Bebe Eight’s back, even though he seemed mostly unfazed by the criminality on display.

“Han Solo!” A crystal clear voice echoed over the tables and woman came up to them. She also came up to Rey’s chest. She was beautiful, in an aged sort of way, impossibly small with dark skin accentuated by wrinkles which seemed to have built up like sediment on her skin. Her face was delicate, and her eyes, accentuated by thick round glasses, seemed to see into your very soul.

She looked like a grandmother who ran whisky smuggling operations under the table during the Prohibition. Her loose tunic, bangles, and head piece completed the look.

“Maz.” Han nodded in acknowledgement. The eyes of the room were on the group, and none of them were comfortable with it. Rey and Finn moved closer together, pushing Bebe Eight behind them.

“You’ve brought guests too,” Their host continued, sounding musical and subtly threatening in an entirely unidentifiable way. She put her hands on her hips. “But one face is missing. Han, where is my boyfriend?”

“Chewie stayed outside, the car is broken.”

“Such a shame. I like that man. You know what they say about beards.” Finn looked alarmed. Rey
was mostly confused. Maz Kanata clucked and turned her piercing gaze on them. “Now, young friends, let’s sit and talk.”

Starkiller was a triumph of a weapon, if weapon was even a word that applied to it. It destroyed so utterly, so thoroughly, it really transcended the word.

Not bad for a computer virus.

The new township government was sloppy. They had no fear of attacks. Not since the Death Star arson cases of the late eighties had the town’s infrastructure been in danger.

Hux personally thought the indulgences of the past, the Alderaan court house fire and the Endor forest threats, were a little petty. Why act if you weren’t going to go all the way? With modern technology, he could bring the Hosnian System, which regulated everything from court records to the local DMV, crashing down. They wouldn’t know what hit them.

If it worked, that was. It would work, it had to. He’d been working on it forever, or at least since the sixth grade.

Hux left the final prepping of things to Datoo, and left the computer lab for a bit of a breather. School had left out less than half an hour ago, and the hallways weren’t silent by any stretch, stragglers, detainees, and the many people with after school activities flitted on the edge of Hux’s vision, though they knew better than to get in his way.

He stopped at the end of a hall very familiar to him, lined with blue lockers and populated by a single dark clad figure. Kylo, kneeling in front of his locker, didn’t notice Hux’s approach. He was muttering lowly to something in it’s metal depths, hidden from the world but not from Hux, who had seen the macabre display before.

Scrap of a suit, an urn of ashes, and the melted remnants of a mask once used by feared county sheriff Darth Vader, whose burn scars and subsequent quirks were well known.

Hix turned on his heel to go, not wanting to interrupt a friend’s (or at the least an acquaintance’s) weird commune with his dead despotic grampa.

As he left, he heard Kylo’s voice low and pleading, “Please, give me your strength and together we’ll finish what you started.”

Weirdo.
Rey and Finn had both been given lemonades. Bebe Eight had a chocolate milk. Han had politely declined any drinks, though he was giving the bright green concoction Maz Kanata had on the table in front of her longing looks.

The petite woman smiled. “That is quite the gem you have on your hands, isn’t it?”

Han folded his arms. “Look, can you get it to the right people, Maz?”

“One right person in particular?” she asked impishly.

“No! Not her. Can you help get it to Mon Mothma, or whoever replaced her as mayor? Verlaine, you can take it to Verlaine.”

“Hmm. No. You’ve been running from this fight for too long Han, go home!”

“Look, she doesn’t want to, it would be better if we just…” Han Solo looked genuinely flabbergasted, glancing frantically between Maz and Rey, so Finn jumped in.

“Please, we need your help.” he said.

Rey’s brow furrowed. “What fight are you running from?”

Maz smiled sadly. “The only fight, child, between people who would misuse their power to bring darkness to the world, and those who champion the light. I have seen that darkness take many forms over the years, and today it is a man who would attack the most vulnerable. We must all stand and fight against him. All of us.” she squinted at Han meaningfully.

“We can’t fight!” Finn exclaimed, “Run, maybe, win, eh, it’s iffy. But we can’t fight. People have been trying to take him down for years, he’s untouchable. And his goons, they’re scary, actually scary. Look around, we’ve probably been recognized already! There’s nothing we can do but keep moving.” Finn had more to say, but he stopped as he saw Maz pull out a magnifying glass from her shawl.

“What are you doing?” he asked.

Maz stood on her chair and leaned over the table into Finn’s face. He leaned back. “Han, what is she doing?”

Solo shrugged.

“You know, if you live as long as I have you start to see patterns in people. The same eyes show up in different faces. I’m looking at the eyes of a young man who wants to run.”
“You have no idea who I am.” Finn said low and angry. “Snoke is ruthless, and worse, he’s cruel. We need to go.”

Maz sat back down. “You see that man over there?” she pointed. “He owes me a favor and owns a taxi. He’ll take you wherever you want to go. Out of here, out of town, it doesn’t matter. If you want to go, go.”

Finn looked at him. He looked just as rough around the edges as the other bar patrons, but Finn was inclined to trust Maz’s word. He kept looking.

“Finn, you can’t be considering it.” Rey said.

His face set with determination. “Come with me.”

“We can’t, we promised we’d get Bebe Eight where he needs to go, to your people.”

Finn’s shoulders hunched. “No, I can’t.” He stood and offered the pepper spray back to Han. who shook his head to indicate that Finn could keep it.

Rey followed in hot pursuit as Finn headed towards the taxi driver of freedom, and, after a final gulp of his chocolate milk and a cool glance around the table, Bebe Eight tagged after them.

Maz reached a thin arm over the table and poked Han in the chest. “Now, you’re going to tell me the full story. Who’s the girl?”

“What are you doing!” Rey demanded, grabbing Finn’s arm, then quickly releasing it. Finn spun, and the Rey stepped away from the curious looking driver, looking expectant.

“Don’t leave without me?” Finn asked, before following her. Guilt and firm resolve warred on his visage.

“You can’t leave.” Rey said. “Your friends, your mission.

Finn’s chin dimpled with shame. “Rey, it’s not my mission.”

“What?”

“I lied. I’m not with their resistance. I was a hall monitor.” he tried to compose himself, so his words came out like marching soldiers rather than track runners. “Like all of them, I don’t have a lot going for me. Phasma got me during sixth grade summer orientation. I never had a chance. But I realized what was happening, how wrong it was. And I made a choice, I ran. I found you, Rey, and you’re one of the best people I’ve ever met. But I can’t go back. I’m going to get out, run away, probably get moved to a new home out of town. You could come with me, we could stick together.” he offered, without much optimism. He had known her long enough to know she wasn’t moving.

“Please, stay.” Rey pleaded.

Finn shook his head. “Look after yourself, Rey.” he said. “You too, Bebe Eight.”

Bebe Eight, hovering quietly behind Rey, made a rude gesture. Rey herself was too shell shocked to
do much but slump against the wall as Finn left with his new crew.

“Are you okay?” Bebe asked.

“Yeah, I mean, I didn’t even get to tell him about Han.” Rey said confused and more than a little hurt. She was startled out of her stupor by screaming coming from the other side of the room, the far end of the bar. She looked around frantically, but no one else seemed to notice it. Rey got to her feet in a daze, and stumbled towards the noise, a baffled Bebe Eight taking her hand, as if worried she’d fall.

As they walked they missed Finn, standing in the doorway, giving them a last look.

They snuck past Han and Maz, and towards the back of the room. There was a small hallway covered with a curtain, and then a broad low stairway down into an uncertain fate. Bebe Eight wasn’t good at stairs, and Rey was on her feet again, so their positions switched, with her supporting him. She could handle touching when it meant not taking a head first dive down a staircase.

The screaming had grown more distinct, it was a desperate wailing, too high pitched to come from most grown ups and vaguely muffled, as if it was being heard through a door. Rey had heard children screaming before, she knew what it sounded like. She had thought Maz was at least semi trustworthy, but that was how it went when you trusted people.

She moved as lightly as she could, and held her pepper spray tightly in her hand.

The room at the end of the hall was shut, but the door wasn’t locked. Bebe Eight took up a position to the side as Rey painstakingly cracked it open.

There was nothing inside but boxes.

She gestured for Bebe to stay put, and took a few cautious steps inside, looked around, and saw no cause for the noise which was clearly coming from inside the room. To one side of the room, in fact. Caution forgotten, Rey approached the stack of dusty antiquities inside, and found herself gravitating to a long thin box. It looked plain, but sturdy, and it opened easily at her touch. Inside was a sword.

It was long, and didn’t look particularly old, more than a decade, but not historical. Rey thought it looked like something ceremonial, but the edge was sharp. A functional thing, sturdy and versatile and gorgeous, and she reached for it, not noticing that the screaming had stopped.

As she touched the weapon it began again, louder and shriller, until it faded into a vague sort of background hum. Rey felt her stomach drop. The feel of the hilt in her hands, the smell of dust and old leather it reminded her of dark rooms and fire and the childlike fear that can’t be fought, only hidden from. It reminded her of one of her father’s friends, leaving her alone outside of the police station one dusty summer day. She had cried for him to come back, to stay with her, her dad had left her with him and promised to come back, and he was leaving her too. She should have chased him, should have fought, but she had been so shocked all she could do was cry.

She could remember it so clearly, so painfully, achingly clearly, her tank top and messily pulled up hair, the man’s fear and hasty retreat. The feeling of tears tracing their way down small cheeks.
She dropped the sword.

“Rey!” came the warning call from outside.

Rey spun and saw Maz Kanata standing outside, Han hovering awkwardly behind her. “I thought it would call to you.” the old woman said, sounding strangely satisfied.

“What was that?” Rey asked, breathless and dizzy. She felt like someone had just turned her upside down and shaken her.

Maz’s eyes widened even more, threatening the laws of facial construction. “You saw something?” she asked.

“No, I mean, not really. It was just, terrible. Awful. What was it?”

“Your birthright. That sword was once your grandfather’s, and then your father’s after him.” Maz smiled. “I acquired it at great cost. Now it has called to you.”

“That’s insane.” Rey said. “Why would we have an ancestral thirty inch sword? And why would you think I would want it?”

Han coughed something that sounded a lot like, “Skywalkers”, but despite the customary insouciant attitude, he did seem concerned. Maz was rather more triumphant.

“It called to you, and you found it. Didn’t you see?”

Stress and a day’s of pent up anger welled up in Rey like a slightly hysterical geyser. “I didn’t see anything!” she declared. “And I never want to touch that thing again. I want- I’m going after Finn. I’ll meet up with you back her, Uncle Han.” she added, before she brushed past Maz and sprinted up the stairs, picking up Bebe Eight like a storm catches a dust mote as she passed.

Maz Kanata tsked. “Skywalkers. Very highly strung, and too sensitive for their own good.” She picked up the knife, sheathed it, and tucked it into her belt. “It will work out, just you wait.”

Han didn’t reply but his facial expressions suggested he was considering a range of responses. Sadly there was no good go to reaction to borderline supernatural creepiness, and he knew that as well as anyone.

Starkiller was a thousand moving parts, a dozen brilliant algorithms, and the finest the computer and engineering clubs had been able to put together. But mostly it was a virtual knockout punch of force, destruction at it’s finest. It was solar powered, for Christ’s sake, it took up so much energy Snoke, not an environmentalist by any standard, had approved solar panels on the roof to help keep things in the school stable.

Without getting into technicalities, it’s safe to say that smashed through the municipal computer systems like a blunderbuss worth of grapeshot, old fashioned firewalls like tissue paper before it. The town government was brought to it’s knees within minutes. It wrecked havoc with everything, right down to the electrics, and power outages flickered through the streets, attacking blocks at at time and plunging them into the darkness of a mildly cloudy afternoon. In the parking lot of Maz’s bar, Finn looked up, as if hearing the voices of a few dozen bureaucrats crying out at once, and then being silenced.
Then the authorities showed up.
Rey was running when the cop cars arrived, which was better than some options, but not, per say, ideal.

The second she heard people arriving, no sirens but something are just recognizable, she ducked behind the trees. Bebe Eight followed quickly and they watched as the truant officer arrived, flanked by an assortment of young do gooders on bikes. The hall monitor squad.

They were wearing helmets, mostly simple, except for one lanky youth sporting what looked like a black motorcycle helmet.

Rey turned to Bebe Eight and whispered, “The information, do you still have it?”

“Yes. What should we do?”

“You need to run in the woods and find a place to hide.” Rey ordered.

Bebe shook his head. “I’m not leaving anyone again. It didn’t work out last time.”

“It’s only sensible. You can hide better without me and I can cover you. You’re supposed to be some sort of genius, right? Tell me it isn’t the best plan.”

He worried his lip for a second, blinking as he thought, then wrapped his arms around her waist in a quick hug. “Stay safe and follow me as soon as it’s safe. I don’t want to lose anyone else, and you’re a good kid.”

Rey was struck, both by the gesture and by the fact someone that tiny was calling her a kid. But she didn’t have time for feeling, so she patted his head awkwardly and shooed him away, into the woods. His round orange backpack disappeared further into the foliage and Rey peeked back out at the hall monitors. They were standing around outside, while the police officers, mostly those attached to the school, went inside the bar.

They were guarding the perimeter. Rey’s lip curled. They were twelve. This was the sort of behavior she usually saw from gangs. She was starting to sympathize with Bebe Eight and his great revolutionary cause, even if she knew she couldn’t get invested in it. Not when she had to keep an eye out for her father.

One of them started to move into the tree and Rey grabbed a branch from the ground. It was lighter in her hand than her walking stick, but it would still do, she slipped behind a tree and as when the hall monitor was only a few feet away, knocked him over with a solid hit to the stomach.

Rather than the quiet breathless collapse she had been hoping for, he yelled. Rey cursed under her breath and took off running, in the opposite direction as Bebe Eight had gone.

The woods were quiet considering the chaos so close by. The trees seemed to squeeze noise out of the air, leaving only a leafy silence. Even Rey’s stumbling footfalls and breathing were muffled. The desert stole your voice with sheer space, the forest did it by obstruction.

But there was definitely someone following her, she could see them out of the corner of her eye, and so she ran, until they were gone.
Rey stopped to catch her breath and look around, try to figure out if she had shaken off pursuit, and if so, if she’d done it too quickly.

A dark figure stepped out from behind a tree.

“It’s you then.” he said in voice muffled by his motorcycle helmet.

“Maybe.” Rey said slowly. “Who are you?”

The voice was surprised, “You don’t already know?”

Rey shook her head, or tried to. Her joints felt locked in place, as though fear had taken hold of her in a way it never had before.

She felt trapped, for a long moment, as the helmeted figure surveyed her and she fought against the invisible force that seemed to be holding her in place.

Then she broke free, and slammed into him, pushing him to the ground. A moment of shock later he fought back, using his height to roll her over, and his long limbs to get some distance between them.

Rey kneed him between the legs and twisted out of his grip, stumbling back into a tree, tripping over a root, and knocking her head against the tree trunk. She got up, head spinning, and watched the helmeted idiot approach through a dark haze, before her legs gave out underneath her.

The second Finn heard the cop cars he sprinted back to the bar, barely making it inside. Patrons were fleeing from various side exits, and Maz Kanata grabbed him by the arm. “Where is Rey?” she asked.

Finn felt panic bloom in his chest. “I thought she and Bebe Eight were with you?”

Han cursed under his breath then muttered, “Pretend you didn’t hear that, kid?”

Finn nodded absently. There was a loud noise from outside, and he backed up against the table, grabbing the first thing that came to his hand and brandishing it.

Maz Kanata gave him a thoughtful look as he dropped, and then quickly caught the sword, holding it like something he didn’t want to break, but simultaneously didn’t want to be holding.

“If we can get back to the Falcon I think we can make it out.” Han said. “But we might have to fight through.”

Finn shrugged, even as he felt his stomach clench. “I’m probably already expelled.” he said, as much to himself as anyone else. “But we need to find Rey and Bebe Eight.”

Han rolled his eyes. “It’ll happen. But I know from experience, sometimes you have to get yourself out first so you can help others. Carry that sword, will you. Behind me on three.”

“One.” They crept up to the door.

“Two.” Han leaned against it, holding it closed as the truant officer tried to open it.

Three was a hand signal, a quick flash of three fingers before Han flung the door open, leaving the officer to fall on his face. With incredible spryness for a middle aged man he leapt through the doorway, pulling Finn after him, and started sprinting through the parking lot.
They didn’t make it far. Han clearly hadn’t been expecting the sheer number of people in front of the building. Finn estimated it was about half the hall monitors. There were certainly a lot of faces he recognized.

“Traitor!” someone yelled, and Finn found himself face to face with Nines, one of his old friends. “I’m not-” he started, before he was cut off by a fist swinging at his face. He ducked it, he had always been faster than Nines, and clutched the sheathed sword to his chest.

Nines advanced on him, and Finn swung out with the only weapon he had, the sword. Though it was sheathed it felt natural in his hands, and it hit Nines squarely on the side, knocking him to the ground. Finn backed up as more monitors advanced, anger on their faces. He wondered why they couldn’t see how insane it all was, the little army Snoke was building for himself, this pseudo war playing out in the hallways of a learning establishment, for the Force’s sake!

But he couldn’t really say that, just swing at the advancing crowd in an attempt to fend them off. He couldn’t see Han, couldn’t see a way out, all he could hope to do was stay on his feet. It worked fairly well, especially once Finn demonstrated that he wasn’t afraid to hit people, but it couldn’t last forever.

Over their heads he couldn’t see much, just a few cars, the edge of the woods.

A dark figure carrying Rey’s body. Finn felt his heart plummet. He tried to surge forward, found himself pushed back every time. Not even a sword could cut through this rope of preteens. He couldn’t do a thing as he watched the car drive off.

“No.” he whispered. “No.”

A spritely girl dove at him, and Finn shielded himself again, automatically, let instinct take over so he could ignore his grief. For a while it worked, and he thought, he thought maybe if he kept focusing on weakening the left he could break through and go after Rey.

The harrying crowd parted. Nines had a split lip from hitting the ground and a look of sheer fury on his face. He was holding a baton, like the cheerleaders used. Finn tried to remember if Nines did cheerleading. Phasma didn’t like them to talk about their hobbies, much less have hobbies.

“Traitor.” Nines repeated, walking forward. Finn tried to slash at him, but he caught the strike on his baton and shoved it away, kept pressing forward on Finn.

Another slash was also blocked, then another, until Finn felt the baton hit his wrist with enough force to make him drop the sword. Nines went at him with all his strength, batting aside every one of Finn’s attempts to free himself and wrestling him to the ground. Finn closed his eyes, tried to ward off the inevitable blow, but it never came.

“What,” a clear woman’s voice said. “Do you lot think you’re doing?”

Han was in handcuffs when his wife rolled up. Sadly it was not the first time it had happened, though in his defense none of the arrests, including the current one, were legitimate. He just had an arrestable sort of face.

“Ma’am this man is guilty of harbouring truants.” the officer said. Leia waved him off with her usual regality.
“Well.” she said coolly. “As I’m the Deputy Superintendent of Schools I think I should have some say over this affair, shouldn’t I? Especially since it’s after school hours.”

The officer swallowed nervously. Han grinned. Chewie was standing behind Leia and Han hoped he had filled her in a little.

“Arguably it was kidnapping, ma’am. That makes it a criminal offense.”

“Really.” Leia’s tone could have cut diamonds. “Our city in chaos and you’re arresting my husband for picking my niece and her friends up early from school?”

The officer’s brow furrowed and he started to say something, but Leia cut him off. “And if I remember correctly part of the deal when we allowed police officers at Palpatine Memorial, since Principal Snoke was so certain they were necessary, was that you would only be authorized to conduct arrests in a limited set of circumstances. I don’t think these qualify.”

“Not to mention,” Leia continued, “Your little squad of deputies. Now, if you know what’s good for you officer, you’ll let my husband and this fine young man go, or I’ll have you arrested. Are we clear?”

The second police officer, having made it to the scene of the disturbance, was less afraid than the first. He’d learn fast, Han was sure. “You and what army, ma’am?” he said with a sneer. He saw a short woman in a blouse and sensible trousers, Leia had never been much for fuss, it was why she had quit City Council, acting like a princess.

Leia crossed her arms. “The one around the corner. I have friends, officer. Subordinates, really. Now, let them go, immediately.”

“I don’t think so.” said School Officer Jerkface.

Leia shrugged. “Your funeral.”

The aerial barrage was immediate. Han saw it decimate the group of kids doubtless gathered around poor Finn, who had probably put up a fight but twenty to one was no odds for anyone. He saw the water balloons full of….. well, he didn’t want to know smack Officer Jerkface in the face. He saw it all. He definitely saw Leia’s promised police officers come up. He had no idea how she had wrangled a full team, not when half the city was down. But Leia could do a lot when she put her mind to it.

Han rubbed his wrists after Chewie unlocked the handcuffs and looked at his wife. “Hi, Leia.”

“Han.” she said. “Nice to see you.”

“You- uh- you too.” he shoved his hands in his pockets. “It’s been a while, hasn’t it?”

“A week.” Leia agreed. “Or two.”

Han looked away, half to make sure Finn was alright, and half so he didn’t have to look at her. “Are you good?” he asked.

“Not bad. We should go back to the house though. Wedge said he couldn’t do much about the officers, and he can only really send the kids home. You know how it is with Snoke.”

“Too well. Home then?”
“Home.” she agreed.
“Are you alright?” Finn asked Bebe Eight for the fifth time. The boy had appeared out of the woods as the building was cleared. Han was talking with the woman who had pulled them out of it, middle aged and practically dressed, and though Finn wanted to sprint over there and demand a rescue mission for Rey be mounted immediately, he knew it was better to wait and let the grownups sort things out, at least at first. If that failed, he’d try it his way.

But in the meantime all he could do was fuss over Bebe, whose sandy curls were littered with twigs and who was still breathing a little fast. His dark skin looked pale and Finn was honestly wondering about the likelihood eight year old heart attacks.

“I’m fine.” Bebe Eight promised him. “I just don’t like running much. I’m a genius, not a track star.”

Finn snorted, but his mind was still on Rey, who had looked hurt as she was being carried away, who was alone with the First Order, who would think she was involved in something she wasn’t.

Bebe Eight tugged at his hand. “We should go.”

Han was still talking with the woman, whose braid looked like a crown and whose face looked sad. But Finn trusted Bebe, if not the rest of these resistance lunatics, so he followed him back to one of the cars and settled in, still holding the sheathed sword in his lap.

After all, these people were probably his best hope of helping Rey.

Rey woke up in a dark room, which was a comfort since her head was pounding. She hadn’t gotten knocked out in a few years. She’d forgotten how much it hurt.

The hard plastic of the chair she was sitting in hurt her back and she fidgeted before realizing that it would tip off her captors, the middle school mafia presumably, that she was awake.

It wasn’t like they were an actual gang. How much could they do?

The room was dull, windowless, underlit, beige, the chair was uncomfortable, the table was weathered. It was, in short, a school.

The person in the motorcycle helmet was sitting across from Rey.

She sat up straighter, feeling her back ache. “You know my aunt works for the school board, right? You can’t keep me here.”
It was a tough bluff. Rey wasn’t used to having leveraging power.

The figure shrugged. “Detention. Absolutely legal.” he, Rey was fairly sure he was a he, said in a ridiculously low voice. It sounded like a child trying to imitate Batman.

“Where am I?” she demanded.

“You’re my guest.”

“ Weird detention then.” Rey sniped. “Where are the others?” Her mind instantly went to Bebe Eight, Uncle Han, and Finn. Finn who was probably out of the county by now. She didn’t think she’d ever see him again, even if she got out of educational prison.

“You mean the liars, miscreants and traitors you call friends?” he paused for dramatic effect. “No idea.”

Rey stared at him intently. Something about him was familiar. She’d first noticed it in the forest, but now with more time to observe it was even more obvious. She thought he was staring back through the mirrored face of motorcycle helmet. Stupid motorcycle helmet, he’d been riding a scooter.

“You still want to hit me.” the figure said.

“That’s what happens when you’re being interrogated by a mysterious jerk in a motorcycle helmet, indoors.” Rey told him.

Thin, pale, familiar hands reached up and pulled the helmet off. Rey looked into the face of her cousin.

“Ben?” she asked, incredulous. She thought back to what she remembered of Ben Organa, who had told her to never talk to him at school and had then hid in his room for most of the past two weeks. It was undeniably him, but he looked different. Less sulky and more mean.

“Don’t call me that!” he snapped. “Call me Kylo.”

“What are you doing here?” Rey said. “Uncle Han is your dad! Why are you teaming up with these weirdos?”

“My family abandoned me.” ‘Kylo’ informed her. “But Principal Snoke sees my true potential. Now, tell me about the boy.”

“What boy? There’s a lot of them, you know.” Rey said, trying to hide her shock and fear. She’d been scared since she woke up, but sheer surprise had heightened it.

“About this high?” her cousin gestured. “Bleached hair, brown skin, wears orange, literally the smallest person in the school? Carrying some very important information?”

“No idea what you’re talking about.” she lied.

“I can make you tell me.” Ben threatened.

Rey held herself stiffly. He was bigger than her, and strong in a lanky way. She didn’t think she could get out of the room, much less out of whatever corner of the school she was in, even if it was after hours. Snoke’s minions had clearly demonstrated that they did not care about the rules. Still, she had people to protect. She shook her head tersely and steeled herself for some other threat or blow.

Instead she felt her headache intensify.
“You’re so scared.” Ben said in a derisive voice. “Waiting for people who’ll never come back. Your father abandoned you so you latched onto mine. Don’t worry, he would have disappointed you eventually too.”

Rey shook her head again, like she could shake off his words. Still, they stung.

“At night,” Ben continued, “You’re so lonely it hurts. You make up stories, imagine beautiful endings, an island….”

Rey closed her eyes and tried to push his voice out of her head, even though it seemed to be worming its way in. She felt tears in her eyes.

“Shut up!” she snapped. “I bet you’re afraid of something too. That I’ll, that I’ll be better than you.” The words seemed to come out of nowhere, but they felt right on her tongue. “That you’ll never be as strong as Darth Vader.”

She had no idea who Darth Vader was. It was a name she’d heard mentioned a few times over the past few weeks. She’d thought it was some student who’d done something especially impressive or terrible in the past, though sometimes he sounded more like an adult. Aunt Leia had mentioned the name once as well, in hurt tones over the phone. Rey had been too shy to ask.

Ben reeled back.

“How-?” he breathed. His dark hair was sticking to his forehead and Rey realized that she was breathing hard. She had no idea what was going on. She didn’t think this was how fighting with your cousin was supposed to work. For one thing she didn’t think there was supposed to be quite this much seething hatred.

“What just happened?” Rey asked, more to herself than to Ben. Ben answered anyways.

“The Force did.”
The Sheer Number Of Background Characters With Backstories Is How You Know It's Star Wars

The cars cruised through a dark and silent town. Whole segments of it seemed to be out of power, and people seemed to have retreated to their homes. They ended up in a nice suburban neighbourhood, lots of baby trees and neat lawns, before pulling up at a large, somewhat dilapidated looking McMansion.

“Mrs. Organa inherited a lot of money, I think.” Bebe Eight explained. “But yard work isn’t really her forte.”

It wasn’t quite as much of a mess up close, the house was clearly in working order but the lawn was dry and out of control. Multiple cars were parking the driveway and on the dead grass, and people could be seen through the front windows.

Bebe Eight slid past Finn and outside, while he was still looking around, confused and out of his depth. Other people, children and adults, were spilling out of the other cars. They seemed like a very mixed group.

Finn stepped gingerly onto the lawn, like the dehydrated plants might bite, and looked around, only to spot Bebe Eight in a tight embrace with a familiar figure. Dark hair, handsome features, Finn’s eyes widened as the boy stood up and looked his way, then jogged over and grabbed him in a tight hug.

“Poe?” Finn asked Poe’s shoulder.

“Yeah!” Poe replied.

“I thought you were a goner for sure.” Finn told him, pulling back to check Poe’s face for signs of injury or malign hall monitor influence. He wouldn’t put brainwashing past them.

“The librarian helped me.” Poe said. “What about you? I can’t believe you made it out alright, and you found Bebe Eight!”

“I found him.” Bebe Eight corrected.

Poe ruffled his hair affectionately. “Sure, kid. I’m just glad you’re both safe. I was so worried when Jessica and Wex came back and said they were on a field trip all day, trust me to forget about eighth grade spanish, and no one else had seen hide or hair of you. And then we heard that the hall monitors were practically running a man hunt…”

“We made it out, thanks to these people.” Finn gestured at the mass of people. “What is this? Is this the Resistance?”

“I call it the Resistance.” Poe said fondly. “General Organa calls it us butting in on her work, but she loves us, really.”

“She says we’re meddling kids putting ourselves in danger.” Bebe Eight reminded him.

“Words, words.” Poe had an infectious smile. “Hey, you have my jacket! I was wondering where it got to.”

“Sorry.” Finn said, starting to shrug it off. “It was still in my hands when I ran and I didn’t want to
drop it.”

“No, no.” Poe put an hand on Finn’s arm to keep him from removing the jacket. “Keep it. It fits you pretty well.”

Finn nodded in thanks, and swallowed. “Poe, you know your way around here, right?”

Poe slid his thumbs into his pockets. “I like to think I do. Why?”

“Cause I your help with something.”

Threepio was waiting in the foyer.

“Han!” he cried. Han winced at the too familiar voice.

“Threepio.” he said. “Nice to see you too.”

Threepio looked the same as ever, skin a rich golden shade, hair white and fine, face heavily lined. His neat white button down almost camouflaged his prosthetic arm, which seemed to have changed colours while Han was away.

“I got a replacement.” Threepio explained, noticing Han’s glance. “You have been away for a terribly long time. I do believe Leia missed you.”

Han winced again and heard Leia’s sharp inhale behind him. Threepio had never been tactful, but he was family. He’d worked for the Organa’s for years and had insisted on sticking around even though Leia didn’t exactly need a butler. Now in his nineties, he spent most of the time in the garden, fussing over the fact that sometimes people had the audacity to walk on the lawn that he increasingly couldn’t take care of.

Threepio continued talking, in his blithe old man way, “We’ve been so concerned about young Ben, and now little Rey. She has grown so much, but the poor girl is quite uncultured. Children these days, trouble all of them. Ben is still hanging around with a bad crowd, his mother is so worried about him. Not to mention that brute, Snoke. Quite a time for you to take a vacation!”

“Threepio.” Leia sighed. “I need to talk to Han.”

“Of course you do.” Threepio said kindly, and did not move. Around them Leia’s recruits streamed towards the kitchen, some of them shooting wary looks at Han and Leia, like they were waiting for a fight to erupt. Busybodies, the lot of them.

“Threepio.” Han started, trying to at least try to pretend he had some power in the house he’d been living in for years.

“Those children are upsetting Artoo.” Leia said. Sure enough, the old dog on his usual pillow in the alcove was being aggressively petted. He seemed to be coping by passively accepting the attention- in his old age Artoo had abruptly discovered his zen- but Threepio looked alarmed. He bustled off, strident complaints and admonishments already on his tongue.
“Well.” Han slid his hands into his pockets.

“Well.” Leia agreed. The bubble around them grew.

“You look good.” Han told her. “As usual.”

“You look irresponsible. As usual.”

“Hey, that’s not fair,” Han tried to defend himself, but it was weak. It was fair, he knew it was.

“You left, Han.” Leia snapped. “You left me with a little girl who doesn’t trust anyone as far as she can throw them, Ben who hates everything except a certified monster, and a political crisis bubbling out of control.”

“Ben hates me.” Han reminded her, “Whenever I’m around he’s barely controllable. I was making things worse!”

“That’s an excuse and you know it. Ben hates both of us. And we both needed to man up and deal with it.” Leia’s voice shook.

“I know. I’m sorry I left. But I thought, I thought without me you might have a chance of fixing it. Maybe Ben would calm down, if I wasn’t there, always making things worse. Being a scoundrel. I was never a good father.”

Suddenly Leia’s face seemed softer. “You tried. We both did. There were factors outside of our control. After Luke left…. We overcompensated. It was a bad choice and Snoke took advantage of it. Now things are even worse than we could have expected.”

Han nodded. “Disaster, isn’t it? Just like old times, we just better hope we make it through this one too.”

“Yes.” Leia agreed. Han tried to tell her she had it under control, that she was the best person he knew for a job like this. But he was interrupted by a trio of children, and not just any trio. Finn and little Bebe were there, as well as a short, smiling, Latino boy Han recognized as Shara and Kes’s son.

“Poe.” Leia said, with a faint smile.

Poe slammed into a salute. “Ma’am.” Han tried to stifle a chuckle, sensing Leia wouldn’t appreciate it.

“Once again, Ms. Organa is fine.” Leia told him in the voice of someone who knew a lost cause when they heard one.

“Hi, Ms Organa.”

“Hello to you as well, Bebe. And you must be Finn.” Leia turned her warm smile on Finn, who seemed on the verge of panic but rallied well despite it. “I’ve heard all about you from Poe, and Han. Thank you for helping my niece.”

“Rey?” Finn asked, then shook his head. “Right, Rey. Are you going to go save her?”
“We’re going to do everything we can to stop Snoke,” Leia promised. “But going after Rey specifically would only put more people in danger.”

“She’s your family!” Finn said in barely restrained undertone. “And they just took her.”

Han could see the way Leia was holding herself, as tightly wound as Finn’s voice. “I know she is, and I will do everything I can to make sure she’s safe. But there’s a big picture as well, and I’m worried we’ll only put her in more danger if we move too quickly.”

“Some family you are.” Finn said, crossing his arms.

“You can think what you like.” Leia informed him. “I lost my brother, I’ve almost lost my son. I will not lose my niece as well. But first, we need you to tell us everything you know. I think the others are waiting in the kitchen.” she looked to Poe for confirmation and he nodded smartly.

“I should go find Chewie and Maz.” Han said, “Make sure she isn’t giving him too much trouble.”

He moved hastily across the foyer, and noticed Bebe had wandered over to pat Artoo. “That’s an old dog, kid.” he said. “Hasn’t moved in years. Better leave to him alone.”

Bebe sighed and followed Han into the kitchen where- as far as he could tell- half the town was crowded in. Poe dragged Finn over to a pile of kids sitting on counters, there was sweet speed demon Kare, terror of driver’s ed, and Wex, and Jess Pava from down the lane. He saw Shara Bey and Kes Dameron and Kaydel the young secretary. Half the PTA, a few police officers, a couple members of the old gang, including L’Ulo. Statura was at a computer on the island, doing science things with Maz Kanata hanging over his shoulder, and Chewie was next to Doctor Kalonia in a corner with a brand new bandaid.

Everyone snapped to attention when Leia entered the room, some more literally than others. Poe and his little gang saluted again. Han was going to give Leia hell for that when he wasn’t out of his mind with worry.

“Right.” Leia told the assembly. “We all know why we’re here. There’s just been a cyber attack against the central city infrastructure, and we all know who is to blame. But I have good news too. Bebe?”

Bebe skipped over to the computer and climbed over Statura, brandishing a thumb drive in one small hand. He plugged it in and started typing frantically.

“It’s encrypted.” he said, between furious typing, “But I can figure it out.”

Finn looked alarmed by the sudden display of technical know how. It was one thing to know the little boy was bright, another thing to see it. The laptop was turned to face the crowd, and Leia moved over to look at the screen. Han could see documents, mostly financial but also some correspondence, over her shoulder.

“Everything we need to lock Snoke up for good.” Bebe Eight promised.

“Mr. San Tekka was right.” Poe said happily. For the sake of the rest of the group, Leia explained.

“Lor San Tekka acquired certain information about Snoke. Poe took it upon himself to get it to me,” there was a hint of reproach in her voice, “since apparently he and Lor were concerned it might not otherwise get delivered. This prompted Snoke’s new boldness. He is actively attacking children, and our city, in his pursuit of power. This cannot stand.”

There were murmurs of assent from around the room. “But how?” asked poor Officer Ematt. “The
Death Star arson cases were one thing, begging your pardon, Ms. Organa. This, this is another matter entirely.”

“The hospital is entirely out of commission.” Kalonia added. “Korr Sella called to say city hall is in chaos. The police are suspect, present company excluded. Snoke has too many old ties.”

“Starkiller protocol.” Bebe Eight piped up, surprising everyone. “There’s some details on it in here, and I think I can guess the rest. It’s all a bit technical, I don’t think Mr. San Tekka even knew what it was talking about, but I can dumb it down.”

“Please.” Leia said.

“Multi pronged. It starts at the school and uses the connected servers across town to take down everything municipal. It’s less of a virus and more of a power surge, honestly, just a really wriggly one. Probably takes a lot of power to start. I wouldn’t be surprised if it knocked the school’s lights out too.” Bebe Eight consulted the computer again. Statura peered over his head.

“Interesting.” he said. “A single hit to the computers would be difficult. More than one though, that could do long term damage.” Statura looked over at Dr. Kalonia. “I suspect the servers at the hospital are fairly dated. If they got knocked out while they were rebooting, you could lose patient information permanently. Same thing with city hall and the registry. So much of our information is digital these days.”

“After the Death Star everyone thought it was safer.” Leia said, looking tired. Everyone over the age of thirty seemed reserved. “All right, you’ve figured out the problem, now give a solution. You said we can’t let the town take another blow? How do we stop them?”

“Take out the school!” one of the younger ones suggested happily.

Bebe blinked. “That’s actually kind of right. The best thing to do would be to go to the school and knock out the power, and for safety probably the internet. If Snoke is using it to stage his whole mutant cyber attack thing, we need to knock it out.” Statura nodded in agreement.

“Finn, do you know anything?” Leia asked.

“I think they’re right.” Finn agreed. “Hux used to use the computer lab for something, because there were a lot of computers. My guess is that he creating Starkiller, I mean, more computers, more processing power, right?”

“So the computer lab is the weak point.” Ematt summarized. “We have the evidence to arrest Snoke, why don’t we go in there, secure the computer lab, and march him out in handcuffs?”

“He has the place crawling with his little minions.” Poe pointed out. “And he’ll probably be anticipating something. We need to be sneaky. I can get people into take the computer lab, I think. We’re pretty good at sneaking out of that place.”

“I’m going to pretend you didn’t say that, Dameron.” Leia told him. “As much as I hate to let you children put yourselves in any more danger, you do know the school better than anyone. Nien, Shara, L’Ulo, can you go with them to keep an eye on them?”

They ageed. Leia turned to Ematt. “Officer, I need you to secure Snoke. Once the computer lab is down I want him arrested and held. I know it’s shaky but we have direct evidence of all sorts of nonsense and it’s too dangerous to leave him running around. We’ll take our chances with his lawyers and connections. Now, there is one more problem. Snoke might try to use Rey as a hostage. We need her safe as well.”
“I can get in.” Finn said suddenly. “I know the school and I know the patrol schedules, probably even better than Poe. I can sneak in and get Rey.”

It was Han’s time to be a sufficient uncle, he knew it. “I’ll go with you, Finn. Drive you and provide parental support… and I’ll see if I can talk to Ben as well.”

Most everyone knew the long story of Ben Organa’s flavor of teen rebellion. They glanced aside or gave Han sympathetic smiles. He didn’t look at Leia.

“Fine.” she said, voice smooth. “I’ll go settle things at city hall. We need this town in one piece, with or without a megalomaniac running around. Now, I want everyone to remember, these are children you’ll be dealing with. Don’t shoot anyone shorter than five feet, and try not to shoot anyone in general. And remember, we can’t let them run their starkiller thing again. It was bad enough the first time.”

“Aye-aye, General!” Leia whipped around, clearly ready to glare Poe into submission, and stopped short when she saw Kes Dameron grinning at her.

“May the Force help us all.” she said. It was one of the first times Han had heard her refer to the force in years. The meeting broke.

Maz Kanata cornered Finn on the front lawn, while he tried to help Chewie load up the van. She had the sword in her arms and Finn drew back. He’d given it back to Maz as soon as possible, and had assumed she’d keep it.

She must have seen some of his thoughts on his face. She smiled. “The other person I would have given it to would not take it. She’s stubborn, that Leia, and this weapon holds dark memories for her. I would like you to carry it, for now.”

“I’m not sure you really do.” Finn protested weakly.

“For an old lady’s sake.” Maz insisted, and shoved it towards Finn. “Take good care of yourself, Finn. Take good care of Rey.”

“Okay.” Finn said, feeling overwhelmed.

Maz looked over towards the back door of the van, where Han was standing awkwardly near Leia. They were talking softly.

“Couples.” Maz tsked as they hugged. “They never know what’s best for them.” With that she disappeared into the crowd.

Finn opened the side door of the van and was about to step in when Poe caught his arm.

“Hey, buddy!” he said. He was flushed with excitement. “Best of luck, okay?”

Finn nodded and let himself be pulled into another hug.

“Let’s go give them what for.” Poe said confidently, before going back to join a man who looked like his father and a bouncing Bebe.
“Let’s go.” Finn agreed, trying to mimic the flyboy confidence as he slid into the Falcon. “Let’s go.”
Hey, it’s been a while. Life got out of control, but I am dedicated to finishing this, even if it takes a few years. Thank you for all the support though! Nice to hear people enjoy bad Star Wars jokes.

“It was years ago,” Ben began and despite herself, Rey listened. Some things were bizarre enough that you had to.

“Your father and my mother only met each other when they were teenagers. Uncle Luke grew up out of town—”

“I know.” Rey said. “Aunt Leia told me the story. There was a mix up when they were born, my dad got sent to live with his aunt and uncle, and Leia got adopted. They only met when Uncle Luke came looking for records about his parents. He and his teacher hitched a ride with your dad into town, and they met her together.” She couldn’t help the note of query in her voice, couldn’t help but be uncertain about the story she’d only heard for the first time a few weeks ago.

Ben was more than a little irritated to have his dramatic tale interrupted. “You don’t even know what was going on back then. You don’t know the true power of the Force.”

Rey sneered. Pretending to be in control was better than ceding it to Ben, even if it meant acting as obnoxious as possible. “Everyone keeps talking about the Force. Force this, and Force be with you. I don’t know the true power of the Force. I barely know what the Force is!”

“It’s power. The power to do what you want, have what you want. Our grandfather understood it. He worked with the former mayor, Palpatine, to use it to its fullest. Mo- you aunt,” he corrected himself conscientiously, “And your father, they didn’t understand. They didn’t tell you anything, they didn’t tell me anything! But Snoke explained it all.”

There was a feverish quality to his voice that alarmed Rey, a note of fear and want and worship that was just a little too intense. She leaned back in her chair, and listened.

“There have always been people in the world who could do more than others, and things science alone couldn’t explain. This town, it’s always had lots of people in it with powers unknowable. The ability to see into other people’s minds, to see more clearly. It… attracted people. Academics and psychics and so forth. In the eighteen hundreds we had the most fortune tellers per capita in the whole country!” Some civic pride snuck into what was otherwise an utterly baffling explanation.

Rey wasn’t about to write off supernatural happenstance, she’d seen enough weird stuff over the years. Dad had always frequented weird circles, and Rey could remember being a little girl and having crystals waved over her by acquaintances every time she had a cold. Even in the system, well, you got a lot of characters and a lot of old houses. Things happened. And it certainly wasn’t surprising that this town was a bit kooky, she’d kind of figured that out already. Rey just didn’t know what fortune tellers had to do with their current situation. She narrowed her eyes and gestured for Ben to get on with it.
“There were a few secret societies that specialized in it. The Jedi, the Nightsisters, that sort of thing. They called their power the Force, and they explored it, but always shied back from truly grasping its potential. They had rules and bylaws and stuffy hierarchies. No one really recognized what could be done with their power. Not until Palpatine and Grandfather.” Ben’s story had taken on the cadence of a nursery tale, much loved and often heard. There was a glee there too, at finally having someone to tell it too.

Rey had never had much of a family before. She hadn’t even realized she had a grandfather in anything but the most theoretical terms until now. There was something thrilling about the idea, even if he had been a Freemason or whatever. She took her cue and asked, “The mayor that the school is named after? I thought he was kind of awful.”

Ben shook his head knowingly. “He was a genius. He understood power better than anyone, and he held it for almost twenty years. He used the Force for more than just light police work or stupid secrets. He and Grandfather made this town a completely different place. They abolished the old secret societies, remade the local government, explored more and more into the mysteries of the Force.”

“But Aunt Leia said she and her brother both got adopted,” Rey said cautiously, testing the waters. “Why…?”

“After Palpatine took power there was a lot of chaos,” Ben snapped, “Our grandmother didn’t understand, so she left her children with friends rather than trust our grandfather. One of the old order people, one of the Jedi, a former friend of our grandfather’s, interfered as well. Obi Juan.”

Rey knew that name. It was her middle name, and it had given her no end of trouble over the years. Her father’s old teacher, Aunt Leia had mentioned him once or twice. Dad had a picture of him when she was little. Obi Juan Kenobi had a white beard and blue eyes and generally looked like someone’s grandfather. He did not look like the sort of person who got involved in secret societies and kidnapping and politics. On the other hand, neither did Aunt Leia—except for the fact that they both had the same steely look about them.

“When our parents were older, Obi Juan brought them together and convinced them that grandfather and Palpatine were destroying the town. There were… some fires.” Ben admitted. He shifted slightly. “Things were bad. The whole town was arguing, and it was spilling over into the rest of the county. Grandfather was chief of police by then, and trying to keep control of things. Our parents, and some other people, they started making trouble. Lots of trouble.”

Rey nodded. She approved of trouble. Clearly Ben meant for her to sympathize with poor put upon Palpatine and their granddad, but she couldn’t quite bring herself to. It was sad that Leia and Luke hadn’t been able to make up with their father, but Rey had seen enough broken homes to know it didn’t always work out perfectly. Especially when the police were involved. They’d had each other though, and at least Aunt Leia had been able to make something for herself. A home, however messed up.

“So, what? Aunt Leia went through a really bad rebellious stage because her dad was a jerk? That’s pretty tame, Benji. I don’t know what counts as a scandal out here, but I’ve seen things way more messed up.” Rey’s chin was set, the challenge thrown down. He maligned their family at his own risk.

“They killed him.” Ben said, and even though the effect was ruined by his sulky tone Rey still froze. But she recovered fast.
“Sometimes that happens. Family isn’t blood, it’s who you choose.” She leaned back in her chair and looked pointedly away from her cousin. “And I choose not-you and your creepy psychic cult and our stupid grandfather and whoever Darth Vader is. Now either let me go or go away before I punch you, and I don’t care how many thugs you have outside.”

Ben spluttered, “Darth Vader is our grandfather, and you have the Force too! You just read my mind! How are you so stupid? It’s like we aren’t even related!”

Rey was temporarily nonplussed.

“.......... I did not read your mind.”

“You did too!”

Rey shook her head stubbornly and Ben threw up his hands with a shriek and stood up fast enough that his flimsy chair crashed to the floor.

“Why do I even try. You’re as bad as everyone else. No wonder your father didn’t want you! He should have stayed and taught me!”

Ben stormed out of the room and Rey’s stony mask shattered. Her head hurt, she was confused and alone and tired. Things were weird and confusing. She had wanted a family, not a trainwreck. It was all so strange, the entire town was.

It was entirely possible she had just read someone’s mind.

The longer she thought about it, the more likely it seemed. Maybe it was the fluorescent light warping her brain, but she couldn’t come up with any alternative. The strange pressure on her brain, Ben’s weird knowledge, her own instinctive backlash. The name Darth Vader had just come to her, had just appeared out of the ether.

Ray considered herself a rational person and she was rational enough to know her new home town was really bizarre and her supposed family was the epicenter of the bizarreness, which implicated her by extension. Nothing was off the table.

She bit her lip and rested her head on the table for a second, tried to collect her thoughts in the dark. There was no time for doubt or wallowing in fear or asking questions like “What sort of name is Darth Vader”. She had to get out.

The room was still plain and boring and when she tried the door it was locked from the outside.

Rey threw a chair at it and it bounced away with a clang.

“Be quiet!” someone on the other side of the door shouted.

“Let me out!”

“No!”

Rey considered this, weighed her options, squared her shoulders, and tried to connect with universe. Psychic powers…. activate, she thought and tried to channel Ben, thought better of it, and tried to channel her dad instead. The wise Luke Skywalker she’d heard stories about, the mysterious hero. In anyone had the Force, whatever that was, it was him.

“You WILL let me out,” she said firmly.
“What?”

“You’re going to unlock this door and let me out.” Rey said again, confidence building. There was a pause.

“You’re out of your mind,” the voice on the other side of the door said dismissively. “What do you think you are, some sort of Jedi?”

Fluttering hope died in her chest. Rey collected herself, took a deep breathe, and tried again. This time she made an effort to sound convincing, like her orders were a given thing.

“You’re going to unlock this door and let me out.”

The air seemed to vibrate with possibility.

There was a creak, a click, and the door swung open. A lanky preteen in the crisp vest of a hall monitor was on the other side. His eyes were strangely blank.

It had worked. Oh god, it had worked. It was real, the Force, all of it.

Some things you just didn’t wake up and expect. Some things you couldn’t expect. Psychic powers were up there.

Rey raised her head imperiously and stepped out the door, but quickly in case he changed his mind. Outside it was all grey walls, a tight hallway with no windows and plaques reading “Conference Room #” on the doors. She took stock of her surroundings, and tentatively tiptoed towards the lower numbered doorways.

The hall monitor behind her shifted slightly and Rey turned on him a little too fast.

“And you’ll forget you saw me,” she added hastily, before skipping down the hall, not even bothering to see if the command stuck.

She really wished she had that map she’d gotten as a new student.
“Rey is Luke Skywalker’s daughter then?” Finn said a few minutes into their car ride, when he’d worked up the courage. He had to lean forward over the center console to look at Han and Chewie in the front seats.

Han stared determinedly ahead. Chewie prodded him and muttered something.

“Yeah, yeah, I know the kid deserves to know. What are you, my mother?” Han sighed. “It’s a long story.”

Chewbacca rumbled and Han scoffed in response, but something in his demeanor softened.

“You’re a local boy, right? You know the stories, about how this place was founded, about it’s history, about what Mayor Palpatine did.”

“And how you stopped him,” Finn added. “You and Leia Organa and Luke Skywalker and your friends. You changed the whole town. But I didn’t even know Luke had a daughter! Just that he was a hero, that some people think he had magic powers, and that he disappeared when I was little.”

“There’s a lot most people don’t know,” Han mumbled. “Like that it’s real. The mumbo jumbo, the Force, our own homegrown version of the Freemasons, all of it. Couple of the weirder rumours too. Luke was… Luke was something special. Leia as well. Their whole family is weird- I love them- but they’re X-Men weird. Secret government conspiracies weird.”

Finn digested this. He was a bit of a skeptic by nature, but he’d also watched Kylo Ren tear horrible secrets out of people’s heads before. He’d seen Snoke’s uncanny manipulations. He found it horribly easy to accept that something supernatural was going on- that the old wives tales about Jedi and magic and monsters in the desert were true.

“Okay. But what about Rey?”

Han tapped the steering wheel nervously, and when he spoke his tone was brusque but oddly vulnerable. “After Palpatine, we all thought this place could be good. That the government would be better. That there’d be no more secrets or lies, no more fires and deaths. Leia and I got married, and she got a job. I went to flight school, starting flying out of the airport down the highway. We rebuilt the house she grew up in. And we had a baby. Ben,” Han’s voice broke.

“He amazing. Even as a baby, it was clear he was different. He was talented. Luke loved him to pieces, loved having someone else like him. He was always a family man, Luke. Even shacked up
for a while, but that fell apart quickly. Left him with Rey. She was amazing too, but not as….
precocious as Ben.”

They were driving into the business district now, and it looked dead. Lights were out, a few
streetlights were visibly smoking, people seemed to have disappeared. Chewie laid a supportive furry
hand on Han’s arm as he kept talking.

“Luke and Rey came to live with us, and we were all one big happy family. Luke was looking for
other people with talents, who went untutored after Palpatine’s purges. And he coached Ben- who
was too young for it, but Leia and I couldn’t say no to either of them. You should have seen it. Rey
would be in her baby rocker, and Luke and Ben would sit on the floor and just stare at each other,
giggling every now and then, having the time of their lives.”

Finn couldn’t quite imagine it. His childhood had been- never quite neglectful, but not doting either.
Grownups never had the time or energy to devote to him. It had all been businesslike, food, clothes,
some worn toys to occupy himself.

“Ben,” he said carefully, “That’s Kylo Ren, right? What happened?” How had the most adored child
in the township turned out so awful? How had someone who clearly had everything ended up being
such a jerk.

Han snorted, “It was my fault. Ben was always highstrung, and we spoiled him, all of us. And his
abilities… they made things difficult. He could feel every moment of frustration and anger, which
happen a lot when you have a toddler. He started acting out. Leia and I didn’t know what to do! We
were all only children, we were all orphans. We had no one to turn to for guidance except Threepio,
and he wasn’t the best with little kids. Things got bad. Ben shouted… a lot. He threw things. He’d
get inside your head. He hated me especially, probably because I was such an godawful father,” his
voice was shaking, “Rey grew up too, hit her difficult stages. We were swamped. Leia and I had
jobs, so Luke was home alone with the kids. And Ben, things were bad.”

“I’m sure it wasn’t your fault.” Ben ventured and Chewbacca grumbled an agreement. Han’s hands
tightened on the steering wheel.

“Yeah, that’s what everyone says. Anyway, Leia and didn’t know what to do except leave him
alone, since otherwise he threw tantrums. We just… backed off, except then that made him hate us
even more. Then when he was four and Rey was two, something bad happened. Luke was home
with them and…. well, you don’t need to know the details. Luke had a meltdown. He blamed
himself, for teaching Ben so much, for not recognizing the warning signs. He was always a little
fragile, and he’d been under stress for a long time. He took Rey and got out of town. Nobody could
find them, and we tried so hard.”

“And Ben, we never really got him back after that. He blamed us for driving Luke away, he blamed
himself too, maybe. He was four and he was angry and he was confused and he had powers he
didn’t understand and now had no one to teach him how to control. And it just got worse when he
entered school and Snoke got in his head. I started spending more time away from home, hoping
maybe if I wasn’t there he’d open up a little bit to Leia. He always liked her more. But as you can
see, that didn’t work. We couldn’t do anything. We couldn’t ground him, he’d run away from home.
We couldn’t take away privileges, it just made him furious. Short of tying him to a bed- which
believe me, was considered- we couldn’t control him at all. We’ve all been hoping it’ll pass, but
apparently we’re past that point too.”

He sighed, “You probably think I’m a terrible father. Believe me, I think I’m a terrible father.”

Chewbacca slapped him upside the head.
“Ow! What am I ‘sposed to get out of this Chewie? My brother in law is missing, possibly dead. My son is a maniac tutored by a psychopath and my niece spent her most of life in Arizona.”

Finn hesitated. Even after that whole spiel, he couldn’t find it in him to dislike Han. Han was- was everything Finn had always wanted. Devoted, stubborn, smart. He wasn’t even really absentee, he was absentee in an attempt to help. Finn couldn’t say the same.

“I think- I think you tried your best in a really bad situation. Snoke’s not easy to beat.”

“And yet here we are. Trying.”

“What about Rey?” Finn asked.

Han pulled a sharp left that almost flung Finn into the car door, and answered slowly, more thoughtful than his emotion ridden deluge of words earlier.

“Leia says the foster system papers say she’s been in since she was about six. We think Luke left her with a friend and never picked her up. Rey doesn’t have many memories, except that she lived in England for a while and that her father promised to come back for her. So that’s promising, I guess. Honestly, she’s only been with us for about two weeks, we’re trying not to push her, especially with things so volatile. Ben resents her for driving Luke away, and for the accident, and as long as he was pretending she didn’t exist it kept Snoke from taking too much of an interest. So we’ve been taking it slow,” he laughed “More stellar guardianship from the Organas. One kid with a lunatic, one kid who barely know what’s going on and doesn’t trust us.”

Finn was starting to suspect that maybe the famous Han Solo had some emotional issues. Chewie was giving him significant looks, so he cleared his throat.

“Ohkay. So, how are we going to get into the school? You said you had a plan.”

Han smiled, not a self pitying or broken smile, but a cocky one. The sort of smile he could imagine coming from the outlaw hero of local legend.

“Kid, you don’t want to know.”

Poe’s mom drove a minivan. Since Han Solo was also famously be-vaned he kind of suspected it was a pilot thing.

It was retrofitted so his grandfather’s wheelchair could fit in, but there was still enough room in the back for him, Jess, Wex, and Bebe, provided they squished in tight.

His mom and dad were in the front seat, giving each other worried looks. There was a much more jubilant air in the backseat. It was finally happening! There were going to go arrest their principal. Most students could only dream of that.

More than that, it felt like they were part of a story, about the rebel alliance, from back when his parents were kids. They’d gone on an adventure, all of them. Poe had been captured, Bebe had
gotten to meet Han Solo, Jess and the others were still a little star struck over the fact that they had tipped off Mrs. Organa to everything. The day had been a blur of intrigue an epic quest that they had all gotten to take part in, and there was still more to come. Jess was bouncing in her seat and Poe heartily echoed the sentiment.

Bebe Eight had borrowed Wex’s phone so he could text his parents, and had gotten distracted by something on the screen. Poe leaned across to peer at the screen. It didn’t get any more decipherable, still little numbers and letters tightly packed together on a white background.

Jess poked the back of Bebe’s head. “What’s that?”

“Some of the stuff I pulled off of Mr. San Tekka’s drive,” Bebe Eight said, his voice distant. “The data is still raw but I can read it mostly. There’s some stuff about Starkiller that confuses me though.”

Poe knew enough to recognize when asking for details would just confuse him. Bebe was whip smart in a technical way, and Poe was prepared to trust what he said without asking questions.

Jessika was a bit more naturally curious.

“What about it is confusing, Beach Ball?” she said, using the affectionate nickname a few of the other swim team members had picked up after Poe had talked Bebe into being a, well, beach ball for their local fourth of july parade float.

Bebe Eight crossed his legs, squishing Poe even further into the car door. “I mean, it’s aimed at data and systems, right? But it’s not behaving like a virus, really. It’s too strong and it moves weird and it knocked out most of the town at once.” He looked out the window and pointed to a smoking streetlight. “See! Those are supposed to be on a closed circuit. It’s more like an EMP, really, which makes sense. Hux is a brute underneath it all.”

“A brute in a really nice coat.” Wex added, and a general sentiment of ugh, Hux, was silently shared amongst the foursome.

Shara Bey gave a little cough, and turned a bit in her seat to look back at them. Her dark hair was falling out of its bun, and she had worried eyes. The car was slowing down, and so were the others, keeping themselves out of sight of the school just a block up the road.

“You all doing alright?” she asked.

They all nodded and Jessika chimed, “Yes, ma’am!” with an extra dose of peppiness. She’d always had a bit of a crush on Poe’s mom.

“Oh, you know the plan. Your dad and the police and some of the other adults are going to go in and grab Snoke. You all are going to stay out here, stay together, and monitor the perimeter.” she seemed to regret it even as she said it. “If something bad happens, you all get out, okay?”

Poe considered this. Standing outside as reinforcements while the authorities made a lawful arrest wasn’t exactly the ending to the epic quest he’d been imagining. He crossed his arms.

“I want to drive the getaway car,” Poe said firmly.

Kes Dameron looked unimpressed. There isn’t going to be a getaway car. We’re doing things nice and legally.” He flashed his badge for dramatic effect.

Poe exchanged glances with his friends. Legally didn’t sound nearly as fun.

“What happened to your wild youth of rebellion and fighting the power?” he asked plaintively.
“You can have a wild youth of rebellion when you’re old enough to have a driver’s licence.” Shara informed him. “For now, let’s obey the chain of command. Is that understood, soldiers?” Her slight smile was enough to bring Poe back to real world, where his parents were cool and their predicament was anything but normal. He could deal with coddled for bit, at least they were still near the action.

“Yes, ma’am.” Poe confirmed.

“Good.” Shara turned off the car and cracked open the door. Outside people were milling, hearty shoulder slaps were being given, instructions delivered to kids and adults alike. The late noon sky was already darkening. “I don’t want to have to explain to anyone’s parents how they got hurt on my watch.”

Jess’s dad was actually one of the adults outside, and Wex’s moms and Bebe Eight’s parents probably would have been there as well if they weren’t stuck at work, but Poe accepted the little dose of condescension.

He slipped out of the car, hugged both his parents tight, and watched the adults group together and start heading purposefully down the street, leaving a few adults and a passel of kids, most of them Poe’s friends, behind.

Jess nudged Poe in the ribcage and muttered, “We’re not staying here, are we?”

Poe had been raised by a police officer and an Air Force reservist. He had a lot more of a sense of discipline than most people gave him credit for. He shot Jess a sly smirk. “Orders are orders, Pava. We’re staying right here…. until we see an opportunity worth taking advantage of.”

They weren’t far from to the parking lot where Finn and Rey and Bebe had first broken into Han’s car when Han warned Finn, “Buckle up and try not to scream too much.”

Finn looked around, worried. They were at the back of the school, closer to the cafeteria than the sports fields but still separated from the access road the food trucks used by the heavy chain link fence he’d climbed earlier. Nothing nearby looked immediately threatening, but he buckled his seatbelt with fumbling hands. It felt old and frail, the cloth worn thin by years. There were some times where age wasn’t reassuring.

Han started backing up and Finn thought maybe this was one of those times on multiple accounts.

“What are you doing? Why are you aiming at the gate?”

The smirk that Han shot his way was terrifying. “We can’t move jump the fence, they’ll see us coming there’s a lot of space in between us and the cafeteria doors.”

“So what, we’re going to ram the school?” Finn asked, incredulously. “That’s crazy!”

Chewie laughed, and it was simultaneously a low rumble and absolutely manic. Han was grinning like a dead man.
“Alright Chewie, get ready!” he shouted over the upsetting clanking sound the engine was making.

Chewbacca took over the stick shift so Han could put both of his hand on the steering wheel. He backed up a little more, giving them the maximum amount of space to get a speeding start at the fence.

The solid looking, seven foot high, old but still menacing, metal fence. Han seemed to be aiming for the gate, but there was still a solid padlock there to keep them out.

Finn tried to kick anything that could hit him in the impact onto the floor or into the back, and braced himself.

“Okay,” Han rolled his shoulders back and sniffed. “we’re ready.” Something under the hood went clunk. Han continued on unfazed. “Five….”

Finn wondered if the Force accepted prayers.

“Four.”

He decided to try anyways.

“Three- now!” Han gunned it and Finn was thrown back in his seat as the car jolted into high gear. They flew across the parking lot towards the fence like a van shaped cannonball, fired from the cannon of desperation and flyboy bravado.

Finn closed his eyes, but he could still feel the sudden vertigo as the car twisted so it was moving sideways, could hear the screech of tires on asphalt. They crashed into the gate and there was a second before the padlock chain gave way. Han’s window shattered, and the windowshield would have if they had hit the fence face on. As it was they scraped through the gate, tilting dangerously as Han yanked on the steering wheel in an attempt to right them without losing momentum.

He managed, barely, and kept driving at a ridiculous speed, heading for the tiny parking lot behind the cafeteria reserved for deliveries. When the car screamed to a halt, Finn felt like he’d lost ten years off of his life.

Han looked like he’d just wrestled a bear and won the lottery, blood on his face from the broken window dripping into his elated smile, staining his teeth red. He and Chewie were giggling, like school children.

Finn clutched his chest and felt his heart beating at a thousand miles an hour, but still slower than they had just gone. “We could have died.”

Han shook his head, and when he spoke his voice was raspy. “Nah, I checked the posts, they’re all concreted down, and impalement is the real thing you have to watch for in these circumstances. Plus the airbags have been disabled in this baby,” he patted the Falcon happily, “for years. And Chewie and I had agreed to shield you with our bodies, if it came down to it.”

Finn was almost touched.

Chewie spat something predictably unintelligible, and Han nodded. “You’re right, big guy. We’ve got to get to that breaker room. Where did you say it was?”

“By the gym.” Finn said, unbuckling himself with shaking hands. “And we should move fast before someone notices we’re here.”
Kylo Ren was sulking, but it was a functional sulk— the sort of sulk where you could do things— so nobody called him out on it.

“Are you sure you can’t find her?” he asked Mitaka again, staring at the uninjured door Rey had somehow phased through without the hall monitor in front of it noticing.

“I mean, that’s what everyone looking for her told me…” Mitaka said slowly.

“She going to try to get out, lock down the entrances.” Kylo snapped, then stiffened. Something felt familiar. It was like a smell, the memories it brought back were vague and primal, but strong.

“Dad?” he said, mostly to himself, but loudly enough for Mitaka to look concerned. They’d been in school together for years, and they got along well enough even before Snoke.

“Um, Ben?” Mitaka said, wary and worried. Kylo gave him a withering look.

“Just make sure no one gets out.” he instructed, and whirled off, his fit of pique giving into dark purpose with well practiced ease.
Empty Schools Are Terrifying, Should Be The Setting For Everything, Probably

Chapter Summary

It took a while to get this one up, but I think it's the longest chapter so far. We're moving into the home stretch here, nothing but daddy issues and fight scenes from here on out. Love you all so much. If you're still reading you have the patience of a saint.

Rey crept along the corridors, catlike, dodging into doorways at the slightest noise, every muscle tense and every nerve on edge. She could feel the adrenaline rushing through her veins and the fight or flight instincts that had been dormant for the past fortnight awakening. She’d taken a wrong turn somewhere and ended up on the second floor, and now she was searching desperately for a staircase back down.

A pair of hall monitors strode past, arguing about which computer lab they were supposed to be going to. From her hiding place in the girl's bathroom, Rey listened to them walk off, then crept out of her hiding place and went back to checking doors for the elusive stairwell.

She heard the footsteps echoing behind her and the warning whisper of, “I told you it was Lab 3,” too late.

Rey fumbled for the doorknob of the classroom next to her and found it locked. It looked like her luck had run out, some teacher clearly knew how to do their job, or perhaps the janitor had absentmindedly locked it where he had left the others, or maybe the room was just out of use. She darted to the next door down the row but the hall monitors were already running at her, shouting, “Stop!”

She threw the door open and dived inside, looked around frantically, and found no obvious hiding places. No closet, no bulky furniture, nothing. Just sad old desks, a folding table with a computer on it, a much abused Smartboard, and maps covering the walls. The room had seen better days, a few of the plaster ceiling panels were missing, revealing wiring and ducts and beams.

The pants and reverberating footfalls of her pursuers echoed down the hallway. It was long but she still had seconds, at best.

Rey bared her teeth, climbed on a desk, and jumped.

The empty kitchen was cold.

Even the engine hum of the big freezer couldn’t warm up the stainless steel surfaces and tile floor.

Finn shivered and walked a little faster, talking as he did. The sword Maz had pushed on him was now strapped to his back, an awkward weight and pressure against his shoulder blades. “The breaker room is off of the gym, but we’ll have to find a key somewhere.”
“Wait just a second,” Han said, “you said you knew how to get in. You didn’t say anything about a key.”

“I know how to get in; with a key.” Finn stopped and glared. “And I want to find Rey first.”

Han hesitated. “Leia said the fuses need to be our first priority.” He didn’t sound convinced.

“But we don’t even know what’s happening to her! They could be hurting her, or something.”

“They wouldn’t dare,” Han said grimly. “I’d agree with you, but everyone is counting on us. The faster we get the power off, the faster we can go find her, okay?”

Finn relented. Chewie gave him a hug, which he accepted, if only because it was so chilly.

“Now, what’s your plan for getting the key to the fuse room?” Han asked.

Now that, that was a bit of a problem. Finn stammered, and then stuttered to a stop under Han and Chewie’s baleful gazes. “We could- we could use the Force?” he suggested, weakly.

He didn’t need Han to translate Chewie’s roar of syllables. Apparently that wasn’t how it worked. Shame.

He ran through all the other possibilities. Find the janitor, maybe? But he had probably already gone home, it was almost six. He tried to recall who else had a set of keys. Snoke, obviously, but he wasn’t an option. Ren was similarly out of the running. Hux, maybe? And…..

“I have an idea.” Finn grinned, “Come on, we’ve got to go fast.”

Rey, he thought, we’re coming.

The hall monitors stumbled through the door, shouting too loudly for Rey to make out the words. They skidded to a halt and surveyed the apparently empty room.

“Um.”

“Hey, come out!” the other one shouted, and her words echoed sadly.

“We know you’re in here!”

“Yeah!”

There was an awkward silence, Rey tried not to move, or even to breath, as assorted scuffing and banging noises testified to an energetic search going on below her. Eventually even that faded into embarrassed quietude.

“One of us should go get Hux,” the first hall monitor whispered. There was fear in his voice, and Rey had to suppress a giggle when she realized that to their eyes she had essentially disappeared into thin air, like a ghost.
“I’ll go with you,” the other offered, and they both backed out of the room. This time Rey was careful. She waited a solid three minutes before shimmying back up the length of the vent, out of the shadows of the ceiling. She looked around carefully, then dropped to the ground with a muffled thud that made her wince, barely managing to avoid crashing into a desk or three.

She rushed over to the windows on the far side of the room and started shimmying them open. They wouldn’t go more than two feet, but that was enough for her slight frame to slide through.

The brick outside walls of the school gave just enough hand and footholds for a careful climb down. She could make it, she thought.

Rey hoped the Force came with healing abilities too.

Poe wasn’t the tallest person in his grade, or the strongest, or even the most handsome (though he made an effort to at least hit the top ten). What he was, was friendly.

People liked Poe. It was hard not to.

He already had friends among the kids clustered outside the school. There was Peet and Theo, Kare and Ello. Even L’Ulo and Mr. Nunb, their erstwhile chaperones, gave Poe friendly nods. There was an atmosphere of tension, but also one of excitement, everyone talking amongst themselves and glancing up the road to the school.

Bebe Eight was still tapping furiously away at his kidnapped phone, looking grave. Poe resisted the urge to pinch his cheeks and gave the boy a serious nod instead. “How’s it going, Bebe?”

Bebe looked around before standing on his tiptoes and gesturing for Poe to lean over for a whisper conference. Poe obliged, slightly concerned. Bebe wasn’t one for secrecy, most of the time.

“I’m worried.”

“It’s okay, little dude. Just spill.”

Bebe Eight gnawed on his lower lip pensively. “It’s just, I’m not sure cutting the power will work? I don’t think it actually runs on our power grid.”

Poe blinked and Bebe kept talking, low and fast, rocking back and forth on the balls of his feet. “It knocked out so many systems, and the town infrastructure isn’t that connected. It even got all the traffic lights near the school and they’re definitely on a closed circuit! So maybe it’s more of an EMP thing?”

Poe mulled this over. He wasn’t a tech guy, but he was a good student. Getting solid Bs made it easier to balance his extracurriculars. And more importantly, he knew an opening when he heard one.
“You’re saying we need to go help?” he asked.

“Maybe.” Bebe nodded. “The plan right now won’t work if they dragged up the emergency generator and used that, then let the EMP mess with the rest of it. I mean, it’s what I would do.”

Poe wasn’t sure that was real science, but he was prepared to buy it if it supported his goals. Bebe had only led him wrong a few times before. He hoisted himself onto the hood of the nearest car, standing shakily and waiting for everyone to turn to look at him.

“Hey, guys,” he said, trying to keep his voice casual, without sacrificing reach. “I know we’re supposed to stay here, but Bebe just told me he’s worried that the current plan may not work, that the layout of the whole thing may be a little different than we expected,” Keep it vague, Dameron, he thought. “I propose, we go in and hit them hard, make sure they can’t pull their whole “Starkiller” thing again.”

There were murmurs of excitement from Poe’s gang, but they were quickly silenced by Mr. Nunb’s disappointed sigh.

“Poe,” he said, “You heard Mrs. Organa. We’re to wait here. I know you kids want to be a part of things but I thought you- at least- wouldn’t disappoint your idol.” There was a hint of irony, and a lot more honesty. Poe had always known starting the Leia Organa Fanclub when he was six and she was president of the PTA would backfire on him.

“Haha, very funny,” Poe put his hands on his hips and nudged Bebe Eight, “I’m serious, Bebe thinks something is wrong. Tell them, Bebe.”

Bebe launched into a chirping recitation of technical statistics, while Poe tried to communicate to Jessika that they should start finding baseball bats, or possibly projectile weapons. They needed to get a move on if they wanted to be a part of the action, and save the day.

Mr. Nunb was the only thing standing in their way. L’Ulo was a chill guy, he’d go along with anything, but Nien Nunb wasn’t so easily swayed.

Point of fact, he wasn’t looking at all convinced by Bebe Eight’s increasingly meek arguments that the entire town would probably be destroyed if they didn’t go punch Hux in his smarmy face. It was time for Poe to step in.

He slid off the car hood and smiled ingratiatingly.

“Come on, sir. You’re always telling us stories about your time with the Rebellion, fighting the power. Making the world a better place. You weren’t that old then—”

“I was twenty four.” Mr. Nunb pointed out, crossing his arms. “You’re thirteen.”

“*The point is,*” Poe continued, “Freedom knows no age limit. Sometimes you have to break some rules to do what’s right. If there is even the smallest chance that Bebe Eight is right, we need to act on it.”

“Or, we could call Mrs. Organa and ask her opinion.”

“And give away their position! Put them all in danger! Honestly, sir, I thought I knew you. We need decisive action, like you took when you helped out in the Death Star raids.”

“*Poe!* I am not disobeying orders and putting children in danger on the basis of a vague idea. We are
not sinking to their level and using kids to fight this fight. That’s final.” He had a good stern face, Mr. Nunb. Poe had lived in fear of it as a third grader. He was older and wiser now, but still a little bit intimidated by the unimpressed glare of a veteran rebel.

“Sir, I’m afraid I can’t obey,” Poe told him. “I know you think I just want to get in on the action and I do, I’m teenager. I’m supposed to be impulsive and self righteous. But I also trust Bebe, and he’s worried. He’s really worried. I’m worried. My parents are in there and I’m scared for them and for my friends. I got interrogated at my own school earlier, I had to hide under the librarian’s desk to get out. Jessika punched a guy in the face so we could find Mrs. Organa.

“We’ve all been dealing with Snoke, with his stupid rules and weird mini-cult for months now while you and the grownups figured out what to do. You can’t lock us out now. Not if people are in danger, not if our families are in danger. You're not saving us, you're just keeping us from helping ourselves.” he took a deep breath. “Finn’s a good kid, and I like Mr. Solo and everything but I know what can go wrong in there. You guys raised us to stand up in for what we believe in, to take action to do what’s best for our community. And we’re going to. The only question now is whether you’re going to be there to supervise us or not.”

Phasma was sort of a hands on the ground leader. Hux was weird and rich, Kylo was flat out weird, but Phasma Argent knew everyone’s name and number. She arrived early every morning, stayed after every day, patrolled the halls of the school in between every class, and kept a perfect 3.5 gpa. Finn was pretty sure she was some sort of terrifying platinum blonde robot, but he had to give her credit, when she started something she never stopped until it was finished.

Her adherence to rules and schedules was her greatest strength. Finn hoped with the right push it could be her greatest weakness as well.

Han kept peering around the corner, despite Finn’s warnings that Phasma would bolt if even one thing was suspicious. Finally Chewie stepped in front of him, pushing him back and leaving Finn to make the calls.

At a quarter past, Finn started to panic.

Maybe she wasn’t coming today, maybe she was holed up in the computer lab with Hux. Maybe he’d miscalculated, it wasn’t like he had her schedule memorized or anything. He just knew the general path, the same one he’d walked a thousand times. Maybe they’d missed her.

When the sound of footsteps finally reached his ears, he almost fainted out of pure relief. He gestured for Han and Chewie to be quiet, and found that even quiet wasn’t quite quiet enough. He could hear their breathing, a three part round, whistling through the air. Surely she would notice. Surely they would fail.

She didn’t even hesitate before walking right into their trap.

Chewie grabbed her more gently than Finn thought she deserved, oddly careful with everything and everyone around him even mid-kidnapping, and they retreat, an awkward shuffle backwards into the media closet where all the old projectors are stored even though no one uses them anymore.
Phasma looked less shaken than one would expect from someone jumped in the school hall by two local town legends and one of her former lackeys. Finn turned to Han, only to find Han already looking to him. Oh. Apparently it was his rodeo now.

He tried to look like a self assured revolutionary, but rather suspected the end effect was less rebellious and more constipated. He was all too aware of the sword on his back, his dirty clothes, Poe's battered jacket. “Remember me?”

Phasma raised an eyebrow. “21. I knew you would come back.”

“Yeah? Well… I did. I did come back. My name is Finn, and I’m in charge! Not you.” It felt good to not be keeping quiet and toeing the line, to say what he really felt. His shout may have been a little louder than necessary, but some things happened when you were a rebel with a cause.

“No.” Han muttered in an undertone.

Finn’s cheeks burned and he tried to fight off the rising blush. “Right. We need the keys, Phasma. I know you have one to the boiler room and you’re going to give it to me.”

Phasma considered this. “No.”

Finn faltered, before settling on a brilliant retort. “Yes!”

“I won’t.” Phasma said, eyeing Chewie like she was seriously considering making a break for the door.

Han put one hand on Finn’s shoulder and said softly, “Mind if I take over?” Finn was all too happy to give way. It was harder than he expected, being around Phasma again. Phasma who he had hated and feared and admired in equal parts. Phasma who still terrified him, though he didn’t want to admit it.

“Hey,” Han said gently, keeping some distance between himself and Phasma. His hands were at his sides, palm up, entirely nonthreatening except for the fact that he was Han Solo and therefore slightly gruff by default. “Look, I know you’re just a kid,” Phasma glared. “Or, a young adult. A very brainwashed young adult, might I add. And even if you don’t realize it right now, brainwashed as you are, we are doing the right thing. Trying to keep a lunatic from destroying this town again. Anything named Starkiller isn’t a good sign, am I right? So if you could just give us those keys....”

“No.” Phasma repeated. “I will not, Solo.” she said the name like it was a curse word. “If you want them, you’ll have to take them.” Han took a step back, but the shock faded quickly, replaced by a smile.

“Okay then,” he said matter of factly. “Like the outfit by the way. Very professional.” Finn blinked, nonplussed. Phasma was dressed sharply, yes. She always was. Dark trousers and button down shirts and expensive fleeces, cut tall because she was tall, intimidatingly so.

Han continued. “My wife wears that exact same brand of pants. Always complains that they don’t have pockets. So if hers don’t have pockets, and you didn’t have a bag…” he stepped in and carefully lifted the lanyard hidden by her collar away from her neck. Phasma didn’t fight it, just glowered. A handful of keys gleamed on the end of the string, felt between them so they wouldn’t make noise.

“Probably for the best.” Han said ruefully. “I didn’t want to have to frisk a little girl. Now, can we leave her in here?” He addressed the last question to Finn. Finn nodded quickly.
“Yeah,” he said confidently “The only reason I even know about this place is because Ciena Ree and Thane Kyrell made out in here a lot two years ago and nobody heard them until they accidentally knocked down a stack of boxes and he broke his arm. It should be good.”

“Great.: Han said tossing the lanyard up and them snatching it out of the air. “Don’t suppose one of these locks it?”

“We can try,” Finn suggested. He knew he shouldn’t be happy about locking anyone in a closet, but he was definitely reassured by the idea of Phasma being out for the count for a while.

They walked out carefully, making sure that Phasma didn’t make a break for it, and managed to lock the door with what Finn thought was one of the janitorial keys. He only gave it about fifteen minutes till she broke out, but at least that was a headstart.

Han seemed less confident. “What if there’s a fire?” he whispered to Chewie. Chewie’s response was long and complicated, but it seemed to have a soothing effect on Han. “Yeah, right. Okay.”

Finn tugged on his sleeve impatiently. “Come on, let’s go.” They didn’t have much time. They had to get to the boiler room and find the main fusebox, or the entire plan failed. He wasn’t letting Rey languish in captivity so they could dawdle.

“Lead the way,” Han ordered, still looking unsettled. He’d have to figure things out on the way, Finn decided, and took off at a headfirst jog, down the echoing corridors, Maz’s sword smacking his shoulder blades with every step.

Left at the music hallway, then right again. They were making more noise than he would have imagined possible, every footfall and breath tripled by the emptiness, and eventually Finn had to slow down. It wouldn’t do to get caught before they could reach the gym.

Slow, steady steps, past the bathrooms. They’d be the most likely place for a hall monitor to catch them. Next the locker rooms, another possible threat. Finn paused by the stairs that reached down to the photography classrooms and interminable storage areas, and Han and Chewie stopped with him. He took some small comfort in the fact that they seemed to be much more out of breath.

“Okay, there’s two entrance to the gym, this one and the one that leads outside. Boiler room is to the left, sharp turn as soon as you’re inside the door. I’ll hold this doorway, one of you guys get the other one, and the third person gets the fuseboxes…” he trailed off. Han and Chewie weren’t paying attention to him. They were looking down the stairs instead.

There was a gasp behind him, soft, barely noticeable and… not familiar but knowable somehow. He might not have heard it before, but he could picture the gasper instantly.

Finn turned and saw Rey, standing a few steps below him.

She rushed up the last few steps and threw herself into a hug Finn hadn’t even realized he was holding his arms open for. They stayed that way for a few seconds, rocking gently, arms warm around each other.

Han cleared his throat.

“Hey, you okay?” he said, baseline gruffness soaring to new heights. Rey pulled away from Finn a little bit, but not entirely, and looked at her uncle.

“Yeah, I’m okay.”
“Good.” he said and Chewie roared in agreement.

“What happened?” Finn asked, “Is your head okay? Did you get hurt?”

Rey ignored the questions. “What are you doing here?” she asked instead, slightly baffled, staring at him, at the sword, at the entire scene.

“We… we came back for you.” Finn said. “To rescue you, but I guess you took care of that. How?”

Rey laughed breathlessly, and hugged Finn again, before detaching herself from him and diving at Han. Han patted her on the back awkwardly, but seemed somewhat miffed when she dropped him and embraced Chewie just as tightly.

“I can’t explain it, and I don’t think you’d believe me if I tried.” she told them, “Thank you though, for coming back.”

Finn smiled, just as overjoyed and relieved as she was. “That’s what friends are for. Now, we were going to go into the gym, there’s something we need to do for Ms. Organa, and we’ve gotta do it fast.”

“We’ll explain on the way.” Han said, nodding to the double doors, technically in front of them but seeming miles away. “Come on.”

They sprinted down the last stretch of hallway, sticking close to one another, and crashed like a wave through the doors.

The first thing Finn saw was light, seeping under the doors and through the narrow windows set in them and he thought, ‘that’s not right, it should be dark in there’. As they pressed forward, into the gym, the light intensified. Someone had turned on all the harsh incandescent ceiling lamps, and they shone down on the polished gym floor inlaid with mythical zillo beasts and the school’s name in black print, reflected off the shiny metal bleachers marching up the left wall.

All except one place, a little blob of blackness at first glance, and then as Finn’s eyes adjusted to the light, a person. A Kylo person.

They skidded to a halt and Han’s breath stopped so sharply for a second Finn worried he’d had a heart attack. Instead he seemed frozen with shock.

In all fairness, even without the family issues involved, Finn didn’t want to pick a fight with Kylo Ren.

On the other hand, it had been that kind of day.
Yeah, It's Not Great That The Town Is In Crisis, But Poe Has Been Waiting For A Chance To Give Military Orders Like This Since He Was Five, Let Him Have This

Chapter Notes

Happy Thanksgiving, Americans! Happy Thursday to the rest of you. Election sent me on a bit of a tail spin, but I'm trying to get back to writing again. So, short little chapter for this. A bit anticlimactic, but I promise the fight scene next chapter is going to be epic if I can figure out how to write it. Love you all!

Han stepped in front of them, arms outstretched. Rey could see his shoulders shaking with barely contained emotion.

She was new to familial betrayal, and she couldn’t guess at what Han might be feeling. She knew how she felt though; angry. Angry and scared and confused, because this wasn’t how family was supposed to go. It wasn’t supposed to be this complicated.

She reached out and grabbed Finn’s hand, and squeezed hard. He squeezed back and that was enough.

Her eyes were clearer now, and she could properly take stock of things. Ben was on the bleachers, and he was holding something thin and metallic. It looked like a sword, but a skinny one.

Rey scowled and whispered, “What’s he doing with that? Is he going to stab us to death?”

Finn shrugged. “He fences, I think. So maybe?”

She’d had more than enough swords for the day. The one slung loosely over Finn’s shoulder was still making her feel uncomfortable, though it hadn’t moved into full on flashback territory yet.

Chewie was moving, tiny shuffling motions, trying to stand in front of them. Trying to shield them from view, Rey realized. He and Han were close to each other now, close enough for Chewie to put a hand on his friend’s shoulder and Han to clasp it affectionately, a mirror of what Rey and Finn were doing, a small reassurance in the face of a storm.

Han cleared his throat loudly. “Ben!” he said, his voice cracking. “Ben, why don’t you come down here. I- I know you don’t like me but can’t you come talk?”

Silence.

“I’ll come up and talk to you then,” Han declared. He seemed smaller, somehow. The vastness of the gym dwarfed him, negated his usual larger than life presence. Ben, standing still as a statue on the bleachers, didn’t help.

Han’s footsteps were loud in the cavernous space, louder than they should have been. Every one seemed laboured, an exercise in terrible intent.
Rey was frozen, staring at the scene, but Chewie was not. He was in front of them now, and Rey had to crane to see around him, and he had stretched an arm back and had grabbed Finn’s hand.

Then he dropped it and Finn was tugging on Rey’s sleeve. Something shone between his fingers, a key ring. Keys. Chewie had passed him keys.

Rey replayed the sequence of hand holding in her brain, compared it with the few drug exchanges she had been privileged enough to witness, and realized Han and Chewie had been trying to get something- the keys- to them.

Was this what they had to do for Aunt Leia?

Finn tugged again and pointed to a door to their right, hidden by the bulk of the bleachers. Well within Ben’s line of vision, but if he was distracted…. 

Being the last to clue in on a plan was always frustrating.

Uncle Han made his clanking, straining way up the bleachers, as Rey and Finn crawled towards their target.

Ben was still silent as the grave, and that more than anything scared her.

“Okay,” Poe said, in what his mom called a “command whisper.” Soft enough to be subtle, controlled enough to carry just as far as you wanted it to. “Mr. Nunb, sir, you’ll take Theo, Bebe, Peet, and Oddy and be our technical squadron. Try to unplug as much stuff as possible, disrupt… whatever’s happening. You guys are the smartest so you’ve got the best chances.”

Mr. Nunb still looked highly reluctant about the entire operation, and especially reluctant about taking orders from a former student. Poe tacked on a “Please?” and he gave an unenthusiastic nod.

“Kare, L’Ulo,” Poe continued. “I want you guys to cover exits and make sure no one gets to Mrs. Organa and the other people going after Snoke. I’ve texted her, but they probably have their phones turned off. So, Kaydel,” he gestured to a small blonde seventh grader with buns, “Your job is to run over there and find them, without letting anyone know we’re here. Just clue them in.”

Kare wasn’t thrilled with her assignment either, she was one of the few highschool students in their group and she and her little cluster of ninth and eighth grade friends weren’t a force to be trifled with. But she couldn’t argue that it was a good idea to put the most experienced people on crowd control, so she tossed her braids over her shoulder and gave Poe a smirk.

“That leaves me, Jess, Snap, Ello, Zolo… is Zolo here? No? Shame. Okay, us and everyone else are the distraction. Be big, be loud, make Hux’s flunkies panic.”

“But do not start a brawl.” Mr. Nunb warned. “We’re not here for you all to pick a fight, this isn’t the playground and you are not children anymore. The point is to make sure that they’re as disarmed as
we can get them. Disable any alternative powersource they might have, take control of the computers. That is all.”

“Right,” Poe agreed quickly. “Non lethal stuff only. Just, kinda… try to herd them into a corner or something. All clear?”

There was a chorus of muttered affirmations. Poe stood up from his crouch and glanced around the corner. They were just a few turns away from the computer science hallway.

“Okay, let’s give five minutes for everyone to get in position. Then, we charge. Remember, as long as the lights are still on, we’ve got to keep fighting.”

“You’re going to shout charge aren’t you?” Snap whispered as the group broke up into whispering factions and Kaydel sprinted away.

“Maybe.”

“I’m disappointed in you, Dameron.”

“You never cared about me!” Ben shouted. It was a shout that wasn’t really a shout, was something far more tormented. Han’s voice raised to contradict him and Ben countered until Rey couldn’t hear words anymore, just raw emotion.

Betrayal, hate. So much love it made her heart ache.

Finn’s head was still bent over the lock, but every time Ben or Uncle Han spoke his shoulders hunched, until his head seemed to be trying to retreat into his torso.

“Try the other one,” Rey urged. “The blue one.”

“I tried that already,” Finn breathed, not even risking a fully fledged whisper. “It didn’t work.”

Every second they spent on the lock the chances grew greater than Ben would glance their way. Rey wasn’t sure what would happen then, but she didn’t like any of the possibilities.

Finn shoved another key on the ring into the lock and tried to turn it, to no avail. There were, in Rey’s opinion, far too many keys. They were four down and there seemed to be another five or six to go.

She glared at the door handle, like she could glare the locking mechanism into submission, as Finn tested another key, and then another. The next one worked, thank the Force. (Whatever that was.) With a click and an all too loud creak, the door opened. She and Finn slid inside, creating several more creaks in the process. Fortunately Ben seemed way too caught up in his now hissed conversation with his father to pay any attention.

Only once they were inside the dark room and Finn was fumbling for a lightswitch beside her, did she feel confident enough to whisper, “What are we supposed to be doing here?”
“Killing the power.” Finn said. “There should be fuseboxes and stuff in here. We just need to… unfuse them, or whatever.”

“Flip the main switch?” Rey asked.

“Yeah. Or failing that, flip all of them.” Finn grinned as the lights flicked on in the little room.

Pipes, furnaces, and water tanks filled the not in-significant space, making it feel cramped. The ceiling was crowded with vents. On the walls to either side of the door were a series of electrical boxes.

To Rey, it felt a little bit like home. She might not understand small town cults or X-Men superpowers, but she'd spent a lot of time hanging out with janitors at her old school. Mechanics came naturally to her.

“Right, you take that side and I’ll take this one. Do you know how to flip a circuit?”

Finn was already opening up the nearest panel and studying it. “I guess you flip it to off?” he hazarded. Rey peered over his shoulder.

“Right. There’s a main switch at the top too, but it looks like there are multiple panels. It is a big school, I guess.”

Finn nodded, already reaching up for the main switch and moving on to the next panel down the line. Rey followed suit, attacking the electrical circuits like they had personally insulted her family.

After all, in this town, with her family, there was a possibility that they had.

The two of them flew from panel to panel, flipping switches and slamming the metal doors shut. The time for silence was clearly far behind them. Outside something was happening, Rey could hear it- or feel it? Something whispered in the back of her head, and now, after Ben’s story, she wasn’t quite certain it was sound.

Finn let out a whoop as the light in the gym, visible as a sliver of brightness under the door, flickered off. Rey jumped to give him a highfive, and looked around the room, making sure that there wasn’t anything she had missed. It didn’t look like it. She turned to the last circuit breaker, the one labelled “Maintenance (Gymnasium)”, and flipped it.

The room went dark. Rey could hear her breathing, and Finn’s, could feel a sudden swell of strange, hollow rage rise low in her chest.

There was a crash followed by a low, dull thud and then a roar . The sort of sound someone made when they were about to make a Berserker charge.

Rey scrambled for the door, hearing Finn right behind her. She flung it open, and nearly tripped over the body on the floor.

Uncle Han was sprawled out, limbs at strange angles. In front and above them, Ben peered over the side of the bleachers, looking more startled than anything.

Chewie was still shouting, hoarse and helpless, as he ran towards them and bent over Han. Ben disappeared, and only then was Rey able to refocus on Han, who lay unmoving on the floor.

It wasn’t a very high fall. The old telescoping bleachers only went up about six rows. But if he’d hit his head…. Rey didn’t want to think about that.
“We gotta get the van,” Finn muttered. Rey realized belatedly that they’d ended up holding hands again. His palm was sweaty and her hands were trembling.

“Yeah.” she nodded. “Get the van, call an ambulance, or something. And then I’m going to kick my cousin’s ass.”
Happy Rogue One week! This story is almost finished! I think there's only one more chapter to go. Thanks for hanging around so long, everyone.

I've been promising Maz would do something since the beginning, that was actually one of the founding concepts of the story- "Maz has an impact on the climax of the plot"- and after a whole year the day of Mazening has finally arrived.

Kaydel took the empty hallways as a personal challenge. She might not have made Track this year, but she had been the star of her Little League team. She knew how to slide.

And slide she did, slipping and stumbling down the halls at a speed that definitely would have gotten her detention during school hours and probably would have made her mother give her a lecture about breaking her neck. She was a woman on a mission, and the fact that said mission involved personally hand delivering a super secret message to Leia Organa was all the motivation she needed.

She had been accused of having a tiny crush on Mrs. Organa, but honestly she didn't think it was any worse than Jessika’s crush on Poe’s mom, or Poe’s total infatuation with the very air Mrs. Organa breathed. The heart wanted what it wanted, and at 14 Kaydel thought it just wanted a hero. Someone to idolize, someone to want to become. Someone to nearly faceplant into a bank of lockers for.

Heroism felt weirder when you were actually performing it, but maybe that was just part of growing up.

Rey and Finn ran towards the blacktop facing exit, elbows slamming into each other, Rey’s hair flying in Finn’s face. Tripping over each other’s feet seemed a much better option than being separated.

Kylo was in the doorway, looking more bewildered than angry. Finn glanced back at the other door, the one to the lockers, but it was too far from the Falcon that way.

Kylo-Ben had a sword in his hand, a fencing saber that looked significantly more lethal than anything sport related should have been.
(Their school didn’t even have a fencing club, Finn remembered dully. He probably had to take it at the highschool. That wasn’t reassuring.)

The sword Maz had pressed on him was longer, heavier, more rusted. A weapon of war, however ceremonial. He swung it off his back awkwardly, and unsheathed, wincing at the long forgotten rasp.

Rey grabbed his arm. “Do you even know how to use that?” she hissed.

“Do you?” Finn whispered back, hoping secretly that she did and would take it from him. Instead she leaned back.

“I am not touching that thing!”

Chewbacca yelled something at them and Rey shuddered, then shouted at her cousin. “He needs to get to a hospital! Let us through!”

There was a moment of hesitation, then… “Where did you get that sword?” Kylo demanded furiously. “I know it!”

Chewie was carrying Han towards them and Han was limp as a doll and there was no time for arguments, Finn realized.

He was terrified. He charged anyway.

Rey let out a deafening yell and ran after him, and the two of them almost caught Kylo off guard, for a second. He stumbled backwards, out the double doors and into the darkness beyond.

The sun had disappeared behind the buildings and all there was now was the soft glow of early evening. The parking lot behind the gym was painted with hopscotch squares and meter markings for when the runners got banished back there. The mural the art class last year had painted on the walls looked eerie in the dark, Finn knew, and he tried not to look back at the gym’s facade as he and Rey gave chase.

Kylo seemed to have recovered his footing however. He parried the first careful swing Finn made, trying to menace without doing any actual damage, and nearly knocked the heavy blade from Finn’s grip entirely. Rey’s attempted tackle was neatly dodged, and then they were on the defensive.

Finn had watched movies, had played pirates and knights as a child with sticks and curtain rods, but this was so much different. Kylo didn’t even do the swashbuckling thing he expected from a fencer, no quick movements. He looked like he wanted to be fighting with a broadsword, not a skinny little foil.

Nighttime chill had set in fast, and all there was to do was to keep moving. Keep Kylo distracted as Chewie sprinted past them, then… figure something out.

He tried to parry, nearly tripped, resettled his footing while Rey shouted incoherent insults in an attempt at distraction. He couldn’t quite see Kylo, he was a shadow against shadows, but if he squinted he could make out his stance and try to copy it.

The next desperate lunge he successfully blocked. If he held the sword with both hands it was steadier, and he could push back, make Kylo stumble.

Two parries, a flubbed sword swirl straight out of Pirates of The Caribbean that still made him feel a little more badass, made him feel like he could win. Kylo still had the advantage, was still pressing him back, but wasn’t that how all the movie duels started. If Finn swung with all his strength, used
the weight of his weapon to his advantage, watched, was fast enough, clever enough, he could really get somewhere.

The uneven tarmac was familiar to him. He’d walked it often enough before. He jumped a pothole Kylo stumbled in and spun, tried not to look in the dead eyes of the abstract faces looming over them.

From the corner of his eye he could see Rey covering Chewie’s escape, arms flung wide like she could shield the world, and when her uncles were a safe distance away she darted back into the gym. Finn turned his head to follow her, and Kylo struck.

Finn blocked the sword coming down at him, but just barely. The angle wasn’t right, he could feel it, but he couldn’t move. He couldn’t.

It had happened before, a long time ago. Phasma had been handing out assignments in office after school and Kylo had been sulking in the corner and there had been some fight, Finn remembered. He’d tried to stay out of it but Hux had been shouting and Kylo had been shouting and some poor brave souls had tried to intervene and then Principal Snoke himself had emerged from his office like fury from the depths of the earth and *none of them could move*.

Finn tried to shift stance, but Kylo was leaning in and his shoulder was twisting strangely and it was all wrong. Wrong in a way that he felt at the bottom of his soul, like how people described the ruins of Alderaan House or whispered about ghosts out in the desert.

The was a scream that was unmistakeably Rey and a basketball hurtled out of the darkness at them. Kylo ducked and it bounced off the wall, but it was enough.

The spell broke, as if it had never been real.

Unfortunately the damage was done. Finn had a one handed grip on the sword, which wasn’t nearly enough. His arms hurt and his shoulder ached and Kylo was wearing a snarl that seemed almost unearthly as he lunged.

Finn tried to block, but Kylo twisted somehow, using his grip to lever Finn’s hold into something entirely untenable.

The sword clattered as it hit the pavement, but Kylo didn’t pay much attention. He was advancing on Finn now, worryingly intent.

The wall was behind him, brick and cheap paint in garish colours. Finn couldn’t see Rey, couldn’t see much of anything, to be honest. Fear and nighttime collaborated to heighten his tunnel vision.

The sword was out of reach, somewhere in the gloom behind Kylo. Running wasn’t an option, unfortunately. At least not without Rey.

There was no point in running, he’d realized, unless you had something to run to.

His shoulder really, *really* hurt.
The main problem with being a messenger turned out to be finding the people you were supposed to deliver the message to.

Kaydel had peered around a corner into the foyer- no grownups. The hallway outside the little office block was similarly empty.

What would someone smart sneaking up on a principal from hell do? What would Leia Organa do?

There was a set of bathrooms just off the nurse’s office, big and better cleaned than the other ones because the administrators used them more frequently. Kaydel checked all around her, made sure the First Order goon at the front desk was well and truly distracted on his phone, then slipped into the girls bathroom.

She caught a glimpse of familiar faces before someone grabbed her from the side. Warm hands grasped her shoulders tightly, then loosened as recognition passed between them. Shara Bey patted Kaydel’s back gently as if to apologize for the fright.

“Poe texted us,” she said, resigned to her son’s antics. “I suppose you’re the messenger.”

Dr. Kalonia, her little sister’s pediatrician, gave Kaydel a reassuring smiled. “You’re Karrie K Connix’s older daughter, aren’t you? Could you give us the whole story? I’m afraid young Mr. Dameron was rather vague.”

There was nothing more surreal than trying to repeat Poe’s reasoning to a small citizen’s militia of stern but kind adults. For one thing, everything Poe had said sounded very rational in the moment, but was rather harder to justify to Mr. Statura and Chief Ackbar, Mr. Dodonna and Ms. Agate and the concerned-but-not-surprised Bey-Damerons.

“...Then Poe took everyone to go attack the computers.” Kaydel finished, weak and aware of it. “And I was supposed to, like, warn you. Well, I was supposed to warn Mrs. Organa. Where is she?”

She wasn’t a tall woman, so Kaydel supposed she could be hidden in the back of the little crowd, but it wasn’t like Mrs. Organa to be anything but the center of attention- to be in any role other than “in charge”.

Suddenly everyone else was looking at anything but her. It wasn’t like there was any stunning scenery either. They were in a bathroom. Not even one with good graffiti.

“Where is she?” Kaydel repeated.

Shara Bey’s dark eyes usually looked warm, but now they seemed as ancient as the expensive antique furniture at her grandparents.

“Maz Kanata pulled her away a few minutes ago.” Mr. Dameron said finally. “She told us to carry on without her, but we wanted to see what Poe was doing first, after his very helpful and detailed text to us.” There was barely hidden frustration in his voice. “You kids have really made things complicated. I don’t suppose you had a signal of some sort?”

Kaydel shook her head meekly.

Ackbar sighed, a breathy and complicated affair that went on so long Kaydel started to wonder how many lungs the man actually had. “Right well, we should move now before we lose the element of surprise. If we still have it already. The lights are still on, so I’m not optimistic. For all we know we
could be walking into a trap. Little miss, if you could stay in the back, please? Dameron, Lokmarcha, take point. Let’s assume.”

The lights flickered out on him mid sentence, plunging the bathroom into darkness. There was a little yelp from somewhere in the back and a rising tide of whispers. Kaydel found herself being gently shoved to the side, behind the towel dispenser and out of the way.

Ackbar’s voice cut above the buzz.

“That would be our signal! Let’s go, people!” Someone flung open the door and there was a controlled ruckus as everyone streamed out into the slightly more muted dark of the foyer.

Kaydel tried not to get lost in the crowd. She wasn’t going to disobey orders, but she didn’t want to miss everything either.

What was the point of being a hero if you didn’t get to enjoy the show?

The lights had flickered out before Poe could even finish his heroic pump up speech and everything had gone to heck.

Bebe couldn’t see over the people around him, only glimpse what was going on through gaps in the chaos, try to read the current of the crowd. Right now the current was moving forward, down the hallway and to the computer lab, despite Mr. Numb’s objections.

One room, two room, three room, four, down to lab that Bebe knew better than the back of his hand. No time for stealth, just effort and the power of friendship, which didn’t sound very tactically sound but worked for the Autobots on a regular basis.

As Poe and his vanguard crashed through the door there was a lot of shouting. Like, a lot- enough to make Bebe hesitate for a second before making up his mind.

Poe was a dork of epic proportions, but so was everyone in between the ages of 11 and 14, as far as Bebe could tell. It wasn’t their fault. And Poe was… cool. There wasn’t any other word for it. He was cool and nice and had seen a kid everyone else patronized and decided to take him in.

Bebe wouldn’t die for him, but he would kill for him, probably. If no grownups were watching.

He rocked back and forth a few times to center himself, then took the last quarter of the hallway running.

There was a generator shaped thing sitting in the middle of the room, and despite the shouting struggling sea of teenagers surrounding it, Bebe felt a certain amount of satisfaction, muted by the fact that things seemed to be happening despite the best efforts of Poe’s best and brightest. Computer screens were running, maps had been drawn. Hux was shouting something incomprehensible and really angry while standing on a desk- though the last one at least wasn’t as concerning. Hux liked
standing on things, and anyway Bebe could see Poe already eyeing him with dark intent.

Still, the situation wasn’t good. The room was dark, illuminated only by the glow of screens. Code ran in shining white against backgrounds of blue and black. All that was missing was an already pressed doomsday button and a countdown.

Bebe did what anyone under four feet did in a difficult situation would. He dropped to the ground and started crawling.

Snoke’s stupid evil minions had really done a job on Bebe’s fifth favorite classroom. The usually orderly long tables had been pulled into more of a rough square. Cables snaked across the floor, taped together in bunches and intersecting in big old fashioned power strips, yellow with age. People were tripping over cables, over each other. Bebe nearly got stepped on twice before he made the executive decision to shelter under a table.

The noise was distracting, the stakes were terrifying. He wasn’t a dumb, he knew what was going on, but sometimes he thought he was maybe a little too young to know what to do about it. It was easy to want to cry, to panic, to curl up in a ball and sob for his parents, like he had on the first day of sixth grade. Easy to worry about them and Rey and Finn, about Jess who he could hear yelling at the top of her lungs and Poe who was struggling his way over to Hux’s fortress of deskdom.

He wasn’t six anymore, he wasn’t afraid of the dark, but it wasn’t the most calming environment. His therapist definitely wouldn’t approve.

What had Poe said, he thought, trying to think through the fog of distraction and the impending meltdown. Start unplugging things. He could do that. He was eight. He could do that really well.

There was a powerstrip right next to him, but rather than bother with unplugging every cable connected to it individually, Bebe just grabbed the whole thing and tugged until the larger cord connecting it to the hulking generator in the middle of the room slackened. The blue glow directly above him lessened. There was a shout above the shouting, but he ignored it, focusing on the snaking wires around him, above him. He crawled along, feeling with his hands until the power cords started to clump together again and started pulling, as the fight above him only grew in volume and apparent ferocity.

He needed to think bigger, he realized. The generator, it wasn’t just a generator. It couldn’t be.

It was hard to think in terms of science amid all the ruckus, but he’d read enough books about intrepid mechanically minded heroes. Surely he could remember what he’d been telling Poe earlier, about evil plans and EMPs.

Surely, a generator couldn’t be that big? Unless it was just for dramatic effect- you couldn’t rule out dramatic effect. Still, he knew in his heart that the big ominous piece of machinery in the center of everything was important. It had to be, it was the laws of science fiction.

Wading through the mess of friends and foes around it was out of the question. The “First Order” was putting up a pretty good fight trying to keep them away. But maybe if he could climb on a table and jump, or get Jess to do it…

There was a thud from across the room. Based on the change in the overall tone of shouting, it seemed Poe had tackled Hux.

Poe was so cool.
Rey was in the middle of fishing another basketball out of the big bag she’d hauled in from the sports room, when the air turned electric and Finn froze up like he’d just been shocked. She could feel a wrongness in the air. Like a bad smell that had bypassed her nose entirely and just hit her brain.

The sword- that awful sword- fell out of Finn’s hands and Ben started stalking towards him with as much menace as a skinny guy in black jeans could muster. In the darkness, with her friend’s safety on the line, she was willing to be terrified of anything.

The mesh bag of balls was quickly tossed to the side, as Rey strove to think of a plan. Something, anything.

Finn was backed up against the wall now, and she saw that she had no choice. She took a few steps forward, trying to be quiet but clearly failing. Ben turned to look at her, then at the ground in front of her. Rey abandoned all pretense, dove forward and started searching the ground for the sword. The stupid, possibly psychic sword.

Couldn’t they just hit each other with giant sticks like civilized people?

She couldn’t find it, and Ben was standing get closer. He had his hand out, like he could sense its presence or somehow summon it. They were psychic. She kept forgetting.

Finn was hunched over in the background, a blur that felt like pain and hurt and Ben had his eyes closed, intent. He was moving past Rey now, to the right and the dip where the ancient pavement had sunk low.

Rey stuck her hand out as well and prayed. Maybe not to any god, but to her father and whatever the hell the Force was. To herself.

Something flew out of the darkness, past Ben, and slammed into her hand. She fumbled, nearly dropped it, and recovered to find herself holding a sword, hilt first. The handle felt like it had at Maz’s, but not as violently. Dust and old leather and sorrow.

“Oh my gosh.” Finn said, in a whisper that still cut through the shocked silence between Rey and Ben. “What the hell was that?”

“The Force,” Ben sneered, and Rey shifted back, tried to hold the sword like she knew what she was doing. He was off balance, she could see it as clearly as she could see something in herself. Maybe they were cousins after all. They certainly made the same face when they were scared.

A sudden anger filled her, anger on the behalf of Finn and Han and Aunt Leia. She wanted to make him step back, make him let them go. She wanted to go home.

Running with a sword felt less dangerous than it should have. The hilt dug into her palms, it clearly wasn’t meant to be held two handed. But even when she leans her shoulders in and puts her whole body into the headlong rush forward, she doesn’t feel in danger of accidentally stabbing herself.
She was running straight at someone with a dull but still very dangerous looking sword, and she still doesn’t feel scared.

Confidence was intoxicating.

Ben didn’t back down, and that alone threw her off. She has no idea how to swing a sword, the weight of it is different in her hands, and she’s thrown off balance when he blocks her first wild blow.

She wanted to hold it like a walking stick, but she can’t and her instinct to try stabbing point first proves ineffective. Ben blocked everything, however clumsily, and she backed up a few steps, to the place where the blacktop is cracked and gouged and she can feel the unevenness under her feet.

“You need a teacher,” Ben said, his voice ragged, like he’s breathing heavily. Their blades were locked now, and she can’t think of a way to pull away that will work. “Someone to show you, the ways of the Force.”

The Force. Right. The Force that is real, she knows is real in an undeniable, awful way.

The Force that might just help her, if she can figure out how.

The sword was heavy in her hand, the pressure against her palms bringing back memories of things entirely un-combat related. Hiking with her father, England, copying the accent of the lady at the supermarket and her babysitters. Other memories that are not hers of crisp uniforms, solemn vows, ceremonies and sentimentality and fights more brutal than she can imagine, between people really trying to hurt each other.

She ducked to the left, let the swords skitter apart, kept low and spun and felt her confidence surge again. Ben seemed shocked, as much as she can tell in the low light, and she took full advantage of that, raining down blows, striking with the flat of the blade and not waiting for him to compose his defense.

One blow hit his leg, and she paused for a second, worried she actually hurt him before he climbs back up to his feet. That small success is enough. She doesn’t hesitate again.

She could feel Finn watching her, see him limping forward out of the corner of her eye, but he was smart enough to stay away from the whirl of weaponry. She wanted to shout at him to get out, find the Falcon, find Chewie and Han, but she couldn’t. She was winning, she thought, but that didn’t mean it didn’t take all of her energy to keep it that way.

Ben was looking desperate. She couldn’t tell if that was a good or a bad thing.

He launched himself forward, the swords an afterthought to pure grappling. Hands caught wrists, grips too hard on both sides as they tried not to fall over, tried to- well she wasn’t actually sure what they’re trying to do at this point. Not murder each other, surely. But maybe maim. Minorly injure. At the very least smack some sense into.

Rey was stronger than he was, and they both realized it too late. Ben was too lanky, too easy to topple, and she pushed him over until his the tip of his blade touched the pavement, then pushed more. The whole thing bent, and bent more as she continued shoving him over. For a second she almost thought it will snap, but instead it flies out of Ben’s hands. He stumbled back, and she kicked him squarely in the chest. He hit the ground and didn’t move.

The urge to hurt him, to scare him, was there. She wanted to be furious, for Finn who was now running towards her, for Han. She cannot want to hurt a family member though. It would break her
aunt’s heart. She let Finn take her hand, tried to figure out what to do as Ben struggled back up and bent down for his sword….

Someone grabbed him from behind, twisting his arm. Rey knew what it looked like, even if the assailant was apparently invisible.

“Benjamin Bail Organa,” a voice both beautiful and impossible to ignore said. “Your mother is going to be so angry with you.”

For the third or fourth time this night- Rey lost count- a sword hit the deck with a clang. Maz Kanata peered around Ben’s torso and gave Finn and Rey a firm nod.

“Your aunt will be right along. I think she wanted to check on your uncle first though.” she said. “I told you that sword called to you.”

Rey blinked, suddenly more tired than she’d ever been, and hastily handed the sword off to Finn. The sheath was still hanging from his shoulders, after all. She regretted the choice when Finn winced, and quickly took both sword and scabbard from him to put them back herself.

“I guess so.” she said, her throat feeling dry and small in a way that normal preceded tears.

“I think I dislocated my shoulder.” Finn said after a brief pause. There was an apologetic note to his words, like he’d somehow managed to injure himself with no outside interference or sword wielding maniacs involved. Maz clicked her tongue.

“I’ll look at that in just a moment, young man. Ah, Leia-”

Both Rey and Ben looked up as Leia Organa walked slowly across the parking lot towards them. She looked sad.

She looked scary.

Maz let go of Ben’s arm, and released him into his mother’s custody. Leia put a hand on his upper arm, restraining but not too tightly. He didn’t look like he was going anywhere. All the wild energy had gone out of him.

“Han- Uncle Han,” Rey asked, “is he going to be okay?”

Leia smiled a tight lipped smile. “Yes, I think so. Apparently the hospitals are all a jumble right now, but Dr. Kalonia had the foresight to hang back and Chewie took him around to see her. He’s probably concussed, but other than that seems to be stable.”

Her words were clinical, crisp, and did not betray the amount of heartbreak on her face. Rey felt a weight lift off her chest, and saw Ben’s posture mirror her’s bizarrely, his shoulders untensing as well.

Maz was looking at Finn’s shoulder now, and Rey turned to watch them, be with her friend, give her aunt some privacy.

She could not hear all the words exchanged between them. The conversation was even softer than Han and Ben’s had been.

Maz had a phone with a flashlight, and in the sudden brightness the world seemed strange. Every shadow on the ground was thrown into high contrast. Finn’s smile was a study in light and dark,
strange and impossible to fathom.

Rey slumped next to him, careful not to put her weight on his battered shoulders, and smiled back.

“Did we win?” Finn whispered. Rey shrugged, and it meant both ‘I don’t know’ and ‘despite all logic I really cannot bring myself to care right now’.

“You can use the Force.” Finn said, a little more uncertainly.

“Yeah,” Rey told him. “I kinda just learned that as well.”

Everything seemed sharp in a way that was completely unrelated to the light or the warmth of Finn’s breath on her cheek. It felt like like she could see the bones of the whole world, and the alien landscape of emotion was awe-striking and a little awful.

Leia had pulled Ben away, out of what anyone would consider ‘hearing distance’.

Despite that she was certain Rey was certain she could hear them, could hear something.

“Grounded doesn’t even begin to cover this situation, Ben.” Aunt Leia said, and it was sad, it really was.

Rey still couldn’t help a hysterical little giggle. Family sitcoms hadn’t prepared for this level of weird in the slightest. Nothing could have.
Happily Ever Afters Don't Exist In The Star Wars Universe (And That's Okay, They Can Be Happy For Now)

Chapter Notes

To start off, rest in peace Carrie Fisher. She drowned in moonlight, strangled by her own bra.

This chapter ended up a lot longer than I expected, because I had a lot of feelings, but it's up. Just over a year later, this saga is at an end. (For now.) A personal thank you to everyone who ever commented or left kudos. You guys are the real troopers for putting up this update schedule. Thanks for pulling this through.

When Harper Kalonia M.D finally shooed them out, Finn and Rey stumbled out of the dim darkness of the hallway and into a cafeteria full of delight.

The big room, with the stage on the end and the floors that squeaked and the dark and ominous food stations along the far wall- the room no one with an inch of sense even ate in on any given day- had been requisitioned by the Resistance.

At least, that was what the markered sign on the door said. It looked like someone had gotten bored and had a spare bit of poster board and highlighters. Finn could see the faint outlines of a long dead science project glued to the other side.

Poe let out a whoop of joy and sprung down from the table he was sitting roguishly on. His crown of ardent admirers turned their heads too, until the whole room of shuffled-off-to-the-side-so-the-grownups-could-talk rebellion kids were staring at them.

Finn shifted, nervously, and felt a pang of pain shoot up his arm. (The doctor had put it in a sling, “just in case”. It was possible that she was a little overworked.)

“Finn, Rey! You guys, you made it!” Poe said. He had what looked like the aftermath of a split lip half scrubbed off his face.

“Yeah, we did.”

The lights were so bright and there was so much sound. Nervous giggling, bubblegum popping, snack food being demolished, battle scars already being inspected and judged. The youth of the cause had been left to their own devices, and someone had already started a basketball game in the corner of the cafeteria. They didn’t even have basketball hoops in there.

It was, Finn realized with dawning horror, a pretty good approximation of what a middle school dance looked like. He’d never been to one before, but he’d heard stories, and here they were, in the breath after nearly averted disaster, making bad jokes and folded paper fortune tellers. A dark skinned girl with blonde braids was exhibiting all the symptoms of someone about to start a danceoff.

Poe looped one arm around Rey and dragged the both of them back to his table. He seemed oddly calm- not the shocked to stillness Finn was still clinging to or Rey’s Force zen, but an aura of affable confidence, like he was born to be in the center of a wildfire.
Bebe Eight gave them both a wave and a little hum of acknowledgement in between bites of cereal clearly stolen from the cafeteria stash.

“You have to tell us everything,” Poe said, as he ushered Rey and Finn into their seats, “Finn… and Rey, right? What did you guys do? We saw the lights go out, but what happened? No one will tell us anything. You’ll never guess what happened to us, it was wild.”

“Wait what did you do?” Finn asked, befuddled and more than a little dazzled by Poe in his element.

“You first,” Poe said modestly, then reassessed as he looked at Rey and Finn’s tired faces, “Actually, I’ll go first. You guys look like you could use a good story.”

The tale of Bebe Eight’s discovery, the great winning over of Mr. Nunb, the subsequent rush to the computer lab, and the charge against the first order were duly recounted, with comments from half a dozen people whose names Finn couldn’t quite remember even after Poe introduced them twice, the second time for Rey, who was much more willing to admit she had no idea what was going on. She did have the whole “kidnapped” thing as an excuse though.

“Then Bebe got Jess to just… throw him at the machine thing-”

“Generator,” Bebe corrected.

“Yeah, that. And there was a lot of shouting and sparks and Ollie got punched in the face,” Poe gestured to a young woman with an icepack pressed to her cheek, “And we won! I don’t know, I don’t really remember, it’s all kind of a blur. I may have tackled Hux,” he added as an afterthought.

“You did,” Bebe reminded him helpfully, around a mouthful of Kix, “You pulled his hair and punched him in the stomach and shouted, ‘I hate you so much!’ in spanish, and Mr. Nunb said he’s going to tell your parents.”

Poe shrugged, unrepentant. “Like I said, I can’t remember much, and that’s the story I’m sticking with.”

That got a laugh from the audience. A dark haired girl with a nice smile said, “You’re in so much trouble, Dameron,” and rolled her eyes, but she did so with immeasurable fondness.

He grinned, cheekily. “If I knew what you were talking about, I’d say that you only live a night like this once in your life. No regrets, you know? I still wish I’d had the brains to switch with Kaydel and see Snoke get arrested; that would have been the best.”

“He got arrested?” Finn said, eyes widening with wonder before he remembered that that had been the plan. It was still amazing to hear it had succeeded.

Rey smiled, “He sounded awful, congratulations!”

“Yeah, you’ve got to hear that story- KAYDEL!” Poe shouted, voice carrying across the giddy hum of the cafeteria, “Kaydel! Oh, here she is.”

A small girl with blonde buns and an elated flush tore across the cafeteria, only to sigh disapprovingly when she realized it was only Poe.

“I do have other friends, you know that, right?”

“I know, I know, just tell Finn and Rey what happened. They’re the real heroes of the hour, they should hear it right from the source.”
Kaydel considered this for a moment, then turned to leave.

“Kay, Kay, come on, pleeease. Finn is the best, he saved Bebe and me, and Rey is Mrs. Organa’s niece, I think?”

She stopped in her tracks and half turned, interest piqued. “Really?” She was looking at Rey now, with a gaze too intense for such a small person.

Rey smiled awkwardly. “She is my aunt, yes.”

The dark haired girl- Jessika?- did some mental calculations. “So… you’re, like, Luke Skywalker’s daughter? Holy shit.”

Poe’s draw dropped, apparently that conclusion hadn’t come to him. “Oh, man. That’s too cool. Not that I didn’t think you were cool before,” he assured her quickly. “You walked in here with a sword on your back, that’s pretty badass. But Luke Skywalker’s kid? That’s…”

“Awesome,” a boy next to Poe summarized succinctly.

Evidently it was awesome enough to win over Kaydel. She spun back towards them and leaned against the edge of the table, hands palm down on the laminate top of it. “Right, so Poe sent me to go tell the grownups about his little mission of destruction. When I found them they were holed up in the bathrooms, the set near administration? The one that always gets cleaned first.”

Everyone except Rey nodded. They were familiar with the bathrooms of the school. You had to be, it was a survival skill.

“Mrs. Organa had already left to go somewhere, I never found out where, and everyone else was waiting to try to figure out what to do.” Kaydel smiled, “They looked kind of worried, it was so weird. But then the lights went off, and I guess that was what they were waiting for because everyone- Chief Ackbar, and Dodonna and Statura and everyone - just walked into the office, like no one could even stop them. They made we wait outside, but I watched when they marched Principal Snoke out. He was in handcuffs and everything. He looked a lot less scary- it turns out he’s not that tall next to other adults- with Poe’s dad reading him his rights.”

Poe glowed with familial pride as he said, “I think they took him down to the police station. No one will tell us much, but they probably wouldn’t want to keep him here.”

Kaydel shrugged, “They put him in a police car, so probably. Can I go now?”

“Sure,” Poe said magnanimously. Kaydel gave Rey one last sneaking glance before she jogged away, and Rey’s nose wrinkled up.

“Did Hux and everyone else get taken to the police station as well?” Finn asked quickly, to drag the focus away from Rey. He was a little worried about his former friends. Most of them had just gotten dragged into this mess by Hux and Phasma; it wasn’t their fault they’d gotten pulled into a mini cult masquerading as a club, or that it was so hard to leave.

The boy who’d been introduced to them as Snap shook his head. “Nah, they’re all in one of the classrooms back there. I think they’re trying to call their parents, but it’s hard with everything so messed up. Cell towers are malfunctioning, you know?”

“Speaking of cell towers,” Jessika said, “One of your moms texted me, Bebe. She said she’s coming here with a few other doctors from the hospital, easier than bussing everyone who got hurt over there. Want me to tell her anything?”
“Nuh, t’ank you.” Bebe mumbled, around a mouthful of cereal.

Finn blinked. It was hard to imagine solid, strange Bebe as having a family. It seemed much more likely that he had risen from the ground fully formed, or grown off of Poe like a bud.

On the other hand, they had only known each other for a day- a long day, but still not long enough to really learn much of anything about each other.

“You have parents?” Rey blurted, clearly thinking along the same lines.

Bebe made a face, “Of course I do. I’m not an amoeba. Everyone has parents.”

Rey shrugged, as if to say she was willing to dispute that point but not enough to pick a fight with an eight year old who used words like amoeba.

“Look,” Poe said, standing abruptly to peer over the heads of his comrades, “I think that’s… it’s Lor San Tekka! He’s okay!”

His words seemed to send a wave of action through the room. Others stopped to stare, Jessika and Snap stood bolt upright, jostling the table and by extension Finn’s still bandaged arm. He winced in pain, and balanced on his knees in his seat, trying to see the man who had started, well, everything.

“Who’s Lor San Tekka?” Rey whispered.

“History teacher,” Poe whispered back, “He’s the one who got us the flashdrive in the first place. Hux’s goons dragged him off, we didn’t know what happened to him.”

There was no mistaking that beard and white hair, Finn realized, or the tatty old jacket and tweed trousers. He felt a smile creeping over his face, despite himself. After the events of the day, after everything that had happened, seeing Mr. San Tekka safe was reassuring in some way. Sure, up-ending the entire school was nice and all, but there was something about accomplishing what he had set out to do in the first place- making a stand against the people who would terrorize an innocent if slightly royalty obsessed old man and succeeding.

Poe was waving his arm like he was trying to flag down a helicopter, and sure enough, Mr. San Tekka was making his slow way over to their table.

“Poe Dameron, you seem to have made quite a stir.”

A faint blush crept up Poe’s face. “I got the flashdrive to Mrs. Organa though, or at least my friends did. Everything else just kind of snowballed from there.” Lor San Tekka was looking at them- at Finn and Rey- intently. “This is Finn,” Poe said quickly, “He used to work for the First Order, before he switched sides and saved me. And this is-”

“Luke Skywalker’s daughter,” Lor San Tekka croaked. Rey stilled, not even breathing. The sudden lack of movement at Finn’s side was odd, the sudden change in her demeanor was flat out concerning. “I know. Her aunt asked us to leave her alone, not to scare her, but I know exactly who she is. Did you find the map then?”

“What map?” Bebe asked, puzzled as the rest of them.

“I mean, I’d only heard rumours, but I was certain it would be important.” Lor San Tekka said, “I put a note in the with the data for Mrs. Organa. And when I was captured, I was asked about it which means the rumours must be true. The Vice Principal- former Vice Principal, I suppose, wasn’t smart enough to fool me. You mean you didn’t find anything?”
“We, didn’t really have time to go through all of it,” Bebe admitted. “Just the important stuff, about Starkiller. I think Dodonna is still waiting for a chance to actually go through everything.”

“What map?” Rey asked, her voice tight. She seemed wound up, maybe more than the situation would merit, but if there was one thing Finn had learned over the past half a day it was that Rey’s instincts were usually right. The way she was holding herself, one hand of the shoulder strap of her sword, wasn’t reassuring. Besides, there was a prickling sensation at the base of his brain stem that said much the same thing- that something wasn’t right and that it was important.

Lor San Tekka blinked. “The map to your father, of course.”

Han wasn’t very good at being an invalid, and he hadn’t gotten any better with age. It was exhausting just to be around him, so Leia left him in the more competent and gentle hands of the first doctor she could find. It was a weight off her shoulders, to know he was safe and taken care of and most importantly with a professional.

Leia Organa had never been the nursing type. Emotional trauma she could handle, she was Luke’s sister, after all, but actual medical emergencies were best left to the professionals.

Han grabbed her hand as she left to go.

“Where’s Ben?”

“Chewie’s keeping an eye on him,” Leia said, reassuringly. “He isn’t putting up a fight or anything. I- I had a long talk with him. We’ll figure something out.”

Her son is still so angry, at the world, at both of them. It hurts. Leia isn’t sure what they’re going to do with him, if there’s anything that can be done. Surely a happy ending cannot be salvaged out of this mess. Not with Rey to think about as well.

She tried to smile but Han saw right through it, even though his eyes were still unfocused and his vision blurry at best. (Although she was prepared to blame that more on the fact that he refused to get glasses rather than any possible concussion.)

“Leia…”

“What?”

He leaned in, and stage whispered, not quietly enough to keep the nearest nurse from hearing him. “Remember when I thought you wanted to date Luke because I didn’t know he was your brother yet? Our life is weird. We’ll manage.”

Leia squeezed his hand, found the skin thinner and the joints more crooked than she expected. Slowly but surely, they were getting old. “We all saw how things with Luke worked out, didn’t we? I’m going to go find Maz. Try not to die before I get back please.”

“Yes ma’am,” Han said, collapsing back onto his cot, which was just a little too short for him. He expression as he stared at the ceiling was more pensive than befuddled, which Leia decided to take as a good sign. They all needed to do some thinking, before anything else happened. Unfortunately events were moving far too fast.

Statura tried to stop her in the hallway, but Leia successfully powered through the encounter and
managed to escape the clammy hands of responsibility, for the time being. She still needed to get in touch with Mon and city council, still needed to do so many things, but most of it could wait at least a half hour.

(That was the benefit of being right about someone’s evil intentions, you had the moral highground moving forward. The evil part meant it wasn’t much of a victory though.)

Maz wasn’t an easy woman to find, which Leia assumed meant that she didn’t want to be found. A minor roadblock, but not enough to stop someone of Leia’s power. She took a deep breath, opened up the back room in her brain she spent most of her life trying to ignore, and listened.

Then she headed up to the roof.

There was an access stair so the maintenance people could get to the air conditioning units up there when they inevitably broke a half dozen times a year. It was well hidden behind a locked door, but Leia had gone to Palpatine Memorial back when it had been named after some long dead state senator, she knew most of the good hiding places.

“How is your family?” Maz asked, not even turning to look at Leia. She was watching the stars, or what little could be seen of them through the clouds and around the flickering light of a city trying to reset itself.

Leia found a knot of resentment in her throat, and she swallowed it back with practiced ease.

“They’re doing about as well as can be expected, given that Ben just pushed his father off a fifteen foot drop, and my poor niece just had to learn that her family is even more messed up than she realized in the span of an afternoon. Just another day in the life of the Skywalker-Organan family.” she laughed, and it came out bitter. She didn’t like that. She could usually power through anything, laugh off anything, survive, but Force help her if she isn’t hard sometimes.

“I’m sure you’ll make it.” Kanata said, with a calm confidence that was infuriating.

“We might not,” Leia snapped, and felt baited into second guessing herself, admitting that maybe, everything wouldn’t be okay. Such a slip felt too much like a surrender, and she couldn’t afford that. Not with Ben’s hurt eyes and Han’s carefully disguised pain, not with a town depending on her. Not with Luke’s daughter below, so young and confused.

“You will,” Maz insisted, turning so Leia could see her face, weathered brown skin, big eyes made even bigger by her thick glasses. “Han will recover. You can send Ben to your friend Lando out in the country, he needs some time away from everything, but he’ll figure things out. This is your happy ending, Leia Organa.”

“That’s what I thought when I was nineteen,” Leia’s voice trembled, she couldn’t help it. Everything was threatening to spill out. She’d seen Maz have that effect on other people before, but she’d never felt it so strongly, the urge to shout, to act out. “And yet here we are. Some happy ending that was.”

“Oh child,” Maz sighed, and Leia bristled. She hated being condescended, even by people who had a certain right to condescend her. Maz had age and wisdom, she’d respect that- or try to. That didn’t mean it wasn’t hard. Her father, Bail, had accused her of having an “anti-authoritarian streak” and Leia had cultivated that streak into a full on character trait. “No happy ending lasts forever. That is the point. But here, you have been lucky enough to get two.”

Leia’s face twisted up with horror, half mocking and half real. “Lucky. If this is lucky I’d hate to see what happens to the unlucky people. My family is in ruins, it always has been. I thought we could settle down, after we finished Palpatine, thought we could be happy, but we’re cursed. Ben, my
brother. This damned town and the damned force,” she spat the last word, “it all just went back to the way it was.”

Maz was looking at her curiously, “Is that why you didn’t take your father’s sword?” she inquired, politely.

“What?”

“Your father’s sword. I offered it to you, several times, in fact. Today, most recently. But you never wanted it. Do you really think it is cursed?” Maz had the mischievous smile that Leia had long ago learned to mistrust. It was worn solely by clever mystics and roguish types who thought they knew more than they did. Maz Kanata was infamously both, and therefore doubly untrustworthy.

“Of course I don’t want it. The fact that you gave it to Rey is a completely different matter, which we will discuss later, but I’ve never wanted anything to do with it, with the Force, with any of that. I never wanted anything but peace.”

“Liar.”

“What.” Leia stated flatly, more taken aback than offended, at least at first. Maz had a way about her, she could get away with saying anything.

“Leia Organa, you wouldn’t know what to do with peace even if it came to you. You were born to struggle. We all were, but you especially. I do not deny that you have it especially badly, you have been handed a difficult life. But you have thrived, despite it and because of it. You are who you are today, because of it. Would you unwish the tragedy that brought you into this world? Or the one that reunited you with your brother?”

“No,” Leia admitted, “but-”

The stars were twinkling. Leia felt like they were taunting her personally. “The loss that has brought your husband back to you now? That has brought your niece back?”

“They never would have had to leave!” she shouted, “They shouldn’t have.”

Maz smiled sadly. “But they did. And none of you would be the people you were if not for it.”

“It’s not fair,” Leia said, and knew she sounded petulant. “I mean, you can’t possibly ask me to be grateful for all the terrible things that have happened to me. That’s… awful.”

“I would never ask that,” Maz said, “That would be cruel. Mourn the lives you lost, Leia Organa. They are gone and it is a terrible thing. All things are terrible, just as they are beautiful. But do not reject the future in front of you, it is yours. For better or for worse. Take your happy endings as they come, and when they leave you, fight to get them back again. That is some advice from a very, very old woman.” Her eyes twinkled like the stars, distant and scornful.

Leia’s hands had balled into fists long ago, as she resisted the urge to punch a brick wall. She couldn’t do that anymore, she was in her thirties. Her hands couldn’t take it. Instead she did what her parents had taught her, tried to punch with words, channel the frustration she felt into something coherent. “Then you suggest I just do this over and over again until I die. Is that it? We’re all supposed to build a house of cards, have it collapse on us, and start right over again?”

“Yes,” Maz stated simply. “Or half collapses, or loses a card here or there. That is life.”

“I thought the Force was supposed to fix this,” Leia said with a sneer, “I thought it was about finding
balance, about putting things to rights. At least that’s how Luke always explained it.”

Maz rolled her eyes, the gesture amplified by her coke bottle lenses. “The Jedi and their ilk had a shaky grasp on the universe. Most religions, do, I think. They are all clubs in the end, and clubs want something to hold onto. Some principle to drive them forward, some promise of a greater future. I am not arrogant enough to guess I know exactly how the universe works—” somehow Leia doubted that. If anyone knew the secrets of the cosmos, it was Miss Kanata in her little backroom, always listening and watchful, “but I do not see balance as something that happens naturally. You have to fight for it, because the world is always changing. Nothing, not even the Force can stop that. And you are the best fighter I have ever seen, Leia Organa. So go, have your happy ending. May you have a thousand more.”

Leia wanted to be angry, wanted to rant and rail, but she couldn’t. Somehow all the energy had drained out of her. Maz did that to people. She slumped against the wall of the stairway entrance instead, and after a minute Maz Kanata came over to join her.


“No,” Maz agreed, in her beautiful voice. “It is not fair. We are luminous beings, in bodies that burn every second, adrift in space and energy. All we can hope to do it burn beautifully. And you have been so brave. They all look up to you. The children who come by after school, the old ladies who remember the times before, the lost man, the wanderer. I have seen them all, and here, at least, they love you,” she tilted her head to the side, like a bird, then added, “For the most part.”

Underneath the mumbo-jumbo, Leia thought that was Maz’s way of being kind. Still, it was not enough.

“I want…” she said, and clenched her fist again, because the words would not come to her, “I want more.”

There was a clatter from behind her, the noise of someone- or several someones- tumbling up the stairs while making as much noise as physically

The door slammed open, and Rey was standing in it, the damned sword still slung over her shoulder. Her friend, Finn, the brave young man from who had foiled Snoke, was behind her and so was Poe. The Dameron boy looked like he had seen a unicorn, and that unicorn was Rey.

“Sorry,” Rey said, in a voice that reminded her all too much of Luke- if Luke had a faint British accent. “I couldn’t find you, so I used the… she gestured vaguely to her head, as if to indicate some psychic in nature.

Poe, still doe eyed with wonder, whispered, “She has the Force.”

Rey looked uncharacteristically nervous. She was usually such a strong willed young woman, in her own cautious way. Reserved, yes, but never shy. “It’s just, he thinks he found him. He says he’s alive.”

Leia’s forehead wrinkled. “Who?”

“The teacher,” Rey said, words falling from her like a waterfall, “He says he has a friend who had a friend who was into some weird stuff and heard a lot of rumours from the community of practitioners- of people who can use the Force. Force sensitives, he called it. He says they heard things, about what he was planning to do when he left.”
Leia’s mind was racing, but she didn’t want to jump to conclusions, not yet. “Repeat that again, Rey. Slower, please.”

There was another echoing footstep on the stairs, and a white haired head poked out above the cluster of children. Lor San Tekka, her father’s old friend, smiled down at her.

“Ma’am,” he said, “I have heard rumours recently, about the location of your brother. They say he left a map, a clue to his whereabouts, and this young gentleman thinks he might know where.”

Leia’s heart stopped.

She almost didn’t process the next few sentences, as San Tekka pushed a little boy with a sandy fuzz of hair forward- Benjamin, she remembered distantly, called Bebe. The child was talking fast, but all she could really focus on was Maz.

Maz Kanata, had a smile that seemed to stretch over her whole face, the wrinkled topography shifting entirely for even the gentlest of expressions.

“Go,” she mouthed.

Leia didn’t want to get her hopes up. Unfortunately, Luke had always been a creature of hope.

Artoo-detoo was a good dog.

He didn’t get told so as much anymore, or perhaps he just couldn’t hear. He was old. He could feel the age in his bones. Moving was harder, he could barely go up the stairs. So he stayed on his bed in the foyer, was fed food by the fussy butler, got his head scratched whenever Leia came home.

He watched the goings on and he remembered.

There was Han, who still smelled the same after all these years. There was Chewie, with his big strong frame, who always had an extra treat in his pocket. There was Ben, the boy he had once played with who never seemed in a mood to play anymore. There was the new girl, who was kind and seemed familiar, like a distant memory he could not quite piece together. There was Leia, who smelled like Luke shifted.

There was not Luke. He did not know where Luke had gone.

Sometimes the house was crowded- as it had been a few hours ago- and sometimes it was not. Artoo had learned not to take much note of the general chaos that was the Organa household, not unless it directly pertained to him. So he did not raise his head when the door slammed open and familiar smells and voices came in.

It was not until he heard a child’s voice- high enough to cut through his deafness- among them that he took note. He knew that voice. That voice had been petting him, recently. Small hands had tugged on his ears and tail, but he hadn’t minded, the attention had been nice.

He opened his eyes and found many faces gathered around his pillow.

The boy who had petted him, short and chubby, was kneeling in front of his pillow, and talking fast. Phrases like, “felt something” and “collar” and “used to be a service dog, right?” hurtled past him. He vaguely recognized the last one.

Leia spoke up, faintly. “We didn’t really use those words back then, but yes. He helped Luke a lot.”
Luke. Artoo’s ears perked up even further.

The little boy grabbed Artoo’s collar and started undoing the buckle. Artoo whined, but tolerated the intrusion on his accepted existence. He trusted Leia had a reason for it. He hoped the reason didn’t have anything to do with the vet.

Once the collar was off, the crown of humans bent over it and muttered for a few minutes. Suddenly there was a shout, mostly jubilant but in the startled way people had when something was happening too fast. More words were exchanged, too fast to understand and the group ran back to the door.

Artoo began to lie back down, unsettled by the sudden confiscation of his collar. He’d take it out on Threepio later, he decided.

Then, Leia bent over him and placed a trembling hand on his head.

“We’re going to get him back,” she whispered. “He’s coming home, whether he likes it or not. You hear that, boy? We’ll find Luke.”

Artoo gazed at her face, trying to discern what she meant and how. He did not fully understand…but he could trust.

*Luke*. He’d been waiting a long time. Now, he thought he could wait just a little longer.

Rey was fidgeting with her collar. The shirt was new, Aunt Leia had bought it for her, and it smelled expensive.

The stiff cotton wasn’t quite uncomfortable, it as too fancy for that. But it was too new to be worn carelessly. Every second she was aware of the crisp cloth against her skin.

That or she was just very, very nervous. That was possible too.

She glanced again out of the window of the car Aunt Leia had rented for them. The rolling green hills were almost exactly the same as they had been a few minutes before.

“Trust my brother to end up in a monastery in Scotland, of all places,” Leia muttered. “Couldn’t he just go to rehab like a normal person.”

Rey tried to smile, tried to look reassuring, but it just came out as a grimace.

Leia’s expression shifted from distant frustration, to a sort of sympathy.

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to take it out on you. I keep forgetting, this is your first happy ending, isn’t it?”

Rey didn’t know what she meant by that, but she nodded anyways. As she did the car began to roll to a halt. She didn’t look out the window now. She didn’t want to.

Aunt Leia leaned over and gave her a big hug. Rey froze, then awkwardly returned it. She hadn’t hugged anyone in a while. Well, Finn had hugged her and kissed her cheek as they left, but that had been different.

“Chin up,” Aunt Leia advised, “and smile. Enjoy every second, even if it’s sad.” It was an odd thing to say, but it was an odd situation. Besides, Aunt Leia knew better than her.

Rey didn’t want to smile, but she let some hope sneak into her heart, and grabbed the sword propped
up against the seat next to her. (Getting it through customs had been hard, but it was fitting, they agreed.)

The door swung open, and they stepped out into the misty sunlight.

It was bittersweet, and still so strange she couldn’t wrap her head around it. So she stopped trying, and walked forward.

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