The Only Exception

by CartoonJessie

Summary

A psychiatric ward outside of London welcomes its newest patient - Rey - a homeless girl without a last name or family. All she wants is to return to the streets she calls home, but that is easier said than done. She will need a lot of patience if she is to survive her time in the ward, for she has no intention of mingling with the other patients. However, Rey soon grabs the attention of one of the outcasts in the group - a young man who prefers to be called Kylo. He is prone to anger outbursts, but takes an immediate interest in the girl as he recognizes parts of himself in her. How will they ever recover - and will they find their way to a normal life in society, or escape before they're ready?

Notes

This is a Modern AU. This means that it's not set in space. It's not about aliens or the Force, but you might encounter names of fictional characters who are aliens, like Maz Kanata. If this happens, feel free to envision the actor or actress playing them as the face and voice of the character. In the case of Maz Kanata, you should be thinking of Lupita Nyong'o.

I have "chosen not to use archive warnings" because I do not really have any specifically triggering scenes planned at this point. However, it is set in a psychiatry, and it deals with people who have had a rough life, so I might refer to things that happened in these people's lives that were of a violent, traumatic or abusive nature. If you've ever read any of my other works, you know that I'm not getting a kick from shocking my readers too much, so trust me when I say that you should not fear the content of what is to come, even if it sounds
heavy in advance.
(Some triggering things you might encounter have been written in the tags now - but once
again, these things are most of the times mentioned as character histories, not described in
the most gory way possible. It's not dark-fic)

I do not take writing about people in a psychiatry lightly. I have had a few months of
working experience in forensic psychiatry myself and a graduate's degree in special
education. However, this remains a work of fiction, with fictional characters, whose canon
characteristics I try to translate into a mental illness that would suit their profile. And then I
place them all in the same ward together - while I doubt myself that this would be the case
in modern psychiatric wards anymore.

I mean no disrespect to fans of the characters or to people with the mental illnesses I
describe and hope that you find the story compelling and strangely fitting with your own
views on these characters. Thank you for reading, and I do hope you share your views on
the story with me in the comments below!
“Rey Doe.”

Doctor Maz Kanata looked at Rey’s brief file through round spectacles that stood on the tip of her nose. Rey looked curiously at the dark woman who now held her life in her hands.

She had never quite seen someone of Doctor Kanata’s elegance in the streets of London. The beautiful curly hair seemed held up by electricity itself, and the gorgeous smile on the Doctor’s face almost calmed Rey into complete submission.

Almost.

“Have they told you yet what this place is?”

Doctor Kanata put down Rey’s file as she tilted her head to the side and looked at Rey with a friendly smile.

Despite the warmth and beauty that shone from the doctor, Rey was wary, and so she kept her mouth shut, but she did nod in affirmation.

“If your file is correct, then this is your very first time in a psychiatric ward?”

There was no use in lies – not at this point – and so Rey nodded again.

Seeing how Rey was unlikely to open her mouth if she kept on asking closed questions, doctor Kanata asked: “What are you expecting from your stay here?”

The eye contact was broken as Rey suddenly looked down at the desk between them, her gaze transfixed on a pen as she decided for herself not to say a word. The more she gave away of herself, the more reasons they would find to keep her here – to drug her and make her dependent of this care for the rest of her life. She would not have that.

Noticing the young girl’s determination in not giving anything away, Maz smiled to herself. “Shall I tell you what you can expect?”

Rey’s eyes flittered back up for a brief moment, and Maz continued: “You will find yourself placed with a group of people who – like you – are unable to return to society straight away. Some of them have had a rough time before they came here – others have struggled all their lives.”

Rey looked up again, and Maz continued clearly as she noticed she had the girl’s attention.

“We have a lot of psychiatric wards at this domain. There is also a ward for people with a mental disorder, a ward for older people who suffer from a form of dementia, a ward for forensic psychiatry…”

Rey frowned at the word ‘forensic’, and Maz noticed it straight away.

“Forensic psychiatry is for people with a crime record. They got referred to us by prisons or police and we believe that we can offer them better treatment than is provided in jail. These people don’t roam freely around the domain though, so you shall not have to fear encountering them.”

Rey frowned, a little confused about something else, and like before, Maz was able to read the girl’s thoughts.
“Are you wondering why you don’t have to go to forensic psychiatry?”

Rey nodded.

“You got referred to us by the police as well, that is true. But your profile is different. You lived on the street and they caught you stealing cookies at a Tesco. Stealing is a crime – that’s true – but you would not have been held in prison long for your crime. You would have been out on the street in a matter of weeks, perhaps shorter than that, and you would not have been treated for your problems.”

Rey looked agitated. To her, there were no problems. The street was fine to her.

“Forensic psychiatry has patients who would otherwise be in prison for years. People who attempted murder or other grave crimes, but need psychiatric care instead of a prison cell. You just stole some food, Rey. You will not be treated like a criminal here – but like a patient who needs to be helped in order to pick up a role in society, once you return there. So that you will never need to steal food ever again.”

Rey remained quiet, silently assimilating all the information the Doctor gave her.

“You’ll be placed in a living group with about ten other people. It’s possible that some people will be transferred during your stay or that new people join your group. But during your stay here, you will live and work together with them. Each week you will be placed in a smaller group of two to three people and assigned a few tasks. This could be cleaning up the tables after each meal, cleaning the hallways and main living room area, cleaning the windows, sorting out the laundry that returns to us, and more. Schedules rotate every week. Any questions yet?”

Rey shook her head, and Maz continued: “Between the daily meals, there are a few sessions of therapy for all of you. This is therapy as well – just you, sitting here with me, talking.”

Maz remained quiet for a few moments, and Rey’s lip curled up in a smile as she realized she hadn’t done any talking yet, and to her that was perfect. Just the way she liked it.

“Other therapies include music therapy, going out for walks or playing other sports, coloring, reading, watching movies together… And then sometimes we go to a café on the domain, where you can have something to drink and a chat with the others. And there’s a petting zoo too. We have some rabbits and goats and when it isn’t raining, we go there with a small group. There’s a farmer there who can teach you all you like to know about taking care of the animals, if that’s of interest to you.”

Rey, however, did not seem to be especially stimulated by any of that news, and Doctor Maz decided it was time to bring out her secret weapon.

“We really want you to find a nice hobby here. Do you have a hobby already?”

Rey shook her head, then looked down as a sign she did not want to discuss this, but Maz had already expected that.

Going into her small briefcase, she took out something wrapped in aluminum foil and started unwrapping it. The sound got Rey’s attention, and she looked on with hungry eyes as a piece of chocolate cake got unveiled. It wasn’t just any piece of chocolate cake. There were layers of chocolate cream in-between, and the scent of cacao that greeted her was pure torture.

“My hobby is cooking,” Doctor Maz told Rey. “I am fond of baking and sometimes we bake nice desserts together with the group. I assume you like sweets? I mean, you did get arrested stealing
Rey’s hands were trembling in frustration as she looked at the divine piece of chocolate cake. Was it for her? Could she have it? Gods, this would be where the Doctor would ask her for something in return, wasn’t it?

“Rey, you can have this if you want – but I want to ask you about two things – and I want to have an actual conversation with you about these two things. And then, you will get this cake – and I want you to tell me what you think of the cake afterwards. Understood?”

Rey was unable to tear her gaze away from the chocolate cake. She wanted it so badly. She’d only gotten ham and cheese sandwiches in the prison cell she had spent a few nights in. But this… She had never had a cake like that. Homemade – so fresh and most likely as divine in taste as it looked. She had never had any place where she could steal something like this – and so it would be horrible to see this cake disappear behind the desk again. She wanted it.

“Okay.”

Rey’s voice was a little rough, but Maz smiled.

“Great! The first thing I’d like to discuss with you is your name. Why didn’t you give your last name to the police? They said that you insisted that you had none.”

Rey rather didn’t talk about it, but she wanted her reward and so she spoke quickly: “I have none. My name’s Rey.”

“You must have had a last name when you were born, Rey, before you ended up on the street. Can’t you recall what it was?”

“I don’t recall anything from before I ended up on the street,” she replied briefly, her mouth watering from looking at the cake, and she licked her lips.

“How old were you then?” doctor Maz asked curiously, and Rey shrugged.

“Five or six?” Rey replied, not entirely sure, and if she hadn’t been as focused on the treat she was promised, she would have seen doctor Maz’s incredulous look.

“Your file says you’re most likely nineteen now. So does that mean you’ve spent fourteen years on the street – without anyone noticing? In London?”

“I wasn’t alone,” Rey said quickly, still hoping that the questions could stop and she could start eating soon. “Unkar told everyone who asked I was his daughter.”

“He wasn’t your father?” Doctor Maz wondered.

“No,” Rey replied, shifting anxiously in her seat. “Can I have the chocolate cake now?”

Maz raised her hand before Rey could reach for the chocolate.

“One more question, please. You’ve lived on the street – and I need to know this for your treatment. But do you have an addiction? Drugs or alcohol? Cigarettes? Anything we should know about?”

Rey shook her head quickly, and Maz seemed surprised by that.

“Did you ever do drugs or alcohol?”
Rey shrugged. “Once drank a bottle of wine in one evening when I was twelve or something. Was incredibly sick the day after. Stuck to safer drinks after that. As for drugs… I hate them. I don’t do drugs.”

Maz was still amazed, but smiled warmly.

“Thank you for this information, Rey. Please, help yourself.”

The Doctor had hardly spoken the words or Rey grasped for the chocolate cake, eating it at such a spectacular speed that Maz was left speechless.

Rey ate as fast as she could, afraid the doctor would change her mind if she didn’t, licking the aluminum foil when she was finished, savoring the flavor of chocolate as it hung on her fingers and lips.

“What did you think of it?” Doctor Kanata asked her, smiling.

“It’s good. You should sell these and stop being a doctor,” Rey said with a rare smile of her own, and the Doctor got up from her chair, chuckling to herself.

“I’ll ask madame Phasma to lead you to your new room. She’s one of the keepers at our facility.”

“Keepers?” Rey asked, not sure she knew what was meant by that.

“Oh, it’s a name we give our staff. I’m a keeper too – but also a doctor. Madame Phasma has a graduate’s degree in special education. You will also find some nurses and social workers among our staff. We have a very diverse team of people that will be here for you should you need anything.”

Doctor Kanata led Rey to a door which she opened with her keys before they both entered into a long hallway and the doctor closed the door again.

“We always lock all doors so we know when someone is outside or inside.”

“Can I go outside?” Rey asked immediately, her heart skipping a beat as she feared the answer.

“Not during your first month – not alone, that is. You need to earn that right. Some of your fellow patients can leave the ward, others are unlikely to ever leave. If you behave well, I think it’s likely that you’ll be allowed to go outside.”

Rey gulped. It was time to behave then. The sooner she made it outside, the sooner she could return to her life on the streets.

Doctor Kanata stopped at the first door to the right in the long hallway, and opened it slightly to reveal an office of some sort. There was a large table with six chairs around it, a desk with a computer, a wall full of old cabinets, as well as about four whiteboards on the wall, covered in papers and markings.

A blonde lady was sitting at the table, arranging medication in tiny boxes, making marks on a paper each time she had dealt with a specific medicine.

“Madame Phasma?” doctor Kanata asked kindly, and the woman looked up and at Rey, who was standing right behind the doctor.

“She can’t enter this room,” Madame Phasma immediately said, nudging to Rey and the doctor
“Oh, sorry Rey. I forgot to tell you. All patients always have to wait outside the door.”

Rey quickly took three steps back and waited at the line of the door. Madame Phasma got up from her seat and asked Maz: “Will you lock up behind me?”

“Of course.”

“Thank you.”

Phasma stopped by Rey’s side, and the girl found herself staring up quite a bit. She had never seen a woman so tall and athletically built, her shoulders straight as she looked down at Rey.

“You may call me Madame Phasma. I am one of the keepers at this institution. I am here to answer any questions you may have.”

Rey gulped and nodded. There was no nonsense in this woman’s voice – it was all business – and for some reason it both impressed and intimidated Rey.

As she saw the woman was waiting for something, like her name, Rey suddenly said: “I am Rey.”

“Nice to meet you, Rey. Please follow me to your room.”

Rey followed Phasma, who immediately turned and started walking, forcing Rey to keep up with large steps. Rey looked back and saw how Doctor Kanata was locking the Keeper’s office, but not before she had winked at Rey as a means to wish her good luck.

Phasma did not slow down or stop talking in the meanwhile.

“You may call me Madame Phasma. I am one of the keepers at this institution. I am here to answer any questions you may have.”

Rey felt in awe of the tall woman, who was so self-assured that Rey could not help but feel like this woman had the entire world figured out. As they neared the end of the hallway, they stepped out into the living room area. It was shaped like an L – with one part meant for eating, another meant for group therapies, and the last part meant for relaxation. She saw the large television that was on, and a few people watching the news while another man – with a big belly and dark hair – sat motionless behind a table in the eating area, his eyes open but his mind a galaxy away. A boy with dark skin and camouflage pants and a green shirt held a broom as he cleaned up the eating area. In the doorway to the kitchen stood another man, Latino, a lustful gaze in his eyes as he wiped his hands on a towel and stared after Rey and she immediately turned her gaze away, already deciding to punch him in the face next time he looked at her like that.

Another girl – perhaps not even older than her – with Asian eyes and a wide smile on her face, stood beside the door that lead to the girl’s area.

“Madame Phasma, may I please be excused to my room?” she asked in a childish, wining voice, and Rey frowned as she looked at her, already deciding that she didn’t like her.

As Madame Phasma asked the girl – Jess – what had been agreed upon with Mister Hux and their conversation continued without Rey’s interest, she looked at the group that was watching television. There were men and women of all ages there, but only one looked up at her, as though
he could sense her eyes on him.

He was the tallest of them all, dark hair that ran into his neck, a lot of freckles on his face and a curious gaze as he looked at her and what she was wearing.

She had gotten her new clothes from the police station, but now she doubted if she looked like anything at all. She was wearing a beige sweater that was too big for her, and a pair of jeans with wide flaring pipes at the bottom. It wasn’t fashionable at all – not that she’d ever cared about that before.

But as she looked at him, she realized that he wasn’t looking particularly fashionable either. The dark pants he wore were grayish in places – worn out, or so it seemed – and the green sweater he wore had lost most of its color – the design no longer recognizable as it had nearly completely washed off.

She tore her eyes away from him when Madame Phasma called her name and the other girl sulked and walked away from them.

“Rey, come. I believe Mister Thanisson has left your belongings in your room.”

She was given the third room to the right in the girl’s wing, and as she entered it, she was amazed by how neat it was. She had slept on the street and in parks, and sometimes she had squatted old abandoned buildings – but never before had she been given a room as sterile as this one.

There was a comfortable wooden bed in there, as well as a closet, a rack to put her belongings on, a sink and a window that overlooked the courtyard. It was more than she could have hoped for and she was rather impressed with it all.

As Madame Phasma noticed the small bag that lay on the bed, she frowned.

“Are those all of your belongings?” she asked in a disbelieving voice.

Rey looked into the bag and saw the tooth brush she had been given by the police, the two shirts she had worn when she was arrested and the linen pants as well, all washed now, and she hesitated for a moment.

“My jacket’s missing.”

Madame Phasma hadn’t read up on Rey’s file yet, but it seemed clear that she was another patient that came straight from the streets.

“We’ll get you a new one,” Madame Phasma promised her. “I will see if I can get some clothes in your size. What size are you, small, medium?”

Rey shrugged, never really one to bother with clothes in the first place, and the older woman continued: “I will look into it. I suggest you acquaint yourself with your room. You are in luck, as the toilets and shower facilities are opposite your door. You may encounter other female patients in there, but the men are not allowed in this area – except for the other keepers. Mister Thanisson is a few years older than you – very skinny, with dark-blond hair. Mister Hux is my age, quite tall, with red hair. Your room is your own, which means that other patients are not allowed to enter it unless invited. And obviously you are not allowed to enter their rooms unless they invite you.”

Rey looked at Madame Phasma and nodded as a sign she had understood it.

“I will come to fetch you in an hour from now. I’m sure there is some therapy planned for this
afternoon. It will give you a chance to get acquainted with the group.”

As the tall woman left the room, she closed the door behind her and left Rey alone with her thoughts. She felt anxious at the prospect of meeting up with the rest of the patients. After all, she had never enjoyed company and preferred to be left alone. But she had lost control over her own life the moment the police had arrested her. Now she had to face the consequences.

“Chin up, Rey,” she spoke softly to herself. “You’ll get through this. You always get through everything.”
First Observations

Chapter Notes

A few new characters are introduced by name in this chapter. Their names are stolen directly from The Force Awakens. In case you are in doubt who they are, here are the actor names so you can google their images if you like to know what precise characters you're dealing with.

Mister Thanisson - based on Thanisson, a first order petty officer played by Thomas Brodie-Sangster
Wexley - based on Temmin "Snap" Wexley, an X-Wing pilot for the resistance played by Greg Grunberg
Jess - based on Jess Testor, an X-Wing pilot for the resistance played by Jessica Henwick

When Phasma returned to pick up Rey for her first therapy session, Rey followed obediently. She had given Doctor Kanata’s words some thought. If she wanted to get out of here soon, it was best if she tried her hardest during these therapy sessions. She needed to be friendly to all these keepers. Perhaps it would help her get out sooner. All she needed was for them to trust her enough to leave the building, and once that was the case, she could run for it. Then she could head back to the streets, back to where she wouldn’t be a bother to anyone, back to the only life she knew.

In the meanwhile, she could try and learn new things. Perhaps those new skills would benefit her on the street as well. It did not have to be a complete waste of time, she figured.

Rey was led to the large table that was meant for group therapies and Madame Phasma announced her presence to her colleague.

“Mister Thanisson, may I present our newest patient, Rey, to you?”

Phasma certainly had a very formal way of going about things, but it appeared like Mister Thanisson wasn’t fazed about that at all.

“Hello Rey,” the young man greeted her warmly. For some reason, he still seemed so very much like a boy to Rey. He had dark, jolly eyes and an inviting smile in his thin face, and it unsettled Rey a little to be welcomed so warmly. She much preferred Phasma’s impersonal approach.

“Why don’t you sit down?” he suggested, gesturing to the seat by his side, and Rey hesitated for a moment.

There were still plenty of empty seats around the table, but then again, she wasn’t sure if it was wise to sit between other patients if she had no idea what they were like. Perhaps some of them were sitting rather isolated because they liked it that way, and she would not want to get on a bad foot with them.

She sat down next to the young Keeper and gazed at her other side, where the catatonic man sat whom she had seen before. He was rather overweight, and Rey could not help but wonder how anyone could get such a large belly unless they were millionaires. Then again, if Maz Kanata often
made those chocolate cakes with them, it was no wonder that someone was a bit heavier than most.

“That’s Wexley,” Thanisson explained as he had followed her gaze. “He won’t be actively participating in the therapy today, but it’s good for him to be around other people.”

Rey noticed how Wexley gazed at the ceiling with a smile on his face, not even realizing someone was talking about him – or did he?

“Dude, those new pills he’s having are totally drugging him!” Jess cried out from the other side of the table, clearly upset about this as she crossed her arms over one another.

“These pills might not be right for him – but we have to give his body the time to adapt. He’s only been taking them for two days.” Thanisson continued in a slightly stern tone: “And besides, Miss Testor, I would appreciate if you would not call me ‘dude’ each time you disagree with something that happens here.”

Jess looked a little angry to be called out like that, but nodded and mumbled: “Sorry Mister Thanisson.”

Thanisson acknowledged her apology with a small smile and continued: “Before we begin, perhaps you would like to tell us a little something about yourself, Rey?”

Rey had felt anxious just being there with all these strangers, but now her heart rate increased even more and her face turned red as she looked around the table. Everyone’s eyes were on her – save for those of Wexley besides her – and while most of them looked eager and curious, Rey saw one pair of eyes giving her another message.

It was the tall man again, the one with the thick dark hair and the worn-out green sweater. Instead of looking curious, he seemed wary, and his gaze was very intense as he shook his head.

Rey wondered if he was trying to tell her something, and as she suddenly understood what he meant, she quickly said: “No.”

“That’s alright,” Mister Thanisson said straight-away. “You are of course welcome to share with us what you want, when you feel the time is right.”

Rey felt relief wash over her as she realized she had not needed to tell them anything. For a moment she had feared she had had no other option.

Her eyes sought out those of the other patient, and he seemed to be very pleased that she had understood his message, a small twinkle in his eyes before he looked down again.

“Let’s begin for today then. I have brought along some mandalas for all of you to color. Please share the coloring pencils with one another and work with those colors that appeal to you personally. There’s a few designs to choose from. Could you please pass these along?”

Thanisson turned to Rey and gave her a bunch of coloring pages, and she took the top one without going through the rest before she tried to hand the rest to Wexley as he sat beside her – but he was still staring at the ceiling and apparently unaware of Rey’s presence.

The young man that sat next to Wexley offered to take the papers from her, and Rey recognized him as the man who had before been sweeping the floor when she had passed through the living area. He wore army colors and she even spotted a metal plate around his neck. He smiled kindly as he took the coloring pages and picked one before he passed them along again.
“Feel free to experiment with using patterns in your coloring,” Thanisson continued, keeping an eye on the pages as they were being passed along, and opening a few boxes of crayons and coloring pencils. “And keep it personal. Don’t just copy what someone else is doing.”

“Mister Thanisson, John is taking too long picking his drawing,” one of the men whined. He was thirty-something, the Latino that had before looked at Rey so lustfully, and she frowned as she looked at him. It appeared that the tall man besides him, the one that wore the hand-me-downs, was called John.

“It’s not John, it’s Kylo,” he hissed quietly, quickly deciding on a drawing and shoving the rest of the papers angrily towards the Latino.

“Poe,” Thanisson said strictly, before Poe could retort to Kylo. “Just because you can pick a drawing in ten seconds, doesn’t mean everyone can. You should try patience for once.”

Poe didn’t look up though, pleased he now had the coloring pages to choose from in his hands, and Rey noticed how the man besides her – John – or rather Kylo – was muttering to himself as he looked through the pencils for a color he liked.

Some people had already begun to work on their drawing, but Rey was hesitant before she reached out for the pencils and picked a yellow one. She was a little anxious. She had never colored anything in her life – at least not in the life she remembered. Had she colored before she was five? Did children even color before that age?

Looking at the soldier boy that sat two places from her, she tried to check how he was holding the pencil in his hand, but she couldn’t see it clearly. Looking opposite her, she tried to check how Poe was holding his pencils, but he wasn’t even holding a pencil yet.

His neighbor – Kylo – already had one in his hand, and as Rey tried to study that, she suddenly realized he was looking at her, and as their eyes met he offered her a brave little smile before he moved his hand so Rey could see exactly how he was holding it.

She copied it, grateful for the help he had once more offered her without any words, but did not dare to thank him for it. Instead, she bent down over the drawing, her nose almost touching the paper as she started coloring one of the hundreds of empty fields in her design. She pressed hard on her pencil, and by the time she reached the second empty field to color, she broke the point of her pencil.

Gulping, she carefully raised her head and looked at mister Thanisson. He seemed to be preoccupied with Jess’s questions about patterns and was unaware of her need of assistance.

Looking around the table, she tried to see if she could see another yellow pencil somewhere – the idea of asking for a sharpener something that did not pop up in her mind. She startled when a pencil suddenly rolled over the table towards her.

Rey immediately reached for the yellow pencil before her, its point still sharp, and as she looked up she saw it had been Kylo who had noticed her distress. He was smiling at her, and then pointed to the pencil that was now rendered useless to Rey.

For a moment she hesitated, once more trying to interpret what he meant, but apparently it was enough as she rolled the pencil back towards him. He took it from the table with his large, but lean fingers and started sharpening it.

When he was done, he lifted the pencil to show Rey the sharpened point before he rolled the
yellow pencil her way again. She put it above her drawing and smiled at him in gratitude before she continued coloring, careful not to press too hard now as she continued coloring – aware that it wasn’t as neat as it could be, but at least the drawing was getting somewhere.

By the time she switched to another color – green this time – she looked back up to see what Kylo was doing, but he was too busy with his own artwork, his brow furrowed in absolute concentration as he continued working.

For the most part, everyone was quiet while they colored, though Jess and Poe sometimes spoke to Thanisson. It seemed like the two of them took up the majority of the Keeper’s time and attention. The rest, not so much.

“Sir, permission to speak, sir?” the black boy who sat on the other side of Wexley asked.

“Of course, Finn,” mister Thanisson said kindly. “Are you finished?”

“Yes, sir!” he said proudly. “May I color another one?”

“As many as you like, Finn,” mister Thanisson said as he took the coloring pages and brought them over to Finn again.

As Rey looked at the drawing Finn had just finished, she startled a little. There was so much red and brown in the drawing – like there was hardly any light in there. Hers was so different – with yellows and pinks and light greens and light blues – every color on her mandala kind in comparison to the crude colors Finn had used.

“Are you going to use another color pattern for your next drawing?” Mister Thanisson asked curiously, and Finn nodded.

“Yes, sir! More greens, I think!”

“I would love to see what you make of it,” mister Thanisson said encouragingly, and as Rey looked at the young Keeper, she thought to herself that he was a very kind person.

The moment he turned his head towards her though, Rey quickly looked down at her own drawing again, and she continued working on her own mandala.

Slowly, people were finishing up their drawings, and mister Thanisson allowed them to return to their rooms or read in the relaxation area. A few of them went to get their winter jackets and went outside to the inner courtyard. One older man, the oldest of the entire group, asked for his cigarette, which Thanisson got from a large cupboard which he had to open with his keys.

Rey looked up from her drawing to study the man as he nervously moved his fingers over one another until he had the cigarette he craved for, and Thanisson joined him to the door to light the cigarette for him before he stepped outside.

As Rey finished her drawing, her hand was hurting like it never had before, and as she put down the pencil, she flexed her hand in order to make the pain go away.

Mister Thanisson neared her as he noticed she was finished, and spoke warmly to her. “I must say that I really like your use of colors. So bright and cheerful. I have not seen many mandalas like that before.”

Rey was pleased with those remarks, and her lips curled up a little as she looked at the drawing herself, but she had not been the only one doing so.
“Like, she can’t even color within the lines,” Jess said from the other side of the table, clearly not impressed with the drawing. “My four-year old cousin colors better than that.”

Mister Thanisson was about to interrupt, but Kylo beat him to it. “And how would you know, your family hasn’t visited you in years!”

“They send me pictures and drawings, alright!” Jess replied harshly, her hands flat on the table as she leaned forward to gaze sideways at Kylo.

Poe, who was sitting between them, turned to Kylo with a sly smile and taunted: “At least she has a family.”

Rey looked on a little breathlessly as she noticed how Kylo’s shoulders tensed and he was about to stand up – no doubt to smack Poe in the face – but mister Thanisson had seen it coming and was by Kylo’s side in an instant, a hand on his shoulder as he urged him to remain put and asked: “Kylo, why don’t you tell us about your drawing? I see you’ve used a very interesting technique.”

Slowly, Kylo’s anger seemed to subside again, and as he focused on the drawing again, he explained: “I was inspired by the glass-in-lead windows, and how the light appears to shine through a little brighter in the center of each piece of glass.”

As Rey looked at his drawing, she suddenly felt hers was truly dreadful. Where her lines were different in hardness and length, his were so controlled that she wasn’t even able to see where he had begun coloring each field. And it was truly impressive how the colors he had used were lighter in the middle of each field.

The colors themselves, however, were rather dark in nature. Black, dark gray, dark red and red – not much else. But the result was strangely beautiful to Rey.

“Dude, you give this shit way too much thought,” Poe muttered darkly. “It’s just therapy, not freaking art school. You’re not the next Van Gogh.”

In a moment, Kylo had risen from his seat, the chair falling on the floor behind him as he towered over Poe.

“I feel awfully tempted to cut someone’s ear off though. Yours, perhaps?” he threatened dramatically, and while Rey was intimidated, Poe seemed to be quite the opposite, smiling in a charming matter at Kylo.

“Oh, Kylo, you’re such a funny guy,” Poe teased him in a lighthearted tone now, but Kylo just grunted and walked away from the table, slamming the outside door as he rushed onto the courtyard, not even bothering to put on a jacket - even if it was the middle of winter.

“Poe, you really shouldn’t antagonize him like that,” mister Thanisson said strictly, gathering Kylo’s drawing from the table, as well as the others that had been left there. “One of these days he’s going to punch you in the face.”

“Good,” Poe muttered darkly. “If that’s what it takes to get rid of him. I hope they’ve kept a spot for him at forensics!”

Jess laughed, clearly amused by that plan, and Poe flashed her a bright smile before he looked at Rey, wondering what she had thought about what had happened, but Rey’s shocked expression immediately changed to one that didn’t betray a thing, and she got up and headed outside as well.

The old man stood smoking next to the door, but nodded briefly at Rey as he spotted her, and in a
reflex, Rey returned the nod, before she looked around to see where Kylo was.

He was on the other side of the courtyard, as far away from them as was humanly possible, pacing angrily back and forth, muttering things to himself as he kicked the wall a few times, trying desperately to get rid of the anger he felt inside.

Rey didn’t know what to do precisely, not sure if it was up to her to do anything as it was. Truthfully, she was a little scared of him – scared of the things she did not know. If he directed his anger at her, she wasn’t sure if she could get away. He was simply too tall and probably stronger than her too. Yet he wasn’t just an angry man – he seemed to be far more intelligent than the rest of them, and he had tried to help her – had offered her smiles. There was far more than just anger inside of him – even if it seemed that anger was winning out over the rest for the moment.

She walked closer towards him, stopping in the middle of the courtyard, her hands in her pockets as she tried to keep them warm, for it was close to freezing and she was only wearing her sweater.

Luckily, it didn’t take long before he noticed her looking at him, and he froze in his steps, his muttering stopping too as he looked at her, his eyes wide, afraid, and Rey wondered what he was afraid of.

They stood there, both motionless, a good minute passing before Kylo turned around and headed back to the wall, apparently his mind made up that he should not face her right now. His muttering and mumbling resumed, though Rey could not understand any of it from where she stood, and she figured that she was not welcome. With heavy steps, she returned inside, glad to be back where it was warm as she sat on a chair by the window, watching the young man as he remained outside, imagining how his hands had to be freezing, wondering where he kept on finding the anger to kick the wall every few minutes, hoping that whatever demon he was facing, it would be over soon.
Marmite

Chapter Summary

New character introduced:

Lor San - based on Lor San Tekka, played by Max von Sydow

Rey’s first evening meal with the rest of the group was rather awkward, to say the least.

She was glad that the tables were set up in such a way that people ate in little groups, not all together like around the therapy table. Poe and Jess were seated together, and as before they were still the loudest of the bunch, commenting on the bread, the ham, the cheese, all of it. They seemed to be talking about absolutely nothing and it was irritating Rey a bit.

Kylo was seated all by himself, facing the wall, though he sometimes looked at Poe and Jess with nothing but hate in his eyes, clearly even more annoyed at their talking than Rey was.

Rey was sat with Wexley, Finn and the old man that liked to smoke. Thanisson had called him Lor San, and apparently he had been given the task to help Wexley with his sandwiches, making them for him before he even thought about making some for himself.

For the first time in her life, Rey was given a choice in what she ate on her sandwich. She had stolen sandwiches from Tesco’s before, but she had never sat around a table like this one, with an entire bag of bread in the middle and butter, ham, cheese, eggs and two kinds of tea to go with it. There was even a little bowl with lettuce and tomatoes just so they could put that on the sandwiches as well, and Rey followed Finn’s example in how he was preparing his sandwich, though she added a few more tomatoes and an extra slice of ham – not realizing she was over-indulging and making her sandwich clumsily big that way.

The sandwich was great though and Rey ate it twice as fast as Finn ate his, noticing that Lor San had yet to begin eating the sandwich he had made himself. Wexley seemed to be more awake than he had during the rest of the day, and he stared ahead as he bit in his sandwich, still not completely aware of his surroundings – or perhaps he was, but it wasn’t apparent from his behavior.

Rey made a second sandwich – glad that there were still plenty of ingredients – and was about to finish hers when she saw Finn take a very odd jar and spread its content on his sandwich. There was nothing to go with it, just the gooey stuff itself - something brownish and transparent.

As he noticed her frown, he chuckled: “Don’t you know marmite, Rey?”

She shook her head, intrigued by this new food, and Finn’s eyes lit up. “Do you want to try it?”

Rey hesitated for a moment, then smiled and nodded. She didn’t see any harm in trying something new. After all, she could very well remember how much she had liked that chocolate cake from Doctor Kanata, and she imagined this to be similarly surprising.

“Oh, I don’t think Rey knows what she’s in for!” Poe sang from his table, and Rey hesitated now, finding Poe’s tone a little fishy.
“Will she like it or will she hate it?” Jess teased, curiously looking at what was going on.

As Finn handed Rey the sandwich with a mysterious smile, Rey gulped.

“Am I the only one who thinks she deserves a warning?” Kylo muttered darkly from his table.

“Ah don’t be such a buzzkill, Kylo,” Poe said in irritation.

“What warning?” Rey asked strictly, turning towards Kylo and looking at him as though her life was at stake. “Is it poisonous or something?”

Everyone laughed, and even Kylo could not help his smirking because of her innocent question.

“No, you won’t die, trust me,” he told her with a rare smile on his face. “It’s just… Marmite is this thing that you either love or hate. There’s no in-between.”

“Just like with Kylo,” Poe added with a charming flair. “He makes people vomit too.”

“Fuck off, Poe,” Kylo snapped at him, which only caused Poe and Jess to laugh louder.

“Language!” Thanisson reminded them while he was sorting out the pills for the evening, sitting at the table that was reserved especially for the keepers.

Rey didn’t really know what to do as she looked at the sandwich now. But if Finn was able to eat it, then surely she was able to as well?

“One tip,” Finn added. “Try not to smell it before or as you eat it.”

Rey gulped, quite sure that that went against her instincts, but she decided to get it over and done with. If she was fast, she would hardly notice the taste. As she took a big bite, it seemed like everyone in the room was looking at her, and the moment the flavor hit her tongue, she nearly gagged, causing Poe and Jess to roar with laughter, though she swallowed it all anyways and tried not to think about it.

Her face had gotten quite red now and she wondered if she was ever going to be able to get that disgusting flavor off her tongue.

“Such a trooper!” Finn said in awe. “Well done for your first bite of marmite! Most people don’t even manage to get it in their mouth properly before they start gagging!”

“I’m surprised she’s still alive,” Kylo muttered darkly. “You put like half the pot on your sandwiches.”

“Mind your own business!” Finn said strictly, not liking the comment on his eating habits.

Lor San had been the only one properly watching Rey and poured her a big cup of tea.

“Drink that,” he told her kindly. “And maybe get some Nutella on your next sandwich. Seems like a safer bet for you.”

Finn took the marmite sandwich from Rey’s plate and winked at her. “I’ll be taking this back then.”

As he took a large bite, he hummed in pleasure, like it was the most delicious thing in the world he had just eaten, and Rey looked at him with a combination of horror and shock on her face.

“Delicious,” he teased her, and Rey slowly started to believe that it had to be some sort of magic –
that she could despise it so much, while he loved it more than anything. She could not help but grin as she saw his boyish and playful eyes, and she took another slice of bread from the bag, determined to wash away that ghastly flavor with some Nutella.
A Hard Worker

He was always alone when doing chores.

In fact, it was even simpler than that: he was always alone.

He hadn’t always been as bad with people though. As a child, he could remember having a few friends who came over to play with LEGO or compete against each other in Mario Kart. Back then, no one had told him to shut up or that he disgusted them.

Sometimes he believed that those friends of his childhood had been wrong, that he had never been worthy of their friendship in the first place.

And at other times he hoped that he wasn’t as annoying and disgusting as the other patients made him feel.

Snoke always said they were wrong about him – that they were jealous of his inner strength, and that he could easily get them to shut up if he just punched them in the face or worse...

Snoke was always like that. He thrived on violence and he made Kylo’s blood boil several times a day – even when he wasn’t around.

As he was doing the dishes while the rest was watching the news, he suddenly heard someone call his name.

Well, not his real name. Nor the name he had chosen. Just the one on his papers.

“John Doe?”

He dried his hands and headed into the living area, seeing Madame Unamo and her cart full of boxes by the door. As he approached her and she acknowledged he had heard her, she said: “Rey Doe?”

As Rey got up from the seat in the corner of the room, Poe obviously couldn’t just leave her be.

“No related to the douchebag, I hope?”

“Come on, Poe,” Finn said in an annoyed tone, trying to watch the news. “That’s just the name they give to everyone without a last name.”

“I know that!” Poe muttered, now annoyed that Finn had actually believed him to be that stupid, but he did not remark further as Rey went to the keeper that had just entered with a large cart. The woman appeared to be in her early forties, with dark hair that was tied into a neat bun on the back of her head.

As she opened one of the large cardboard boxes, both Kylo and Rey saw that she had brought clothes along.

“Madame Phasma send me an e-mail telling me you two could do with some extra clothes. Is it true you ripped four of your T-shirts last week, John?” she asked sternly, and Kylo’s mouth twitched.

“They were old,” he muttered. And he had been very angry. So angry that he was now ashamed to admit it. “And my name is Kylo.”
“Well, Kylo, for once you can consider yourself lucky, because we happened to get a donation of men’s clothing in your size last month. And not too shabby-looking either.”

Kylo was pleased to hear that. He was a little vain, after all.

As Madame Unamo dug through the box, she got out a few shirts for Rey.

“I can see how Madame Phasma wasn’t sure if you were a small or a medium. You’re skin over bones, but you’re not so tiny either. I think your shoulders need a medium.”

Rey wasn’t really sure how proper sizing worked, and so she waited patiently, wondering what she would get.

“As for pants, I’m not entirely sure. You should try these jeans.” She gave Rey a pair of black jeans, then put a few T-shirts on top. “You should try them on.”

Kylo was watching Rey as she looked at the clothes in her hands for a moments, a bit of confusion on her face before she looked around, then walked to the table behind Madame Unamo, put down the clothes, and then started taking off her sweater.

His mouth dropped as he saw she was wearing nothing but a thin undershirt underneath, not even a bra underneath it, and he looked at Madame Unamo with his breath stuck in his chest, wondering if she shouldn’t tell Rey to go to her room instead, but thekeeper was completely unaware of what Rey was doing behind her back.

His gaze then traveled to the other patients, who were luckily too busy staring at the television to give the scene any regard, and the last thing he wanted to do was to pull their attention towards Rey as she was changing.

She put on a black shirt – it suited her, Kylo thought – before she unbuttoned her pants and slid them off, causing Kylo to gulp heavily as he looked at her with a mixture of fear and awe in his gaze.

She was skinny, alright, but he thought her legs were gorgeous regardless of that. Though perhaps he wasn’t the best judge of that, he hadn’t seen that many bare legs in his life.

As she put on the jeans, he could not help but feel the heat rise to his cheeks and other parts of his body as she slipped the tight fabric over her bum. It was as though she had felt his gaze, for she turned her face in his direction the next moment, and he looked away shyly, blushing like an idiot.

Madame Unamo gave him a few more shirts and sweaters, as well as some trousers – all in a very classical style, but he did not mind.

“Ah and there was this black waistcoat,” she continued. “I’m not sure if that’s something you have a need for, but it looked too new to simply throw away. No formal occasions you need to attend?”

Kylo thought about it for a moment, then shrugged.

“One can dream. Could always come in handy for Poe’s funeral.”

Poe’s head turned at the mention of his name and he called out: “What’s that you said about me?”

He shut up, however, when he saw Rey taking off one shirt and putting on the next, and as Kylo noticed his gaze, he felt his own cheeks go red. He should not have drawn Poe’s attention, who was now looking at Rey like it was Christmas again.
Kylo cleared his throat a bit, and as Madame Unamo looked up at him, he nudged in Rey’s direction. The keeper turned around in an instant, and as she saw Rey was still there, she jumped a little.

“Oh dear! Rey, please go and change in your room!” she said, feeling ashamed in the girl’s place.

Rey still didn’t seem to fully grasp what she had done wrong. “I’m done,” she said. “They all fit.”

“Well, I have some more,” madame Unamo said. “Why don’t you bring these to your room and then I will join you in a few moments? John – I mean Kylo – will you try yours on as well?”

He nodded and took the clothes to his room, but not before he looked at Poe, whose eyes seemed to be breathing fire, filled with the realization that Kylo had just ruined the best peep show of the year for him.

Honestly, the thought that he had angered Poe only made him feel a little happier, and he returned to his room with a small smile on his face, closing the door behind him as he tried on the new clothes. He lacked a mirror, but it appeared like all the buttoned shirts and sweaters fit him alright. At least the sleeves were long enough.

As he put on the waistcoat over the buttoned shirt and looked down at his clothes, he grew sadder. He remembered how his mom always loved to see him in clothes like that. He remembered a twelve-year-old Ben Solo attending a fancy dinner for his mother’s work with his parents. His father hadn’t been as fancy, he recalled. He had been the odd one out at the event, but his mother… She had been the star of the event, and everyone had come to talk to her and commented on how fancy he looked – how handsome Ben would grow up to be.

Kylo shrugged, no longer believing any of that, and he didn’t notice the tear that rolled down his cheek until he tasted it on his lips. He quickly wiped the tear away and changed back into his normal clothes.

All the new clothes would do fine, and he put them away in his rather empty closet.

He startled when he heard a knock on the door, and immediately said: “Enter?”

Mister Thanisson opened the door to look at him and wondered: “Weren’t you on duty tonight, Kylo? I saw that you hadn’t finished washing up.”

“Oh, yeah, sorry,” he said quickly. “Madame Unamo came to bring some new clothes. I had to try them on.”

“Oh she’s here?” Thanisson asked casually. “She didn’t pass by the Keeper’s Office.”

“Yeah, eh, she should be with Rey.”

It didn’t seem like Thanisson was planning on seeking her out though, and he suddenly changed the subject, making Kylo feel a little anxious.

“It seems you’re feeling better than earlier this week.”

Kylo gulped, then nodded in agreement. “Yeah. I feel alright now.”

“I can’t say that I know precisely what it is to have anger outbursts like yours, but is there something we can do to help you with it before you wreck your clothes again?”
Gulping, Kylo shook his head. Thanisson wasn’t a bad guy, but in his youth and optimism he didn’t always realize how people ticked.

“If I had not had my clothes to wreck, I would have wrecked someone’s face,” Kylo said darkly, and the young Keeper gulped.

“Well… In that case it’s better to rip the clothes, I guess. Would it help if I put an old sheet in your closet? Something to wreck without actually destroying your clothes?”

Kylo frowned. “I doubt it.” Seeing how disappointed Thanisson looked because of that, he added: “I mean… We could try though. If you have an old sheet… Plenty of room for it in my closet.”

Thanisson cheered up a little at those words, and Kylo knew how important it was for the young man to leave his own mark in the work he did. It was a pretty hopeless place at times, and keepers with the optimism of Thanisson were rare. It was something Kylo did not want to destroy. Life would sniff out that hope in the keeper in its own cruel way. Kylo didn’t want anything to do with that.

As Thanisson left the room again, Kylo returned to the living area, noticing that Rey was back as well, standing behind one of the couches as she raised her eyebrow at the television, not liking the cheap telenovela that kept the rest of the patients so entertained. He wondered why she wasn’t sitting down, but also saw that Jess was taking up two spaces on the sofa, lazily stretching her legs and thus blocking a perfectly good spot for Rey to sit.

Rey suddenly turned her head towards Kylo, and as she saw how he was looking at her as well, she just stared at him, as though she was trying to read him.

To Kylo, it seemed like she was about to see in the darkest depths of his soul, and he felt incredibly exposed. His cheeks flushed and he quickly headed into the kitchen, hoping she couldn’t actually read his mind. Cause that would be bad.

As he went back to washing the plates, he realized that the water had gone cold, and while he added some hot water, he didn’t notice that Rey had followed him, now peering curiously into the kitchen.

“Do you eh… need some help?”

Her voice startled him a bit, and as he looked behind him with wide eyes, he wasn’t sure what to say.

She was looking at him again, her gaze not leaving his eyes for a moment, and as it made him feel uneasy, he quickly turned back to his work.

“Are you sure you don’t want to watch television?” he replied, his heart beating unevenly, and he couldn’t even explain why.

“And become a zombie like them? No thanks,” she muttered darkly, and he could not help but grin because of her tone.

“Not a fan of television?”

“Never had one,” she admitted, and this intrigued him.

He didn’t know much about her yet, except that it was obvious that she came from the street. But no one ever really got born on the street. Everyone always came from somewhere. It was strange to
hear that wherever she’d been born, there hadn’t even been a television around. Or perhaps she couldn’t remember.

As she stepped closer to him, she took a towel from the rack and lifted one of the wet plates he had washed off, carefully drying it off.

He gulped as he realized she didn’t mind being around him, and he had never really experienced that – not at the ward at least.

“You could also read something. We have books,” he said weakly, fearing it was too late to change her mind now that she had begun helping him with the dishes.

She shrugged. “Nah.”

He wondered why that didn’t seem to interest her. Then he remembered how she had not known how to properly hold a pencil either.

“You can’t read?” he asked carefully, and he noticed how she tensed up beside him, before she continued her drying off.

“Only a bit,” she admitted softly, not looking at him as she continued her work.

“That’s nothing to be ashamed of,” he said kindly, a bold idea forming in his mind and causing him to blush. “You need a teacher.” He hesitated. “I could teach you.”

Rey gave it some thought, remaining quiet for a while. In the meanwhile, Kylo thought his chest was about to explode from how fiercely his heart was beating.

“It’s a kind offer,” she admitted. “But I wouldn’t want to waste your time.”

He wasn’t sure what he had expected, but something about her answer told him that something was wrong. Not with him – with her.

“Why do you think it would be a waste of my time?” he asked her, hoping there was no disappointment in his tone.

She remained quiet, locking her lips as she took another plate to dry off, and he tried to empathize with her – to learn what she was thinking.

“Are you thinking of returning to the street the moment you get out of here?”

It was a confrontation – at least to Rey, who was now starting to regret her decision to help him. She had realized that he was far more intelligent than she was – far more intelligent than most of the other patients she had met that day – but she had not thought his questions would be just as disarming as those asked by doctor Kanata. Perhaps even more than that.

“Aren’t you?” she replied, trying to steer the conversation away from himself.

He frowned. “Not really. I mean… I don’t really think about what I’ll do when I get out of here. Don’t think that’s likely to happen anytime soon.”

“Because you get angry?” she now asked, and he nodded.

“They are unlikely to let you out if you can’t read,” he continued, trying to make the conversation about her again – not about him.
There was a small silence before she asked: “Not even to go shopping?”

He was about to reply when he suddenly realized what her plan was and he lowered his voice as he hissed: “Are you seriously considering running away?”

Her silence was the only affirmation he needed, and he continued in a low tone, resting his hands on the sink as he looked at her. “You really want to run away while this place will feed you and keep you warm and dry and give you a chance to get better?”

She now turned to him, her eyes alight with a fire he had not thought she had.

“I am fine the way I am. I do not need to get better.”

He breathed out through his lips as he looked down at her, shaking his head.

“The Nile is not just a river in Egypt,” he muttered, and she frowned as she did not understand what it was he meant with that.

“Look,” he continued. “You want to get out of here as fast as you can. And that’s something I can relate to, but… why not take me up on my offer while you’re waiting?”

She shrugged again, something she seemed to do a lot. “Because it would be a waste of your time and energy. Just me being here is a waste of everyone’s time and energy too, including mine! I can take care of myself, without straining on anyone’s time or resources.”

He remembered a time when all he had wanted to do was return to the street – but those sentiments had eventually changed. Pushing her to think differently would not have the effect he wanted, and he sighed in resignation.

“I don’t think you’d be a strain on my time or energy. I’m bored most of the time as it is. Would be nice to be a little… less bored. Perhaps I wouldn’t be helping you as much as you would be helping me.”

She was quiet again, thinking over his words.

He let the water flow out of the sink and fished out the last cutlery he had missed, taking a towel to help Rey with her drying off. She meant well, but she wasn’t particularly fast. No doubt that she had never done actual dishes like this.

“You’re saying that…” She paused for a moment, trying to put it into proper words. “That I’d be able to help you?”

This concept seemed alien to her, and she remained quiet as she let that sink in.

“I don’t want to push,” he said honestly. “Just… Give it some thought. I’ll be around.”

As she looked into his eyes again, there was a small smile tugging at the corner of her lips, and he felt his stomach squeeze together rather unpleasantly at the sight of it.

You like her.

“Shut up,” he muttered, still looking at her, and she frowned in confusion.

“I didn’t say anything,” she said skeptically, raising an eyebrow before she decided to continue her work, and Kylo’s cheeks flushed pink.
“Sorry… Just…” He gulped. “Talking to myself.”

As they finished up drying off, she helped him put back all the mugs and plates, and they were both unaware of mister Thanisson as he looked into the kitchen with a surprised smile on his face.

In the brief time he had worked for the ward, he had never seen Kylo work together with any other patient. But it was more than just working, even. A meaningful connection had been made. Perhaps this would be the first step in the young man’s recovery.
The Superior Gender

Her first morning in the ward, Rey was woken up by no other than Madame Phasma, as she knocked on the door and opened it, she looked inside, starting with “Good morning,” and soon continuing with a confused: “Did you sleep on the floor?”

Rey had not been able to sleep on the soft mattress and she had just taken the warm blankets and her pillow and moved them to the floor. It had been far more comfortable.

As Rey got up to put the blanket and pillow back on the bed, assuming that was the right thing to do, Phasma’s mouth dropped completely. “And you did not change out of your sweater and jeans? I thought I asked Madame Unamo to give you something to wear for the night.”

Rey gulped, feeling like Phasma was rather pissed off now, and she did not know what to say to make it any better.

As Madame Phasma went into her closet, she found the pajama and put it on the empty chair before her bed. “This is what you will wear when you go to sleep tonight.”

She started gathering clothes for Rey from the closet.

“We’re going to do some sport after breakfast, so I think it’s best to put on these sweatpants and a shirt. And I see you have a sweater in your size too. Excellent.”

As she went into the drawer as well, she took out some underpants and socks.

“And it’s also very important that you put on new underpants and new socks every day. Understood?”

Rey nodded, though she thought that might be overdoing it a bit. But still, if that was what was desired to keep Phasma pleased, then she would do that.

“Now, best to take a shower. There are towels and washing cloths in the bathroom itself. You may use two. One for your body, one for your hair. You will also find some soap and shampoo there that you may use.”

Phasma showed Rey the way to an empty stall where she could shower, and she heard Jess singing a few stalls away from her.

It was quite a luxury to shower underneath the warm water – and to spoil her body and hair with shampoo. When she heard Jess got out from underneath the shower, she waited a few more minutes before she emerged herself, drying herself off as quickly as she could and slipping into her underpants.

Jess was still in the room though, standing in front of one of the sinks as she brushed her teeth. Through the mirror in front of her, she was looking at Rey, nothing but disdain on her face.

Rey saw the girl’s look, but didn’t really know why she looked that way at her. Did she find her disgusting? Her expression seemed to carry some disgust, after all.

As she got dressed, Jess started drying her hair with the blow dryer, not taking her eyes off Rey as she brushed her teeth now. It made Rey a bit uncomfortable, someone who only stared but didn’t say anything in return. If this had happened on the street, Rey would have run away. She would not
have stayed around to see it evolve into an even tenser situation.

Here, she had no such option though, and so she felt her inner levels of stress rise as Jess did not look away, not until she suddenly flipped her long, dark hair down and tried drying it that way.

Rey put the used towels in the laundry bag and brushed through her hair before she tied them firmly together and returned to her room. She put on her shoes and she headed straight for the living room, where Phasma inspected her as she entered.

“Rey, go and dry your hair. We’re heading outside after breakfast. Don’t want you to catch a cold.”

“The other girl is drying her hair,” Rey said weakly, hoping that Phasma understood she simply could not obey the command at that moment.

“Alright. Have some breakfast then. You can go and dry your hair once you’re done and Jess is here.”

Relieved that she did not have to go to Jess, she went back to her breakfast table, seeing that hardly anyone was up yet, though Finn was already eating some marmite sandwiches, smiling widely at Rey as he spotted her.

“Hey Rey. How was your first night in your new room? Sleep well?”

She wasn’t used to being asked things like that, and so she merely shrugged. “Alright.”

Finn didn’t seem to mind her short reply, and continued eagerly: “I always eat a while before we go out for sports. I don’t get how some people can eat and then sport straight after. I’d be sick, I think.”

Rey noticed a box of cornflakes on the table, and eagerly took a bowl and filled it to the brim.

As she started eating the dry cornflakes, Finn asked: “Won’t you have some milk with that?”

He raised the jar of milk for her, and after a moment’s hesitation, she nodded in approval. Finn happily poured milk over her chocolate cornflakes and Rey smiled as she noticed how the milk got a little darker.

“Chocolate milk,” Finn said with a smile, watching her delighted expression as she looked at her breakfast.

“Like magic,” she said quietly, not knowing that it would do that.

Finn frowned at that childlike expression of wonder, and left her to her own thoughts as she ate, wrapped up in his own.

“Phasma, I can’t get Wexley out of bed!” A red-haired man entered the living room, agitatedly heading in Phasma’s direction as she was sipping a cup of tea from the Keeper’s table. “I don’t know what Doctor Kanata is thinking changing his medication like that, but if he is such a zombie I have no idea what I’ll be able to do with him at the track today!”

“Just let him watch, Hux. It’s not like he’s going to run away and there are plenty of seats. Besides, it’s been very quiet here since he’s on the new medication.”

Hux sniffed angrily, looking around and startling a little when he saw Rey eating from her bowl of cereal, her eyes wide as she looked at him in return.
“Ah, you must be the new patient,” he said, composing himself again, and if he had been agitated before, that now disappeared in his expression.

“Rey, meet Mister Hux. Mister Hux, Rey Doe,” Phasma introduced them, not getting up from her seat as she then continued sipping tea.

“Another Doe,” he said with a smirk on his face. “Were you unconscious when they prepared your papers?”

Rey shook her head, not really understanding what he meant by that, and he continued: “And you come from the street, right? How old were you when you ended up on the street?”

Unable to ignore the tall Keeper, Rey put her spoon back into her bowl. Where Thanisson and Phasma had been very patient with her, Hux seemed to be the opposite. He wanted an answer, and it was clear from his expression that he did not like to be kept waiting.

Rey could not help but look in the direction of Kylo’s table, but he wasn’t even up yet. At least he would have been able to tell her if she could refuse to answer Hux or not.

“I’m not sure,” Rey answered truthfully, though she had a pretty good estimate.

Phasma seemed to notice Rey’s unease, and jumped in: “Doctor Kanata is still working on her file. We’ll be sure to get more information on her once she’s been here a little while longer. It’s her first morning here. She only arrived yesterday after lunch.”

Hux continued to stare at Rey for a little while longer, making her rather uncomfortable, but Phasma’s words seemed to have some finality to them, and so Rey quickly picked up her spoon again and continued eating.

It appeared that Hux lost interest in Rey again in that moment – at least for a while – and he stalked off to the men’s corridor.

After she finished her bowl of cereal, she continued with eating a fresh, green apple, then a banana, then made herself another sandwich – and another – and as she was about to take even more bread on her plate, she suddenly felt Phasma’s hand on her shoulder.

“I wouldn’t eat more than this if I were you. You’ll have two more meals here today, you know…”

Rey immediately drew back her hand from the bag of bread, but didn’t look up at Madame Phasma.

“Besides, we just got you all those clothes. Wouldn’t want you to grow out of them already. Just drink some tea or milk now.”

It was true that she wasn’t particularly hungry, but Rey had always eaten all she could – or rather: all she had. And since that had been very little, she had always been hungry. Until now.

Finn was kind enough to pour her some tea and Rey looked up as a few more men entered. Kylo was one of them, and like the others he was wearing rather sporty clothes. He looked even taller than she could remember in the black sweat suit he was wearing, and his eyes met hers only a few moments after she had spotted him.

His lips curled up in a small smile, and hers did the same, almost like some instinct was causing her to mirror his every move, but as Lor San bade her and Finn a good morning, she turned her head away from him again, bidding Lor San a good morning in return.
When Jess entered, Rey headed to the bathroom, glad to see it was empty so she had the place to herself while she dried her hair. She had actually never dried her hair before, and so she just did what she had seen Jess do, and so she turned on the hair dryer and flipped down her hair as she tried to dry them from below, soon learning that it was a bad idea not to move the hair dryer as it nearly burned her skin off if she held it still too long.

She managed quite successfully to dry her hair though and after she tied her hair together again in a tight ponytail, she returned to the living area, noticing how people were already finishing up breakfast and getting ready to head out.

Poe and Jess were cleaning up the area as Hux shouted his orders. “Alright everyone, get your jackets and put on your sneakers if you haven’t already. We’re heading out in five minutes. It’s cold outside and we won’t do our warm-up until we reach the track, so make sure you won’t freeze before we get there.”

Rey noticed how everyone rushed away to obey these orders, and she headed to her own bedroom to take the new jacket she had gotten – a beige one that looked far too elegant for her tastes, but she had nothing else to choose from.

Though she had no proper sneakers, her shoes were comfortable enough for running – she had done plenty of running in them on the streets. As she headed into the living room again, Phasma immediately looked her over. She had apparently decided to keep a close eye on everything Rey did, and Rey knew that she didn’t particularly like it.

“Your jacket has a V-neck,” she remarked, frowning a bit. “You’re gonna catch a cold if you don’t wear a scarf. Do you have one yet?”

As Rey shook her head, she suddenly noticed someone was approaching them, and as Kylo stopped next to them and took off his scarf, he offered it to Rey.

“I have another,” he said, not really looking at her as she took the scarf from him, her mouth slightly open as she did not know how to respond. “Besides. It’s brown,” he continued as casually as he could. “It goes well with beige.”

During Rey’s silence, Phasma was the one to speak up. “Thank you, Kylo. Best you go get a scarf for yourself then.”

Rey was sad to see him leave again, but remained where she was as she waited, putting on the soft, but warm scarf. As she wrapped her neck and chin up in it, she smelled it, and though it wasn’t a completely natural scent – there was some sort of perfume in there, or so it seemed to her – she enjoyed the scent. A lot. As she heard some grumbling, she looked to the side, where she saw Hux as he was helping Wexley into his jacket.

“Phasma,” he muttered angrily. “I really think we should ask Doctor Kanata to undo this new medication for Wexley. Just look at him! He can’t even put on his jacket by himself anymore!”

“Give him time, Hux,” Phasma said in her usual composed tone. It really seemed like nothing was able to faze her. “You are always too impatient with these things. A body needs time to adjust.”

As Hux tied a scarf around Wexley’s neck, he was quite adamant about making sure it looked good on him – even if Wexley himself looked like he would fall asleep at any moment.

Everyone was gathered together in the living room on time, and as they headed out of the ward, following Phasma, Hux stood by the door to check everyone one final time before they left the
“Miss Testor, where is your scarf?” he asked strictly when Jess was about to head out, stopping her with his hand, and she gulped.

“It’s in the laundry,” she replied quickly.

“And you only have one?”

Hux’s strict voice made Rey a little uneasy as she watched Jess shrink in front of him.

“The other one didn’t match my jacket.”

Strangely enough, that was one thing Hux could sympathize with, and Rey didn’t immediately get it – even though it was true that Hux’s clothes were on point – so much so that she would have sooner guessed he was some sort of model than someone who worked at a psychiatric institution.

“Well, suit yourself,” he said harshly. “If you catch a cold, it’s your own fault.”

Even Poe was remarkably quiet that morning, keeping his tongue in check as he walked past Hux, and it was like Rey could feel how other people were a little tense as well. She was glad that Hux did not remark on her at all as she passed him, and was relieved when they were outside on the domain of the psychiatric institution.

It was a massive place, really, with many buildings scattered across the domain, each housing different groups. Not all buildings were built at the same time. Some seemed to be over forty years old, others still looked pretty new. There were actual streets that ran from building to building, but there were no cars driving on them, at least not around their part of the domain. Near the entrance, it was busier as it was where all the visitors and doctors parked their car.

Rey looked around curiously, walking by herself until she realized someone was missing. She feared for a moment that Kylo wasn’t among them, but when she turned her head to look behind her, she saw that he was there, walking in front of Hux, and as she had no desire to go anywhere near Hux, she remained where she was, following the rest of the group as they walked – at a rather slow pace – to the track.

The track itself was a tiny stadium. It wasn’t anything particularly fancy, but there were tribunes for people to sit and spectate, and in the middle of the track was a soccer field. Rey followed the rest of the group as they headed to one part of the track near the benches, and as Phasma guided Wexley to one of them, he immediately sat down.

“Alright, walkers can begin. Runners stay for warm-ups,” Hux announced, and Rey saw a few of the older people, including Lor San, begin their walk around the track.

If she was given the choice between running and walking, then she would choose running though. She saw that most of the younger residents chose the same, and as Kylo came to stand next to her, smiling shyly at her, she once more felt how the corners of her lips tugged into a smile as well. It was a little bit disconcerting how that kept on happening so automatically around him.

Finn clapped his hands together in enthusiasm, apparently pumped to start running, and Poe and Jess were whispering to one another as they only had eyes for each other. Rey wondered what the story was between them.

“Alright. Warm-ups!” Phasma said, taking off her own winter jacket, and the rest did the same, though most of them kept their scarves on for now.
Rey just followed their example and soon found herself standing in all sorts of weird positions she had never stood in before, counting along with the rest of the group from one to ten, wondering how much good these exercises would do if they only did them for ten seconds each time, hoping she wouldn’t fall over as she balanced on one leg while she held the other behind her bum.

As she looked besides her, she saw that Kylo was looking at her too, smirking at something, and Rey frowned.

“What?” she muttered, feeling like he was laughing at her.

He kept his voice down so Phasma wouldn’t hear.

“Delightful to see you look so completely puzzled about all these stretching positions. I can only imagine what idiots you must think us to be.”

As she realized he wasn’t insulting her at all – rather himself and the other patients, she grinned too, finding him amusing.

When the warmups were done, Hux took over again.

“Alright. One lap. Slow pace. Get those muscles loose. Finn, take the lead.”

“Aye aye, Sir!”

Finn eagerly began a slow-paced jog, and as they all followed, Rey felt a little disappointed by how slow they went. If this was how all their runs would be, then she might not enjoy it as much as she would have hoped.

As they came full circle, Hux was holding a stopwatch in his hand.

“Time for a challenge now. I suggest Rey and Jess run against each other, and Kylo, Finn and Poe do the same. One lap each. Fast as you can.”

Rey’s eyes lit up as Hux announced that, and while Hux had expected to see the same annoyance that Jess displayed at the idea, he found himself to be rather intrigued by her gaze.

“Do you think you could win, Rey?” he asked with a smirk on his face, and Rey did not hesitate before she replied.

“Yeah. I could also win from them.”

She pointed to the men, who all turned their heads and frowned, not believing her for one second.

“I don’t think so,” Finn said immediately. “I was in the army. We had to run ten laps before breakfast sometimes!”

“Not to mention that it’s a bit unfair,” Kylo continued. “I mean. Your legs are much shorter than ours. Well at least mine.”

“I do not believe you are truly faster than me,” Poe said. “But I will gladly run behind you and enjoy the view.”

Rey had been agitated by Finn and Kylo’s replies already, but Poe’s actually made her mouth drop. She had no idea how to reply though, but Jess suddenly cried out: “Ow my God, Poe, is that why I always win when we’re up against each other?”
Poe shrugged as though he did not know what she was on about, and Hux just rolled his eyes.

“It is proven that men are better at running than women are,” Hux said. “Men are the superior gender when it comes to most sports.”

Phasma was looking at him through narrowed eyes, ready to fight him on that, and he smirked as he saw her gaze.


As they got ready, Hux said: “Do not start before I whistle.”

As Rey looked to her side, she saw how Finn bent through his knee a little, his head leaning forward as he prepared to dive into a sprint, but Rey merely looked at him as though there was something wrong with him.

The others had taken on a similar posture, but Rey wondered how that would be of help to them, and had no time to imitate them as Hux suddenly whistled.

The rest hurried off and Rey was quick to join them, the adrenaline within her racing as she ran as fast as she could, soon catching up with them.

Jess wasn't a fast runner at all, and Poe followed behind Rey, though he had trouble keeping up. Finn and Kylo, however, were doing much better, but as they saw Rey between them, they were suddenly starting to realize she hadn’t been kidding when she said she could beat them. They tried even harder, but after half a lap already, it became apparent they simply could not keep up.

Hux and Phasma looked on with interest at the little competition.

“I'll be damned,” Hux muttered. “She wasn’t just being cocky. She can actually run.” He was impressed, but also curious. “What do you actually know about her?”

“That she was arrested for stealing a candy bar,” Phasma replied. “Apparently she’s been on the street for as long as she can remember. At least from five years old.”

“Something tells me she stole much more than just one candy bar,” Hux muttered darkly, narrowing his eyes as she neared the finish line.

As she crossed it, however, she did not stop running, and Phasma shouted: “Rey, you can stop running now!”

“I don’t want to!” Rey shouted back, running on with renewed energy as she felt the air pump through her lungs.

As Finn and Kylo crossed the finish line a moment later, they were completely out of breath, their hands on their knees as they tried to regain their composure, Finn simply wheezing from effort while Kylo moaned inelegantly.

“Oh yes,” Phasma muttered darkly, looking at Hux. “Such a superior gender.”

She secretly enjoyed watching Hux’s cheeks turn just as red as his hair, and sat down next to Wexley with a smile on her face.
Voices

It came as a surprise to all that Rey was such an eager runner, but Kylo secretly enjoyed it very much. She had such energy about her – a rare thing indeed in a place where not just Wexley behaved as a zombie at times.

Living in a psychiatric ward got everyone down at some point, but it seemed like Rey had not yet reached that point. Kylo hoped she never would.

As the group was on their way back to the ward, he saw how Rey was walking a few steps in front of him, her hands in her pockets and her eyes to the ground.

Admittedly, he had never really sought out the company of other patients, but Rey was different. There was this pull… And so even before he considered if it was truly wise, he found his feet going a little faster, until he caught up with her.

As she looked up, he said: “I’ve never seen anyone run like you just did.”

She wasn’t sure if he meant that in a good way, not until he offered her a smile, and she relaxed.

“It’s handy to know how to run when you live in a big city and can’t afford the subway,” she admitted.

“I can imagine,” he agreed. “So, London, I assume? I spent some time on the street as well.”

“I know,” she said with a mysterious smile, and now he was intrigued.

“Did you… did you ever see me? Do you know me?” he wondered, and he felt a twinge of disappointment when she shook her head.

“No, but…” She bit her lip for a moment before she said: “You’re like me. In some ways.”

He didn’t feel insulted by that at all.

“Yeah,” he said a little breathlessly. “I feel it too.”

It was nice how they didn’t need to put it into precise words to understand what the other meant.

“So,” Kylo continued carefully. “Did you have friends on the streets of London? Anyone I may know?”

Rey shook her head, and this surprised Kylo a bit.

“You didn’t know anyone?”

“I knew plenty of people – but just well enough to leave them alone,” Rey muttered darkly.

“You had no one who helped you?”

“When I was younger.”

“Who?”

Rey didn’t seem eager to talk about it, and checked where Hux and Phasma were before she replied
softly: “Unkar Plutt.”

Kylo looked at her with wide eyes.

“You know him?” Rey asked, already knowing his answer.

“Yeah!” he admitted, a little startled. “Everybody knew him. He was an animal. Did he… did he hurt you?”

The worry that she saw on his face moved her. No one had ever cared that much about her.

“Not really,” she replied, hoping it would ease his worry a bit. “He used me for his gain. Let me run plenty of errands for him. Until I ran from him too. And then he disappeared and it got easier…”

He was surprised by how easily she told him these things, and truthfully, so was she. Doctor Kanata would have never gotten as much out of her, but Kylo was just different. A kindred spirit, if such a thing existed.

“It was said on the street that he fought everyone,” Kylo continued. “I was glad I never met him.”

“Yeah…” Rey said, her mind wandering back to her past and she grew quiet as old memories started haunting her thoughts.

Noticing this, Kylo kept quiet too, deciding to just enjoy his walk in silence. It was easier said than done though.

As they were nearly back at the psych ward, Rey suddenly heard him muttering to himself. She couldn’t make out what he was saying precisely, not until he muttered: “Shut up”, just as he had done the day before.

“I didn’t say anything,” Rey replied again, confused.

Poe, who had walked a bit before them, had heard that and turned around, grinning widely.

“He’s not talking to you, love. Just to the voices in his head.”

Rey frowned, not really understanding what he meant, but as she looked at Kylo, she saw how he turned red and did not dare to look at her anymore.

“Oh, look at how red he’s getting,” Poe continued, clearly enjoying all the taunting. “Best to take a step back, Rey, he’s going to blow!”

Rey saw how Kylo’s hands were now clenched into tight fists, and how he had begun to tremble all over. She did not step back though, but instead looked at Poe with a defiant gaze.

“No, he isn’t!” she replied fiercely, daring Poe to contradict her.

Poe startled a little from her fierce tone, and Kylo was in mild shock, holding his breath as he turned his head to her, wondering how she could even be so sure about that. She didn’t know him yet.

But strangely enough, it worked. In his surprise, his anger subsided.

“You think so?” he asked softly, and Rey smiled as she saw how insecure he was about that.
“I know so!” she said with a self-assured smile.

He did not understand her at all, but for some reasons, her presence had an impact on him. Her determination flooded over to him, and slowly his hesitation disappeared. He felt calmer again, the anger and the voices gone. For now.

The voices were never gone for long though, and when he returned to his room, they were there. But it wasn’t so bad when people didn’t antagonize him. Poe’s presence was usually the worst. And Rey’s presence the best.

As he returned to the group before lunchtime, he looked for Rey, but it didn’t appear like she was there. Was she in her room? Hux didn’t like it if people weren’t on time for lunch, and he felt like he had to give her a warning. But he wasn’t allowed in the women’s corridor and so there was nothing he could do.

_Hux will definitely yell at her._

“She’s late,” he muttered, but the voice was persistent.

_He is right of course, for it is bad form to be late… But she is also new. And pretty. You take pity on her, don’t you?_

“I’m not talking to you,” he muttered, making sure that he was standing in a corner of the room, so far that no one could understand him. “It’s none of your concern. It’s my life, not yours.”

_Ah, but Kylo – it’s ‘our’ life!_

“You’re just ruining it. Fuck off.”

_That’s no way to talk to me. Thanisson would not approve of your language._

“Well he can fuck off too. He doesn’t know what it’s like to be bothered by you all the time.”

_Such anger inside of you now, Kylo. You should let it out. Why not punch Poe in the face? We both know you want to…_

“You’re just trying to get me into forensics,” Kylo said with a frustrated grunt, and obviously Poe had noticed Kylo’s inner turmoil by now, grinning as he looked at him.

_Look, he’s taunting you again. Go and punch him, Kylo. Do it!_

Kylo just wanted the voice to stop, wanted to scream, but he knew that he couldn’t without ending up in isolation. He had to get a grip on himself and so he tried to ignore the voice as best as he could and rushed outside, trying to ignore the voice as it laughed at him, still telling him to punch Poe.

He immediately grunted the moment he was outside, the voice disappearing for a brief moment, and he stalked off towards the other side of the courtyard, then back again, his steps just as large as the amount of anger he felt.

He stumbled though when he spotted a familiar sight in the corner of his eyes, and his mouth dropped a little as he saw Rey, laying on the seat of an old wooden picnic bench, apparently
sleeping in her winter jacket and with her scarf still tightly around her neck.

Once more, the surprise of the moment helped the anger flow out, and he carefully walked over to her, crouching down before he gently shook her.

She woke in an instant, her gaze terrified before she realized it was him, and he gulped, hoping she hadn’t truly been afraid of him.

“You shouldn’t sleep here,” he said softly. “If Hux or Phasma see this, they’d be upset with you.”

She rubbed her eyes as she sat up on the bench, and he moved to sit beside her.

“I like sleeping outside,” she admitted, and he smiled, finding that hardly surprising for her.

“Besides, I was really tired,” she continued.

“I can imagine. You ran seven laps.”

“I like running,” she said a little defensively.

“I know.” He could not hide his smile again.

She stretched, and he noticed she had a bit of dirt on her cheek from where she had slept on the bench. With a gentle movement of his hand, he wiped it away, startling her a little.

“Sorry,” he apologized, realizing she had not seen that coming and he should have given her a warning. “You had dirt on your face.”

“Oh…” Rey wasn’t used to being touched – didn’t know better than to fight everyone who ever did. Her reflexes had been a little off though. She wasn’t sure if that was because she was tired, or because she trusted him.

Strange indeed that she trusted him, for she hardly knew him.

“Was it true what Poe said,” she asked softly. “About hearing voices?”

“Yeah…”

He remained quiet, staring ahead as he felt the color rise to his cheeks.

“I’m sorry,” she said as she noticed his unease. “You don’t have to tell me anything. I don’t like telling people things that I don’t like to tell them either.”

He remained quiet, but she wasn’t completely finished yet.

“Are you hearing voices right now?”

He chuckled, amused by her curious tone.

“No. Not right now. Right now it’s quiet.”

Rey smiled to herself. “I like the quiet.”

“Me too.”

As he sat beside her, he suddenly heard something familiar in the distance, and he brought her attention to it.
“Listen.”

Rey held her breath for a moment, then said: “A car?”

“The food truck,” Kylo explained, getting up from his seat. “They have warm lunches with them, as well as bread and fruit and drinks and other things we need for our dinner and breakfast.”

“Oh…” Rey listened to the sound of an old engine approaching the other side of the building and then turning off again.

“Come,” he continued. “If we aren’t at our tables by the time the food cart is rolled in, Hux will be mad.”

“That’s strict.”

“That’s Hux. The others don’t really care as much. Come.”

Rey obediently followed him as he preceded her to the living area, holding the door open for her as she entered, and she quickly went to hang up her coat and scarf before she headed to her seat. He did the same, and as he sat down on his seat, he turned to look at Rey, noticing that she was also looking at him.

She likes you.

He quickly turned away again.

“Shut up.”
After they had eaten lunch, which was actually warm dinner, they were all given a few hours to themselves. Phasma took Lor San with her to go shopping for new clothes and Hux was left to make sure the rest behaved, sitting at the Keeper’s tables, scribbling notes in a notebook.

Doctor Kanata briefly came in to take Poe with her for a therapy session, and not much later, Madame Unamo returned. This time she had another kart with her, one that had several boxes of books on it, and Rey noticed how Finn and Kylo headed to their rooms to retrieve books they had borrowed and returned them to her, looking for new ones.

She had been sitting in a seat by the window, just observing everyone, and she had noticed that both Finn and Kylo seemed to like reading.

Kylo could not help but think of Rey and her confession of the day before. She wasn’t good at reading, and he could help her. But she still had not accepted his offer to teach her.

As he looked at her, Finn noticed that Kylo had stopped browsing the books, and as he followed his gaze, he noticed that it was Rey he was looking at.

Finn thought that Rey’s curious gaze meant she was interested in borrowing a book as well, and he beckoned her to come to them.

“Don’t be shy, Rey. You can pick a book as well,” Finn said warmly.

“Up to three, actually,” Madame Unamo added, leaving her cart behind for a moment as she went to Wexley as he sat in the sofa, still as drowsy as before.

“Hey, Snap!” she tried to catch his attention, leaning her face close to his. “Snap, can you hear me?”

For the first time since Rey had arrived, she suddenly saw that Wexley responded, and he grinned as his gaze focused and he looked at Madame Unamo.

“It’s about time you woke up, sleepy,” she muttered affectionately. “Think you can say hi?”

“Hi…” he said slowly, his voice rough, but still looking at her with a warm affection.

Rey was surprised and stared at the exchange, before she reminded herself that Finn and Kylo were waiting for her.

Heading towards the books, Finn eagerly clapped his hands together.

“Well, Rey, what do you like to read? Mystery? Adventure? Romance, perhaps?”

Rey smiled politely, but internally she was screaming for help.

“I… I don’t really read,” she admitted, omitting the fact that she had never properly learned to read.

“You should try Garfield,” Kylo suddenly said, offering her the comic, and as she took it from his hands – for a moment distracted by how big they were compared to hers – she opened it and noticed that there were images – and not too many words to accompany them.
“It’s a cat,” she remarked, skipping through the pages, and Finn furrowed his brow.

“You don’t know Garfield?!”

Rey didn’t realize how that could be so offensive to elicit such a strong response from Finn, and she just gulped as she looked at him.

“Oh… There might be other things you like here,” Kylo continued, hoping to distract Rey enough so she wouldn’t give Finn the chance to grill her. He crouched down to look into the boxes at the lower level of the cart, and Rey quickly followed his example, carefully watching Kylo as his fingers browsed through many books that seemed to be made for children. They were colorful, with large letters and beautiful illustrations.

“They have these children’s books for those in the elderly ward. People with dementia often forget to read, and then these books can still entertain them.”

Rey wondered how he always seemed to know everything, and felt little compared to him. Not just in a physical sense.

But as he offered her an encouraging smile, she gained courage. When he suddenly took another book from the box, he offered it to her as they were still crouched down.

“Can you read the title?” he asked softly, aware that it was a sensitive subject and not trying to draw further attention to it. He hoped Finn could not hear them.

She looked at the words for a few moments, moving her lips in silence as she tried to read it. As she saw the image on the cover corresponded with what she had read, she whispered: “The cat in the hat.”

He smiled warmly. She had taken quite long to read that – but at least she had not needed help.

“Take that one,” he advised her. “It has nice pictures too.”

Rey nodded and got up again, and he followed her example. As Finn saw the book Rey had chosen, he still frowned, but he was wise enough to keep his thoughts to himself.

Poe and doctor Kanata returned from the therapy room and Poe quietly retreated to his room, leaving Rey to wonder what they had talked about in the first place.

“Rey,” the doctor called her gently. “Could you come with me?”

Rey gulped, not sure why. “Did I do something wrong?” she asked, slightly worried.

“Oh no,” Doctor Kanata quickly replied. “Not at all. Just a standard moment to talk with one another. Don’t worry about it.”

“I’ll check out your books for you,” Kylo offered, and Rey handed him the books again, following doctor Kanata through the men’s corridor to her own office beyond the locked door of the ward.

As they entered the office, doctor Kanata offered Rey a seat, then closed the door behind them.

“I must say that I had feared for a moment that you would not talk to anyone when we last parted yesterday. I’m glad to hear my worries were for nothing. I heard good things.”

As Kanata sat behind her desk, Rey looked at her with curiosity in her eyes. What had the doctor heard about her then?
“I heard you are quite the runner! Seven laps?”

Rey smiled.

“I try to do some sports myself, but I don’t think I’d be able to manage that at your speed,” Kanata admitted graciously.

Rey was still smiling, not completely insensible to the compliments she was receiving.

“I also heard that you didn’t sleep in your bed last night?”

Rey gulped. She had feared that Phasma would spread the word, but she had not expected Kanata to know already.

“I tried,” she said weakly. “But when I couldn’t sleep I moved to the floor and then I fell asleep in no time.”

“And you weren’t wearing your pajama?”

“I… I didn’t see the use in it,” Rey said weakly, fearing that Kanata would be upset, but she wasn’t at all.

“Do you understand why we ask you to wear a pajama?” she asked instead.

Rey thought for a moment, then said: “Because that’s what normal people do?”

Kanata chuckled. “Well… Normal people have their reasons for doing the things they do, and I don’t want you to just copy what you see other people do. Be critical. Ask questions when you don’t understand why people do something. In the case of wearing pajamas, there are several reasons. It’s more hygienic and it’s healthier. You keep unwanted folds and crinkles out of the clothes you wear during the day, and they’re more comfortable than jeans with studs and zippers.”

Rey supposed that that made sense, and Kanata continued: “I also heard that you helped with doing the dishes yesterday evening?”

She was really beginning to wonder how much of her day was being reported to Doctor Kanata, and how all the keepers had time to talk to each other about all that. She suddenly wondered if the notebook Hux had been scribbling in held all their secrets. It had to be something like that.

“I was a little bored,” she admitted, and doctor Kanata was intrigued by that.

“What would you do before you came here, when you were bored?”

“Go for a walk or a run,” Rey replied softly, not really wanting to talk about that, and Kanata noticed it, immediately steering the conversation back to the short time she had spent in the ward.

“Well, we usually don’t expect patients to help out during their first week – just so that they can settle in. But if you feel like you’re ready for helping, we could put you in a team with a few others.”

Rey tensed up a little bit at the mention of the word ‘team’. She didn’t really like the idea of being forced to work together with people she did not feel comfortable with.

“Did you make friends yet?” Kanata wondered. “Or are there people you wouldn’t mind working with?”
Was she being given a choice? Rey looked with wide eyes at Doctor Kanata. It really did appear like she was being given a say in this, and she immediately said: “Kylo. I don’t mind him.”

Doctor Kanata was intrigued by her choice of words. The way she said that indicated that she did mind some other patients.

“Why Kylo, if I may ask? He is the only one in the ward who has always preferred to work alone.”

For a moment Rey worried that this meant that she could not be on his team.

“He… He’s like me,” she said softly.

“In what way?” Kanata wondered. After all, she hoped Rey would not turn out to be schizophrenic too.

“He has lived on the street. And… and he likes it quiet.”

Kanata looked at her with a gentle smile, now realizing why Rey felt a pull to him and not to the others. Kylo was indeed one of the quieter patients in the group – when his anger didn’t bother him.

“Well… Before we team you up, I will need to check with Kylo if he is open to the idea of working with you. Would you feel comfortable enough suggesting the idea to him yourself?”

She felt a little nervous at the prospect of having to ask him for this, but she tried to push away her own fear and nodded bravely. “I will ask him.”

“Good. Now then… Let’s discuss something else. Your art! I saw the mandala you colored, and I’d love to hear from you why you chose those colors!”

Rey was still lost in thought as she returned to the living room. Her conversation with doctor Kanata had gone quite well, she thought. Not that she trusted herself to be the best judge of that, but it seemed like even doctor Kanata had enjoyed talking to her about various things: food, colors, sports, television… It hadn’t been particularly personal, yet now that she had left the doctor she felt like she had told Kanata far more about herself than she had thought so judging the questions.

She knew that she had to ask Kylo if she could join his clean-up team, but he wasn’t in the living room. Fearing he was in his room, she went outside then, hoping to get away from the incessant chatting between Jess and Poe, and to simply enjoy some fresh air.

Luckily, Kylo was outside as well, sitting on the same bench she had slept on earlier that day, reading from a book. She slid besides him and offered him a weak “hi” as he spotted her.

“Hey,” he replied in return, putting a bookmark between the pages before he closed the heavy tome, apparently done with reading now that she was there.

Then he pulled out the books he had kept from underneath his – the Garfield comic and The Cat in the Hat, as well as a third book she had not picked herself.

As he gave it to her, he asked: “Can you read the title of this one?”

As before, she was slow again, but eventually she succeeded in figuring it out. “The Little Match
Girl."

“I thought you would like it. But it’s a bit wordier than the other two. You might want to read it last.”

Rey had a small smile on her lips as she let the books rest before her, before she put her hands in her lap and tried to think of a right way to ask him if she could join his team.

“I have a question,” she started, and this seemed to grab his attention and brighten his mood a bit, for he suddenly sat a little straighter and looked at her with a patient gaze.

“Shoot.”

“Could I be on your team for cleaning up?”

His mouth dropped a little and he was surprised by the question in the first place.

“My team?” he repeated shyly, not sure what to think.

“Doctor Kanata said you usually work alone, but I didn’t know who else I would like to work with. I don’t mind helping you out.”

His heart skipped a beat and he couldn’t erase the goofy half-smile from his face. Not to mention that his ears were turning a little red from just the idea that she wanted to spend more time with him.

“Do you need time to think about that?” she asked, now feeling a little self-conscious and hoping he would not reject her. She really had no idea what she’d do or who she’d turn to if he didn’t want to go through with it.

“No,” he replied slowly, and for a moment she feared he didn’t want her help, and her expression fell. “I mean – I don’t need more time to think about that! Of course you can be on my team!”

Rey let out a relieved sigh, glad that was over and done with.

“And you?” he suddenly asked, and as he saw she did not know what he was talking about, he continued: “Did you think about what I asked you? About me teaching you to read – or anything you need help with?”

He had his hands in front of him on the wooden table, but she could see he was nervously wringing them over one another.

She still wasn’t entirely sure about it, and she admitted: “I don’t want everyone to know.”

He looked a little down as she said that, and softly asked: “That I’m teaching you?”

Rey frowned, immediately shaking her head. “No. Well, yes. But rather… that I need a teacher in the first place – that I’m too stupid to know these things already.”

He smiled patiently.

“You’re not stupid. You just lack an education. Big difference.”

They looked at one another for a little while, their eyes kind and their hearts patient as they were trying to sense if this was a good idea or not.
“I won’t tell anyone,” he continued. “I could help you here – when we’re outside. Lor San might see when he comes out for a smoke, but he’s discrete. And I’m pretty sure that Finn figured out you can’t read well either, when we were choosing the books, but he’s not the type to talk about it or shame you for it. They’re both pretty good men in that way.”

Rey thought that wasn’t so bad.

“So… We can sit here and just read then?” Rey suggested.

“Yes. And if you need help, I can help you… I can teach you the words you don’t know yet.”

He was so patient as he offered her his time, and she suddenly felt a twang of guilt.

“I still feel bad asking this of you. You must have much better things to do with your time. I’m already asking you to team up with me, while you prefer being alone, and now I’m once again claiming your time.”

He gulped, hoping he wasn’t too direct as he said: “I don’t mind being with you. You’re… it feels like you’re the only one who treats me like a normal person.”

She grew sad hearing him admit to that, and she said: “I don’t know if any of us are really normal… Or that it’s something we should really strive for… But whatever kind of person you are… I don’t mind being around you. That’s rare, for me.”

His words once again brought a smile to his face, and he nodded. “For me too.”

Feeling how the tension between them was shifting – though he wasn’t sure into what – he felt like it was best to steer clear from those feelings for now. If he was to teach her, then now was as good a time as any to begin.

“Let’s start with The Cat in the Hat, shall we?”
Her second morning at the ward went better than the first. She was up before Phasma woke her – her pillow and blanket rearranged on the bed, even if she had slept on the floor again, and she headed into the shower before the others had left their rooms.

She was one of the first in the living room. Wexley was already sitting behind his usual seat, and Rey moved to sit next to him, startling a little when he suddenly said: “Good morning!”

Her eyes were wide as she looked at him, and he seemed to be completely aware of his surroundings for a change, not at all striking her as a zombie anymore.

“Hello,” she replied, her tone a little surprised, and as he looked at the table and his gaze drifted off again, she wondered if he was really awake yet.

“I’m… I’m Rey,” she continued, hesitating a little because it would be silly to talk to someone who wasn’t even listening.

His eyes shot up though, smiling warmly.

“Wexley. Or Snap. Whatever you prefer to call me.”

He looked away again, and Rey decided to keep quiet for now.

“Yes I’m starving,” Wexley suddenly said, and Rey wondered who he was talking to. He didn’t seem to be directing it at her. “Can’t wait for breakfast. I feel like I haven’t eaten in days.”

It was quiet for a few moments, and then Wexley continued: “Of course I remember Wendy making me a proper breakfast. I miss her.”

“Do… do you hear voices?” Rey asked carefully, hoping she wasn’t offending him.

Wexley turned his head to her again, but he didn’t seem upset at all.

“Oh. Oh, yes. Schizophrenic. Sorry. Just talking to eh… to myself.”

Schizophrenic. So that was what Kylo was too.

“What’s it like?” she wondered, hoping she could learn something.

“Being schizo? Eh… Well, for me… I have people in my head. Sometimes they talk so much to one another that I can only be a witness to it… Other times – like today – they’re calmer.” He hesitated, and she wondered if he was hearing a voice, or just thinking about the best way to describe it. “They talk to me all the time. We can discuss things. I suppose it’s not so bad, but people usually get freaked out when I’m talking to myself.”

“How many people are there in your head?” she wondered, very intrigued by this problem he was facing.

“For me? About seven. But they’re all rather nice. Others aren’t so lucky.”

Rey wondered if he was talking about Kylo, and not always one for subtlety, she asked: “Like Kylo?”
“Yeah, he’s got an evil voice that makes him angry. For me, I just get distracted easily, and then I’m tired really quickly when they won’t shut up. But at night, the voices wish me a good night, and in the morning, they wish me a good morning. I’m never really lonely that way.”

She smiled, glad that it wasn’t bad for him, but at the same time she worried about Kylo. An evil voice? That had to be scary.

“And they’re with you all the time?” she continued curiously.

“Yeah. Though they’re not always active. Sometimes it’s like they’re just sleeping or witnessing everything passively. But they always know everything. Can’t hide anything from them.”

Rey had a million more questions for him, but stopped when she saw Finn had entered the room.

“Wexley, my man!” he cried out. “What’s this? Finally awake?”

As he dropped himself on the chair opposite Wexley, he leaned for, giving Wexley a friendly fist bump that made Rey raise her eyebrows.

“I’m alright, Finn. Feel like I’ve been sleeping for a week though.”

“Well, something like it. So how’s your mind now? Can you hear your own voice?”

“Well it’s louder than the others right now. I’m good. Let’s hope it sticks. Wouldn’t be the first time I need to change meds.”

Hux entered, and with nothing more but a strict gaze, Finn got up from his seat and started setting the tables.

“Need help?” Wexley asked.

“Nah mate, I’m alright. You can just chill if you want.”

“Been chilling all week…” Wexley said with a sigh, getting up from his seat as he headed into the kitchen to make tea.

Rey sat by herself until the rest of the group joined them for breakfast and Hux gave the sign that they could begin eating. Kylo had arrived last, but had immediately spotted Rey’s gaze on him, smiling at her before he sat down and turned his face to the wall again. Rey wondered why he always ate alone like that, and if she should ask if she could join him. Perhaps she’d gain enough courage to do just that in time, but for now she was alright eating at the same table as Finn, Wexley and Lor San, and a little afraid to ask Hux anything at all.

After breakfast, Hux once more gave them a few minutes to get ready, though they did not need any sports clothes today, apparently. Rey wondered where they were headed, and once outside, she sought out Kylo’s company.

“Where are we going?”

“The petting zoo,” Kylo explained. “It is run by a keeper named Statura. We get to work with the animals – feed them, muck out their cages and stables – and in return we’re given something to drink at the end. Like actual coke and fanta – not just the water and tea they give us during our lunches.”

Rey rather liked carbonated drinks, and so it was quickly decided that she was going to do her best
in this. Even if she really didn’t like animals.

When they arrived at a farmstead, Rey thought to herself that it had to be quite old – probably the oldest building on the domain. She hadn’t seen buildings like that in London itself.

They entered the inner courtyard of the farmstead and Rey saw that some people were even riding horses. They appeared to be fellow patients, but from another group. There were only two horses, and that meant that the majority of the patients had to wait by the side of the pen, and Rey looked with large eyes at some people as they stood around awkwardly, making rather unintelligent sounds to voice their disapproval of all the waiting.

“That’s the group for the people with mental disabilities,” Kylo said quietly, following her gaze.

She frowned, her reaction a bit slow, and so Kylo added: “Mentally retarded.”

“Dude, don’t say that!” Finn hissed, turning around to shoot him an angry gaze. “When did they raise you, in the sixties or something? Mentally challenged, is what you’re supposed to call them now!”

“I was just saying it so she’d understand!” Kylo defended himself.

“Don’t waste your breath, Finn,” Poe said with a wicked smile on his face, glaring at Kylo. “You can’t expect mentally challenged patients like Kylo to be politically correct.”

“I’ll have you know that my IQ is twice as high as yours!” Kylo replied defensively, even if that wasn’t quite true, and Poe just laughed at it.

“Twice as high as zero is still zero, loser,” Poe replied.

Kylo was shaking now, and as Rey noticed it, she suddenly took his hand in hers, squeezing it gently.

This startled him a bit and he looked at her in confusion, the surprise once more draining out the anger.

“So what work shall we do?” Rey asked carefully, and she was glad to see that he was able to regain some control on himself.

“Statura usually lets me clean out the BB cages.”

Rey frowned, once more not really understanding what he meant.

“BB cages?” she repeated, and Finn was once again the one to overhear that and reply.

“Baby bunnies!”

“Oh,” Rey said weakly.

“They’re no longer babies though. They were born last spring,” Kylo added, gently pulling her along with him to the stables, and she followed obediently.

Inside the stables, it was rather quiet. A chicken rushed out the moment Kylo and Rey entered, and Rey clung to Kylo’s arm, a little jumpy.

“Relax,” he said reassuringly. “Nothing here is going to hurt you. These are all very small animals.”
In the middle of the old barn stood some tables with many smaller cages on them, and as Rey looked inside, she saw nothing but bunnies. The outside walls of the stables had larger cages against them. One of those cages was home to the chicken, and several of them were empty save for some straw, but Rey assumed that they were in use by animals that were currently outside.

“Would you like to hold one?” Kylo asked, going to one of the bunny cages and gently lifting a bunny into his arms, holding it against him as he petted its head.

Rey was wary – not used to dealing with animals other than cats – and though she did walk a little closer, she did not extend her hand.

“What’s his name?” she wondered, looking at the white bunny with the orange patches of fur.

“BB-8,” Kylo replied softly, careful not to startle the bunny. “The black one is BB-1, then the black one with the white feet is BB-2, gray one is BB-3, BB-4 and BB-5 died, BB-6 is the white one with the orange and black spots, BB-7 escaped, and this here is BB-8. We were here when he was born.”

Rey raised an eyebrow. “And why not give them actual names?” she wondered curiously, causing Kylo to laugh softly.

“We pick names for bigger animals sometimes, but not for bunnies or chickens.”

He noticed how Rey was looking at BB-8, hesitating, and he suggested: “Why not pet him?” he suggested, even going a little through his knees so BB-8 would be closer to her.

She carefully brought her hand to the bunny’s ears, but immediately pulled it back when BB-8 turned its head to sniff her.

“Just let it sniff you,” he continued. “You don’t need to be scared of it, it’s probably more scared of you.”

“With reason,” Rey said a little darkly. “I could hurt it without even knowing it.”

“Nonsense,” he replied, walking over to a chair. “Sit down. You can hold him in your lap.”

She obliged slowly, even if she wasn’t really sure about this, sitting down and letting him put the bunny on her legs, but before she had a chance to wrap her hands around it, it kicked back and jumped off, causing Rey to shriek.

Kylo quickly picked up BB-8 before he could hop even further away, but by then Rey had already risen from her chair and distanced herself from Kylo and the bunny.

“Bad idea!” she said, sounding a little anxious. “Bad idea!”

“Okay, I’m sorry,” he mumbled, putting BB-8 in his cage before he spoke to himself: “I wasn’t trying to scare her… Who doesn’t like bunnies? … I was just trying to help!”

*Just great,* Rey thought to herself. Now her panicked reaction had awoken those voices in Kylo’s mind again.

He started moving all the bunnies to one of the pens, and Rey wasn’t sure if she should stay or leave. Perhaps it wasn’t going to be so easy after all to do something useful.

It didn’t take long for Kylo to notice how she was awkwardly looking around, and wiped his hair
out of his face before he said: “Why don’t you remove all the water feeders and food bowls out of their pens? If you go outside, there’s a drain in front of the door, you can empty the water feeders there, and…” He pointed next to the stable door. “…Over there you can find a trash can to empty out the food bowls. I’ll get us a few buckets of water so we can wash it all off.”

Rey nodded quickly, immediately moving to one of the cages and putting her fingers around one of the water feeders, but as she slid it up and down she didn’t really know how to get it off.

Kylo chuckled to himself as he saw her puzzled face, before he explained: “It’s a snap on, so also a snap off. Don’t be afraid to break it – I can assure you you won’t.”

He was right about that. It turned out to be no problem at all to get them off the cages, and while she headed outside to empty out the water feeders, he took a few buckets with him that he could fill up with water.

Rey noticed that Finn was actually helping the keepers and patients of the other group as the horses stepped in circles in the small pen. He was holding the reigns as he guided one of the horses around, and Lor San was doing the same.

The others appeared to be gone though. There was no sign of Poe, Jess, Wexley, or any of the other patients for that matter. Hux and Phasma weren’t around either, and Rey wondered where they all were.

When an unknown, Asian-looking man came down the stairs from the main entrance to the farmhouse, Rey quickly cast down her eyes and continued emptying out the water feeders, hoping she had not drawn any unwanted attention to herself. But from the corner of her eye she noticed the man was coming towards her, and when he saw her, he addressed her.

“You must be the new girl, Rey.”

Rey gulped, daring to look up at the man, though she wondered who she was dealing with. He wore blue overalls and clumsy gloves, and she wasn’t even sure if she was dealing with a patient or a keeper. He had a few gray streaks in his otherwise black hair, and his gaze was curious as he waited for her to say something. It was rather unsettling.

“I’m mister Statura,” he added, taking off his glove to offer her his hand, and at this Rey relaxed a little.

“Oh… Hello.”

Apparently Kylo had noticed mister Statura’s arrival, and he had left his buckets behind to make sure the keeper knew why he had not let Rey check in with the others – though he now doubted that he had had a good reason at all.

“Usually when someone is new to the farm, I like to talk to them before setting them to work,” the keeper continued, his voice a little strict, but fair at the same time.

“I thought she could help me!” Kylo immediately blurted out, not wanting Rey to take any of the blame.

Statura narrowed his eyes a little as he looked at Kylo, finding him to be behaving a bit stranger than usual.

“Well, if you needed help, you could have just told me,” Statura continued warily. As he turned to Rey, she spoke before he had a chance to order her around.
“I would like to stay and help,” she continued. “I don’t think I’d be much use with the bigger animals.”

“And why’s that?” he wondered, and at this Rey nervously pressed her lips together.

Kylo was quick to come to her aid again. “She isn’t used to dealing with animals. Best start small then, no?”

Statura still looked suspiciously at Kylo, but then nodded.

“Fine by me. And you’re going to give her plenty of things to do?”

Kylo quickly nodded, hoping that sealed the deal, but the keeper couldn’t help but look at Rey one more time, measuring her up as she did not look away immediately.

“Alright. Good luck then,” he finally concluded before he went on to check up on Finn and Lor San.

Rey tried to hide a smile as Kylo looked at her, his gaze a little fearful – as though he was afraid that Rey did not approve of him deciding what he should do, but she wasn’t offended at all. In fact, she had never had anyone look out quite like that for her before.

They worked hard in clearing out all the cages and filling them with fresh straw and food. It didn’t take them much longer than an hour before they were done, and just as they were finishing up, Poe suddenly entered the barn.

“How is my baby?”

For a moment, Rey was offended, thinking he was referring to her, but he walked straight past her and to the cage of BB-8, shrieking affectionately at the little bunny.

“BB-8, my sweetie! I have missed you!” He took the bunny from its cage and hugged it tightly. “Are you alright, my friend? Did clumsy Kylo drop you?”

Kylo rolled his eyes, taking a deep breath and ignoring Poe for now.

“Come on, Rey, I’ll show you the rest of the farm.”

As they headed outside, Kylo said: “Poe thinks he’s the father of the bunny.”

Rey frowned, not fully understanding.

“Or its mother,” Kylo continued with a roll of his eyes. “Or midwife. He was the first to hold BB-8 after it was born. The mother wasn’t doing so well, or else we would have left her alone. But BB-4 and 5 died before we even got there and, anyways, I suppose Poe is a little attached now.”

Rey smiled as she followed Kylo out the farmstead’s gate and they headed to a massive nearby pen that held dozens of goats. Wexley and Jess were still there, brushing the goats with a special glove they were wearing for that, and Rey was curious.

“Why are they doing that?”

Kylo shrugged. “Not sure if goats need that. But they do enjoy it, and if they don’t, they usually make sure they get the hell away from people. I think it’s more therapy for those with the gloves than for the actual goats.”
She chuckled, quite amused by that statement. When Kylo opened one of the two fences that led to the pen and waited for her to enter as well, she hesitated.

“Won’t they get angry?” she wondered, and Kylo was a little surprised.

“Why would they get angry? Do you intend to hurt them?”

She quickly shook her head.

“Then stop worrying. If the goats can deal with Poe and Jess, then they can definitely deal with you.”

That did make sense to her, and so she slowly followed him inside the pen. The goats did not approach them or back away from them – too used to humans in their vicinity. Though Kylo managed to pet a few, Rey did not get very close to them, just following Kylo around, warily looking around.

“Hey!”

Rey looked up, only to see Hux and Phasma stand on the other side of the pen. Phasma was holding a few old bags of bread, and was beckoning to them to come and get it. Hux didn’t seem very interested, his hands in the pockets of his long coat, as though he was rather bored that this was a part of his job.

Kylo and Rey headed over towards them, and Phasma handed Kylo a bag of old bread, and then offered another one to Rey, who didn’t seem to want to take it.

“It’s old bread,” Phasma explained. “For the goats. We always save up on old bread.”

“I know what it is,” Rey said quietly. She had seen the bags of old bread in the kitchen.

She took a bag from Phasma, but didn’t seem to be particularly happy about it.

“Rey,” Kylo said, a big grin on his face. “Check this out.”

He took a few steps closer to the goats, then started shaking the bag. At the sound, several goats turned their heads and ran towards him, bleating loudly, and while he was opening the bag, a few goats even jumped up, leaning on his legs so they could reach higher.

Kylo grinned as he looked at Rey, who seemed to be looking at him in horror, wondering how he could stand it that half a dozen goats had their hooves on him, and he chuckled.

“They can’t hurt you, Rey.” He started tossing some small pieces of bread on the ground behind the goats, and as he did this a few of them jumped off him again, though this only made room for others to jump up against him.

As Rey slowly opened her bag, that very sound attracted the attention of some goats. Spotting the bag in her hand, they bleated loudly and headed towards her. She took a few steps back, but the goats had their minds made up, and when one jumped up against her, she shrieked and stepped back, before she threw the bag of bread as far away as she could, and then ran as fast as she could towards the gate.

Kylo’s mouth dropped, surprised by her reaction, Jess and Wexley were howling with laughter in the distance, Phasma looked on with a bit of a shocked expression, and Hux muttered dryly: “Good thing she can run so fast.”
Rey was slightly out of breath as she jumped over the gate – not stopping in front of it to open it – because that only would give the goats a chance to catch up, even though they had long stopped following her.

Once she felt safe, she let out a few deep breaths, her hands shaking, startling when she heard Kylo’s voice on the other side of the gate, surprise in his tone.

“Rey, are you alright?”

He was a little out of breath as well from the running, and looked at her with nothing but worry on his face.

She nodded, even though she was sweating all over and unable to look at him.

“Well… Guess you’re not a fan of bunnies… or goats,” he muttered. “Do you want me to introduce you to the horses?”

“No!” she replied fiercely, lifting her hand so he could not approach her, even if he was still on the other side of the fence. “No, please, no. No bigger animals… Not helping.”

He frowned, wondering why she was so scared of animals in the first place. As Phasma and Hux approached them, he did not ask the question though.

“Are you okay, Rey?” Phasma asked, her brow furrowed in worry.

“Yeah, I’m fine,” Rey replied as she tried to compose herself, lifting her chin and putting her hands in her pockets. “I just don’t like… goats.”

“But you did your tasks for Mister Statura?” Hux asked strictly, and Rey nodded. “Then go get your drink,” he continued. “And count yourself lucky: your integration into society will not be dependent on your reaction to goats.”

It was a joke – yet no one laughed. Phasma just raised her eyebrow at Hux, giving him the ‘what on earth, Hux?’-look.

Kylo left the pen again and led the way to the farmhouse, glad to see Hux and Phasma did not follow them but instead remained around Jess and Wexley.

Rey was silent as she stared at the ground, and Kylo said: “Hey… I’m sorry. For eh… forcing the bunny on your lap and eh… taking you into the goat-pen.”

She did not say anything, and he hated it. He wanted to help her, but he had no idea how.

“That’s not true,” he muttered.

“Oh no? Look, she’s terrified of animals, and you basically forced her in their company twice now. If it were me, I’d be trying to get rid of you too.

“She’s not trying to get rid of me,” he hissed.

He startled when he felt her fingers against his, tentatively looking for his hand, and as he looked at her, he noticed she was looking at him too.

“I’m not trying to get rid of you,” she assured him, offering him a small smile, and he felt a
relieved sigh leave his mouth, glad that Snoke was wrong.

He squeezed her hand in gratitude, but she soon let go of it again, not wanting people to see it and think something else.

He led her into the bar – the room behind the entrance of the main house, with many old wooden tables and chairs spread across it, and a bar in one corner. The group that had been horse riding before was already having a drink, and one of their keepers went to the bar to help them.

“Names?” she asked, checking the list Phasma and Hux had brought.

“Kylo,” he replied, before he reminded himself that that name would not be on the list if Hux had made it. “Doe,” he corrected himself.

“Me too,” Rey said. “Doe.”

As Kylo looked at her in mild surprise, she smiled, and he didn’t even know why, but he could not help but feel like a lucky bastard.

“The Does,” the woman slowly replied as she checked both their names. “What can I get you?”

“Coke,” Kylo said, and Rey nodded in agreement.

“Me too!”

As the keeper popped off the lids and handed them their bottles, she asked: “Straw?”

“No,” Kylo replied immediately, but Rey hesitated for a moment, looking at the colorful straws that were kept in a glass on the counter.

“A green one,” she said eventually, and as the keeper offered her one, she happily took it from her and put it in her bottle, following Kylo as he led her to sit by the window, as far from the other group as was possible.

She looked so happy as she sipped from her bottle and looked outside, that he could not help but smile again, glad she wasn’t looking at him and noticing that he was beginning to crush on her.

Who was he even kidding? The day before had been the beginning of a crush – right now he was head over heels, with no way out – and if it was agony at all, then it was the most wonderful agony he had ever experienced.
“Well at least Wexley’s medication has finally kicked in,” doctor Kanata said with a smile as she wrote down some notes.

Hux’s expression wasn’t as pleasant. “For how long though? The pills we tried before these only worked for about three months.”

Kanata tried not to let out a frustrated sigh. Fact was: most meetings were just repetitions of previous ones. They had discussed Wexley’s medication every week since he had arrived, and for the past year, Kanata had always been the one to approach the situation with mild optimism, while Hux had been the pessimist who considered himself to be the realist of the bunch. The actual realist was Phasma though, and she said – not for the first time: “No one can ever predict these things. We can only try whatever new medication is on the market and hope that the next line of products is more effective.”

“Let’s not have this entire discussion again,” Kanata said, her fingers softly massaging her left temple as she feared she would otherwise get a headache. “Let’s discuss Rey for a moment. Her first week is nearly over now and I wanted to know your thoughts about her.”

Thanisson, who was the youngest of the keepers, wasn’t usually one to say much during meetings, but he was eager to give his input on Rey.

“She’s a bit awkward, and introverted, but I really think she has the potential to develop her social skills further in our group.”

“Fast runner. Wouldn’t be surprised if she did a lot of running away from cops when she was younger,” Hux said darkly.

Phasma sighed audibly. “Hux, you can’t just assume that everyone who ends up in our group is a criminal and should have gone to forensics instead!”

“If the cops actually did their jobs, then we wouldn’t be talking about this,” Hux replied coldly. “I don’t think she’s as innocent as she seems. How long do we think she’s been on the streets? What was in your file, Maz? Fifteen years or so? And no cop ever saw a homeless child and decided to investigate that? That’s bullshit. Either the cops are seriously failing us or that girl has been running faster than them since she was five.”

Phasma rolled her eyes. “Seriously, Hux, are you also insinuating now that she was guilty of some crime at the age of five?”

“Fifteen years on the street and no crime record? Unusual. Most of them are criminals who steal to survive,” Hux continued, his mind made up and his voice cold as steel.

“I don’t think she’s bad,” Thanisson continued, glancing at Maz, like he was checking if she approved of that. “But we could always check it. Put something valuable on the table and see if she steals it…”

Maz shook her head. “Chances are greater that Jess or Lor San would take whatever bait you set and I don’t approve of such experiments in our group.”

Thanisson gulped and looked down again, his confidence as a keeper slightly faltering at doctor Kanata’s disapproval.
“Whether she was a thief in the past or not does not matter to me,” Phasma said. “She has behaved well so far. I think she still sleeps on the floor every night, but she cleans up her bed, puts on fresh clothes, takes showers without us needing to ask her for it… I think that’s a pretty good start. Lor San needed twenty years before he had his shower ritual under control.”

“If he has it under control at all,” Hux muttered, then speaking a little louder as he saw Phasma’s glare. “He leaves the water on for about ten seconds and then jumps out of the shower again. I wouldn’t give him an award for good hygiene yet.”

“Other things about Rey you noticed?” Kanata tried to steer the conversation back on topic.

“Eats a lot,” Hux said.

“Yes, she is a bit of a bottomless pit,” Thanisson agreed.

“Which is only logical if you’re used to scraping together your meals,” Phasma added seriously. “We must try and teach her to moderate her portions. Because right now she eats breakfast like she won’t get fed for the rest of the day.”

“Agreed,” Maz said. “I will see if I can discuss this with her, ease some of her worries perhaps.”


“Goats?” Maz repeated, frowning.

“We gave her some old bread so she could feed the goats, but the moment they approached her she dropped the bread and ran for it,” Hux explained, waiting a moment before he added: “Screaming.”

“That’s strange. Strange animals to be afraid of. I can’t imagine she got confronted with many goats on the streets of London. I’ll have to ask her about that,” Maz muttered, noting it down. “Could also indicate a general fear of animals.”

“Another thing,” Phasma continued, folding her hands on the table as she leaned in a bit. “And I’m trying not to draw any conclusions about this… But she does seem to spend an awful lot of time in the company of Kylo.”

“Agreed,” Hux said immediately.

Thanisson seemed hesitant, before he said: “I saw something during her first afternoon – when they were coloring mandala’s and she hadn’t even wanted to say something to introduce herself to the group. She was the first to get her drawing, but one of the last to start coloring, and I saw her look at Kylo, and he looked at her… And at first I didn’t get it – almost like they were communicating telepathically or something – and then I realized that he was actually showing her how to properly hold a pencil. Demonstrating it, and she was just… soaking it in.”

There was a brief silence in the room and Thanisson looked around for a reaction, which came from Phasma.

“She doesn’t know how to hold a pencil?”

“Not properly,” Thanisson continued. “But that’s logical, isn’t it, if she has indeed been on the street for fifteen years? She probably never went to school.”

“For fifteen years,” Hux repeated, his tone outraged. “What is our country coming to if we can’t even keep the children off the streets and in the schools!”
He seemed more outraged by the politics of his country than by the difficult life Rey must have had.

“She doesn’t strike me as an educated person,” Kanata admitted. “But I do feel like she is clever in her own ways. I’m not writing her off as a lost cause yet.”

“Is she really clever if she hangs around Kylo all the time?” Phasma questioned carefully. “That’s like a fly heading towards a burning lamp. More often than not they end up getting fried.”

“She could be naïve,” Thanisson added. “Or wise, for that matter. So far Kylo’s held himself in check.”

“Despite Poe’s relentless efforts to disgrace him,” Phasma agreed. “Kylo’s behavior has been alright the past week. Maybe he just needs a friend?”

“I don’t think he looks at her as just a friend,” Hux said dryly.

“So what if he’s got a little crush?” Phasma said, annoyed with Hux’s attitude. “Rey doesn’t seem bothered by him at all, which can’t be said for Poe. It’s quite clear that she picked up on his creep-vibes pretty soon after they met.”

“Yes,” doctor Kanata agreed. “I do think she is aware of Poe’s problem, in her own way, which we still can’t entirely say about Jess, even though she has known him for over a year now… Anyway, during my last conversation with Rey, she said that she didn’t ‘mind’ Kylo. Which is an indication that she probably is minding some other people in the group.”

“Poe and Jess, probably,” Hux guessed. “They are the loudest and she is a rather quiet person. Which probably also explains why she likes to hang out with our mister Doe. When he’s not talking to himself, he’s pretty quiet.”

“Do you think they know each other?” Thanisson suddenly asked. “I mean, Rey was living on the streets of London at some point, and so was Kylo before he came here.”

The young keeper seemed excited about the prospect of being the first to think this, but Maz immediately shook her head.

“I don’t think they knew each other. But it is probably why they feel drawn to one another. They come from the same place. Just as Poe and Jess have similar pasts, bringing them closer together. Their families have rejected them since they came to live with us and we know that Kylo and Rey have no family at all. I had not expected them to bond so easily – also because I thought Rey would keep more to herself.”

“She still keeps to herself,” Phasma said. “Even around Kylo, in a way. But it’s like Thanisson said. Almost like there’s something… telepathic… going on.”

“Oh please…” Hux rolled his eyes. “Did you pick that up in a romance novel or something?”

“You know very well that I only read thrillers and Harry Potter,” Phasma replied strictly, before she continued: “They say so little, but express a lot. Like…” She thought about it. “When they’re walking besides each other to therapy. They don’t talk much, just a little, and I can never hear what about. But the moment Kylo starts talking to himself, she touches his fingers. Reaches out… And then… Like… Just a squeeze. And he’s calm again! Or when Poe says something offensive, he gets upset, and she does the same, just this little pull of his fingers and he gets a grip on himself. She grounds him. And in return… he treats her like a woman should be treated.”
Hux raised an eyebrow. “How’s that?” he asked sarcastically.

Phasma leaned closer to him, lowering her voice. “Like a Goddess!”

Thanisson laughed, amused by that exchange, and both Hux and Phasma shot him a deadly glare.

“You disagree?” she asked strictly.

“No,” Thanisson replied quickly, shrinking down in his seat. “No ma’am.”

Maz was just shaking her head in amusement.

“It’s true though,” Phasma defended herself. “He holds the door for her, helps her take off her jacket, lets her choose a spot on the couch first… And when they’re cleaning up, he doesn’t try to weasel his way out of the work, to leave her to do all of it, but he works hard and helps her when he sees she needs help. He is incredibly considerate of her, even if they don’t speak much.”

“How does the rest of the group respond to that behavior?” Maz continued in a serious tone. “Kylo is already an outcast. Are they going to treat Rey the same?”

It was silent for a few moments.

“The group hasn’t been violent towards Rey. Not verbally or physically, from what I have seen,” Thanisson answered slowly.

Hux and Phasma also shook their heads, not recalling any indications that there was hostility towards Rey.

“I think it’s a good thing she still has her meals with Wexley, Finn and Lor San,” Phasma added. “But if she were to spend those moments with Kylo as well, I think she would grow isolated from the rest of the group. And then I can see them targeting her as a fellow outcast. I would avoid that.”

“Agreed,” Maz said.

As there was a knock on the door, Maz looked up.

“Yes?”

Finn was the one to open the door and looked inside, slightly nervous as he watched the keepers have their weekly meeting.

“Sorry to disturb,” he immediately apologized. “But it’s ten past two and Lor San is getting impatient about his cigarette.”

Phasma sighed as she got up from her seat and got her keys out of her pocket. “Are we done for the week?” she checked.

Maz nodded. “Yes.”

“Alright. I’ll go check on the group.”

As Phasma followed Finn, Maz gathered her files.

“Doctor Kanata,” Thanisson said carefully as he approached her, and she wondered why he seemed so shy in that moment. Usually, when he was shy, he wanted to suggest an improvement or change to the way things were done. It was no different this time.
“I was thinking… We usually put Kylo back in his room after an outburst, and then he always destroys something to vent his anger… Which isn’t particularly handy for him or us. But what if we could put him in another room – an empty one – with a punching bag or something? As a time-out?”

Maz thought about it for a moment. “I like the idea,” she admitted. “But that would require an investment we can’t afford at this moment. Not to mention that we have no empty rooms left.”

“But not in the men’s corridor, no… But we still have four empty rooms in the women’s corridor…”

“But what if we fill in those spots?” doctor Kanata argued.

Thanisson shook his head. “If they’re filled in, we remove the punching bag.”

“Though I like the idea of him venting his anger in another way than destruction, but I’m not entirely sure,” Maz continued. “I don’t think it’s wise to teach a man with anger issues how to throw a punch.”

“I agree with doctor Kanata,” Hux said, leaning back in his seat as he looked at the two of them. “I believe it is a common misconception that fighters – ones with anger issues – learn better control of that once they pick up a fighting sport. All they learn to control are their punches – so that they can actually do more harm the moment they have ill will in mind.”

“Kylo doesn’t have ill will in mind,” Thanisson protested softly. “Not against us. Only against Poe, I guess.”

“And do you want him to throw one fatal punch at Poe?” Kanata asked gently, locking his gaze on hers, and she only continued when he shook his head. “Let’s not make a fighter out of him.”
Rock Band

Friday afternoons weren’t particularly entertaining. While the Keepers had their meetings, the patients were supposed to entertain themselves. That did give Kylo the chance to help Rey with her reading. Not that he was put to use that much. She struggled through most difficult words herself, and hardly ever asked for his help, but he was always ready to assist her – always on standby – with his own book in his lap – spending most of his time looking at her while she read.

After dinner, a few patients were picked up to go home for the weekend, though it seemed like a majority had no such luck.

Friday evenings, luckily, were more entertaining than the other evenings. Depending on who was on duty, they could almost be described as ‘fun’. Kanata would often bake with them, Hux would hold insanely difficult quizzes with questions that no one knew the answers to, Phasma would let them make popcorn and put on good movies, and Thanisson would bring along a gaming console and one of his many games.

This Friday it was Thanisson’s turn, and after dinner, he gave Finn and Poe his car keys so that they could go and get the material from his car. Kylo and Rey were cleaning up in the kitchen when they returned, and they both looked at one another when they heard Poe shout: “Guess who’s going to be rocking tonight?”

Curious about what Poe was referring to, Rey looked out of the doorway to see Poe and Finn carry a massive box in front of the tv, and as they opened it they handed guitars to Jess and Lor San, who were curiously looking inside the box.

“Is that the one with Hotel California?” Lor San asked seriously as he saw Finn get the games from the box.

Finn read the tracklists, then nodded. “Yep. It’s on here.”

“I want to do that one,” Lor San decided, then he sat himself down in one of the armchairs and looked on as Poe and Finn connected the game.

Rey looked at the plastic guitars with some interest, but soon returned to her work as she dried off the remaining plates.

“Do you play an instrument?” Kylo asked her casually.

She shook her head. “No.”

“Well, it’s not real instruments,” he offered. “It’s part of the game. There’s two guitars, a drum kit, and a microphone. They sort of register how well you play and then you get a score at the end of the game.”

“Sounds like fun?” she replied hesitantly, not sure what else to say.

“It is fun,” Kylo assured her with a smile. “And don’t worry about it being too hard. There is a beginner mode.”

They heard how the volume of the tv was turned up in the living room and by the time they were done with their work and joined the rest, Jess was singing, Wexley was on the drums, Finn was on one guitar, and mister Thanisson was on the other. Lor San was watching the score with mild
interest and Poe was singing along and dancing in his seat, not looking up as Kylo and Rey sat down next to one another and watched the others play.

While Jess sang her heart out to Amy Whinehouse’s Rehab, Rey tried to figure out the game, looking at the guitars and how the colors on the buttons corresponded to those on the screen.

When the song was done, Jess squealed. “Ninety-three percent! New personal record!”

“I’ve got ninety-five, on expert mode,” Mister Thanisson teased her with a wink, but Jess just shook her head.

“Well that only seems fair seeing how you can play this game every day in your home and we can only play it once a month or so!”

“Yeah,” Poe added. “You already get enough time to play it. Now give me the guitar.”

Thanisson took off the guitar and handed it over, before he noticed Rey and Kylo had also joined them.

“Hey Rey, do you want to try as well?” he asked kindly, but Rey quickly shook her head and shrank back in her seat. “You, Kylo?”

Kylo felt a little self-conscious. Sure, he had always enjoyed playing the game, like the others, but now it almost felt like an actual performance, with Rey in the audience. He had never really cared about what the others thought of his score, but with Rey… he just didn’t want to disappoint her.

“Maybe later,” he replied hastily, also shrinking back in his seat a bit, and Poe narrowed his eyes as he looked at Kylo. He was used to arguing with him about who got to play lead guitar, and now he wasn’t playing? That was suspicious indeed. Disappointing too.

“Can I play Hotel California now?” Lor San asked, and Thanisson grinned.

“Of course! Lead guitar?”

“And vocals,” Lor San added, looking like quite the professional as he attached the mic to the standard.

“Bass for me,” Poe said.

It seemed like no one was eager to play the drums, except for Wexley, who remained where he was as they set up the next song, changing the difficulty levels.

Rey was rather curious about Lor San’s singing, and could not help but smile widely when the song began and she got to witness how concentrated everyone was on performing well. By the time the singing began, she was swaying side to side to the beat of the song, grinning at Lor San’s deep, yet musically correct way to sing it. He had the guitar mode set to easy, yet made it look so professional as he sang and played at the same time.

Kylo wasn’t looking at the screen or his fellow patients. His eyes were on Rey as she moved along to the rhythm of the music, enjoying the view of her just as much as she was enjoying the music.

“Lor San, use your whammy bar!” Finn hissed as he was playing the guitar solo. “It’s all ready to go!”

“Young man, the whammy bar sounds shit during this song,” Lor San grumbled in reply, focusing
back on his playing, cursing when he missed a note, and Rey chuckled because of it.

“But it increases your score!” Finn argued.

“No it doesn’t!” Jess replied, hesitating a moment before she turned to mister Thanisson. “Does it?”

“In a way… It makes the game more forgiving of your faults.”

As the song had come to an end, Lor San grumbled: “Wouldn’t have made any faults if you hadn’t disturbed me, Finn! Look at that, ninety-eight percent!”

Finn shot Lor San an apologetic gaze. “Truly sorry about that, Lor San. It won’t happen again.”

“It better not,” he grumbled as he sat back in his seat.

“Okay I wanna do Bohemian Rhapsody next,” Poe said as he handed his guitar to Jess and headed to the mic.

“Oh boy,” Kylo muttered, and Rey raised an eyebrow as she looked at him, and he just grinned mysteriously. “You’ll see.”

“I can’t stay and watch this,” Thanisson muttered, knowing what was coming. “Freddie Mercury is still haunting me about the first time you guys played it… I’ll go and get you guys something to drink instead.”

As Thanisson left and the song began playing, Rey wondered what was going to happen. Poe sang beautifully and Jess, Finn and Wexley played together in an oasis of rest. At least at the beginning of the song… And so when the song changed a bit and Jess and Finn dramatically sang along to the “Galileo” bits, she wondered if this was what Thanisson had tried to avoid seeing.

“I’m just a poor boy, nobody loves me,” Poe sang sadly, and Rey suddenly froze as Jess, Wexley and Finn screamed back: “HE’S JUST A POOR BOY FROM A POOR FAMILY! SPARE HIM HIS LIFE FROM THIS MONSTROSITY!”

As Rey’s eyes widened and she slowly turned to Kylo, she saw how he had his fingers to his ears, looking on in pretend-fear as the others continued playing and screaming along to the lyrics.

When she thought it couldn’t possibly get wilder than this, she suddenly noticed how the song seemed to lead up to a guitar solo, and the next thing she knew they were all jumping like a bunch of idiots, headbanging and missing about all the possible notes they needed to hit, and screaming their lungs out as they sang along with Poe.

By the time the song ended, a tiny bit of dignity was restored by the fact that Poe took those final notes rather seriously, and when it was all over, Kylo admitted: “It is quite a beautiful song, actually…”

“When these idiots don’t ruin it completely,” Lor San added dryly, which Poe and Jess only seemed to like more.

“We ruined one of your favorite songs?” Poe asked, and he high-fived Jess as they laughed and passed along the instruments once more.

“Just be glad you haven’t seen them do Smells like Teen Spirit yet,” Kylo continued. “These are some people you don’t wanna hear grunt a song as loudly as they can.”
She took his word for it.

She really knew none of the songs that they were playing, though she had to admit that some of them sounded like fun, and judging on how well everyone sang along to them, it appeared like she had a bit of a gap in her culture.

Finn sang a beautiful version of *Imagine*, Wexley sang a decent rendition of *Good Vibrations* and Jess absolutely butchered *I love Rock N Roll*.

By the time Lor San, Finn, mister Thanisson and Wexley were doing Hotel California for the second time – since it was apparently the only song that interested Lor San – Rey had taken off her shoes and put her feet underneath her as she was watching them play, still swaying along to the music every now and then, and as Poe watched her, he also noticed that Kylo could hardly keep his eyes off her.

A few moments of intense staring drew Kylo’s attention – it always did – and as Kylo suspiciously narrowed his eyes at him, Poe smirked and pretended to stretch and yawn, letting his arm casually fall over Jess’s shoulder, who snuggled closer to him as she continued watching the others play.

Poe shot Kylo a triumphant grin, then shifted his gaze to Rey, and Kylo gulped, realizing what challenge Poe had laid out for him.

Well Kylo wasn’t going to put his arm over Rey’s shoulder – that was for sure. Besides, why should he follow Poe’s example in the first place? There was no doubt about it that the moment he did what Poe wanted, Poe would just make fun of him anyway.

He looked away and remained as rigid as ever in his seat, trying not to look at Rey, even if he liked to do nothing more than that.

*Poe totally knows that you’re into Rey.*

“Shut up,” he muttered, not realizing how that attracted Rey’s attention.

*You can bet that he’s going to try and steal her away from you.*

“No he’s not,” Kylo whispered, trying to focus on the music instead, but Snoke’s voice drowned out all the rest.

*He’s more handsome than you are – he would have it ten times easier than you to win her heart. You can’t afford to sit and wait. They’re going to steal her away from you.*

“No,” Kylo muttered, but he feared Snoke was right. What did he have to offer Rey? He wasn’t much to look at, and he would never be able to live a normal life. He could hurt her, without even intending to. He was a danger to her, even if that was the last thing he wanted to be. “I don’t want to talk about it…”

He startled as he felt something brush his fingers, and as he looked at his side he saw how Rey was looking at him with a compassionate gaze, her own fingers gently touching his. The sad smile she offered him was beautiful and it even took his breath away – but it was still sad. The fact he was hearing voices was making her sad – and there was nothing he could do about it. Ever.

He pulled his hand away from her, feeling like he did not deserve her attention, and got up from his seat, not noticing how Rey’s expression fell or how sadly she looked at him as he headed to his room.
Once there, he slammed the door and kicked his bed, knowing that he was only fooling himself by crushing on Rey this way. He startled once more, however, when he heard a knock on the door, and he felt his breath hitch.

_Do you think it’s Rey?_

“It can’t be her… She isn’t allowed here…” he muttered, before he said in a louder voice: “Enter?”

His surprised expression quickly changed into an angered one once he realized that it was Poe – of all people – and the other patient warily looked inside.

“What are you doing in here?” Poe asked, attempting a casual conversation with Kylo, even if he never had before – and anyone would have noticed how uncomfortable both men felt at that moment. “Like, you haven’t even played against me. And I really love playing against you and wiping the floor with you.”

Kylo narrowed his eyes angrily, using all his self-restraint to stop himself from taking a few steps closer and punching Poe in the face.

“Besides, Rey looks a little lost without you.”

Kylo froze.

The thought of Rey – on her own – feeling miserable – was one that was hard to bear. But then again, this was coming from Poe. Poe, who always lied, who always bullied, who always ridiculed him. Why had he even come here? Was he here to take another low blow at him?

“Fuck off,” Kylo said defensively, turning his back on Poe in the hopes it would remove the urge to punch his perfect face.

Poe did not step from the doorframe – knowing that he wasn’t invited in – and not wishing to be on the receiving end of a beating.

“No, I’m serious,” Poe continued, his voice a little braver now. “It’s easy to see you’ve got the hots for her. Like I even bet your ears are really red because I found out and you thought you weren’t being suspicious about it. But man… I can’t even blame you because she’s hot.”

Kylo clenched his fists and jaw, forbidding himself to turn around and respond to that. It would simply give everything away if he did, and he did not want to grant Poe the pleasure of getting him angry.

“What I want to say…” Poe continued, his voice a little gentler than usual, though Kylo did not drop his guard yet. “Life sucks. For you – for me – for everyone in this shithole. And you can sit in your room and get angry or sad about this massive waste of time in our lives. And it’s fucking depressing to be here, and it’s fucking depressing to lose your friends and family while you’re here, and there’s nothing we can do about it.”

Kylo gulped as he turned around a bit and looked at Poe, noticing that he wasn’t playing. His hands were trembling just like his, and he wasn’t looking at Kylo, just at the wall, maybe in an attempt to hide the tears of fury in his eyes.

“And listening to the Keepers isn’t going to make you feel alive. And taking your pills isn’t going to make you feel alive. And punching me in the face isn’t going to help either of us. Nothing about this place is going to make you feel better because it is hell and we might as well be dead… But the company… Man, the company…” Poe licked his lips as he thought about it. “They’re angels, man.
Jess and Rey. And if we’re in hell – and we probably deserve it – then they are sent by God to give us hope. To make a little bit of this time we spent here worthwhile… And sure, they’ll get better. Girls always do. They’ll leave us, and we’ll be stuck here with each other finding only some relief in expressing our anger towards each other, but in the meanwhile… they’re here. Beautiful and hot and inspiring our dreams to be a little less dull… And we’d be idiots to just turn our backs on these gifts of God. So put your arm around her. Make her yours. Steal a kiss, perhaps a shag if you can manage it, and hope the Keepers don’t find out.”

Kylo had patiently listened to Poe, his eyes narrowed as he was beginning to doubt if this was about him and Rey at all, or if Poe was just expressing his lust for Jess in this way.

He thought a moment longer, then said: “You really just want to fuck Jess, don’t you?”

“Yeah,” Poe replied immediately. “I need to get laid so badly.”

Kylo could not help but smirk for a moment, and as Poe noticed it, he grinned and stopped leaning against the door frame.

“Come on, man, don’t put yourself in isolation. We have keepers to do that for us. I’ll even let you play lead guitar.”

Kylo was still hesitant, still not sure if it was wise to return – if he actually wanted to in the first place.

“Don’t think so much,” Poe continued. “Come on now!”

He was overthinking, wasn’t he? Letting out a defeated sigh, he followed Poe through the corridor, into the living room again, where he saw that Finn and Thanisson had been able to convince Rey to join them on guitar while Jess sung her heart out to Livin on a Prayer.

As Kylo looked at her, his heart ached. She looked so beautiful yet awkward as she listened to Thanisson’s pointers as she tried to get the proper buttons pushed in the correct rhythm, laughing nervously whenever she made a mistake.

As Poe looked at Kylo, he shook his head and muttered: “You really got it bad, don’t you?”

“Shut up,” Kylo muttered, and he took Poe’s wink as a sign that he would, following him to the couch, and applauding alongside Poe when the song was done.

“Not bad, Rey,” Thanisson said. “Seventy percent for your first try.”

“On easy mode,” Jess could not help but remind them, but Rey didn’t really mind.

As she saw Kylo had returned, she smiled widely.

“Did you see that?” she asked as she handed the guitar back to mister Thanisson and headed over to him, wondering why he had come back – and also why he had left in the first place.

“Yeah,” Kylo said a little breathlessly, not sure what else to say. “You did great.”

Rey smiled, pleased with that answer, and Poe pushed a guitar into Kylo’s hands.

“Come on, emo boy, you gotta do lead on Everlong. Last time Finn did it the song ended after thirty seconds.”

“Hey!” Finn shouted, a little offended. “I had never heard that song before and you put it on expert
“It was only medium and you did suck indeed,” Poe replied.

“Well I’m not a fan of the Foo Fighters,” Finn muttered, a little insulted, and he sat back and crossed his arms, pouting.

Kylo had never felt as anxious about playing the game before, and did not dare to look at Rey. If she was looking at him, he was sure he wouldn’t play a single note right, and if she wasn’t looking at him, then it would break his heart. He didn’t want to know which one it was, and so he focused on the guitar instead, trying his hardest to get all the notes right. When he was finished, he was rather pleased with his score and he handed the guitar to Finn before he went back to his place, seeing Rey’s beaming smile.

“You did so well!” she said warmly, and he knew he was blushing like an idiot as he sat down.

“You think so?” he asked a little awkwardly, and she took his hand.

“Yeah! To be honest, you’re the only one of the bunch who actually looks like they could be in a band.”

He gulped as he looked at Rey, seeing how she was serious about that. “Really? And… And it’s not just because I’m wearing black today, is it?”

She laughed, shaking her head. “Nope, you look the part of an actual artist!”

He looked at their joined hands, not sure what to do with her little warm hand as it was wrapped up in his.

“A-and you’re not just s-saying that to be nice?”

She squeezed his hand. “Nope,” she said with a smile, and he offered her a relieved one of his own.

“Rey, will you play this one with us?”

Kylo’s heart fell as Finn dragged Rey’s attention away from him, and Rey let go of his hand to take the guitar again.

Truthfully, he felt a little lost as he sat by himself, but as Poe went to get something to drink from the table, he stopped by Kylo and patted his shoulder, whispering: “Smooth enough, emo boy, you’ll get there.”

Kylo shook his head, his old feelings of annoyance towards Poe rapidly returning.

“Fuck off, Poe,” he muttered.

“Ah…” Poe sighed dreamily. “If only I could!”
On Saturday morning, Rey startled a little when she heard it was a man’s voice that woke her up from the other side of the door.

“Time to get up!”

She did not recognize the voice at all, and quickly said: “Okay!” – hoping that whoever was on the other side of the door would not barge in.

Luckily, he did not. Rey hurried to get up from the floor and put the blanket and pillow back on her bed, gathering her stuff before she headed to the bathroom.

Whoever had awoken her was no longer in the corridor, and only when she went into the living area later that morning, did she see that it was the same Keeper she had met at the farm earlier that week.

“Good morning, Rey,” he greeted her as he saw her enter. “You’re the first one up and ready, apparently.”

Rey smiled nervously, fully aware that she had completely forgotten the man’s name. “Good morning,” she replied quickly, and she noticed that the table had already been set.

“Perhaps you can help me,” the man mused as he headed into the kitchen, and Rey followed him.

She saw an empty cardboard of eggs, a bottle of milk and a box of flour on the counter, and besides it stood a large bowl with some sort of a yellow liquid in it.

“I wanted to surprise you all with pancakes, but I should also go and check if Poe is able to get up today. He makes it his mission to try and stay in bed until noon whenever I’ve got weekend shift.”

“Wh-what do you want me to do?” Rey asked, feeling anxious at the prospect of being in charge of people’s meals. She was comfortable enough setting the table or cleaning up, but actually cooking? She felt lightheaded just thinking about it.

“Just make a pile of pancakes,” Statura replied briefly, putting the pan on the fire and adding some butter to it. “I’ll make the first one because it usually fails anyway.”

Rey gulped, feeling like now was not the time to remain silent in the keeper’s presence, and she admitted: “I’ve never made pancakes before…”

“Oh don’t worry,” Statura said kindly. “It’s just like making an omelet.”

Rey hesitated. “I’ve never made an omelet before either… Or anything else for that matter.”

Statura turned his head towards Rey and gave her such an unbelieving look that Rey felt like an alien – at least for a few moments.

“I can’t cook,” she added quickly, just in case this keeper still believed otherwise.

After a few moments of silence, he looked back at her, an encouraging smile on his face.

“Don’t worry – you can cook. You just don’t know how to yet. Let me show you.”
He dropped a generous amount of batter into the pan, then he swirled the pan around until the batter covered the entire surface.

“Now we wait until we see the edge go slightly brown, and then we flip it!”

Rey lowered her face closer to the fire in order to see the edges brown better, but Statura quickly pulled her back.

“Careful. Don’t want you to burn your face off by accident,” he teased her, but when he saw her startled gaze, he realized he had only frightened her. “Oh, that was a bad joke. Though you need to be careful. It’s hot and I don’t want you to burn yourself on my watch.”

Rey gulped, nodding, but she still wasn’t sure she could do what he did.

When he lifted the pan from the fire and tossed the pancake in the air, Rey watched as it landed perfectly back into the pan.

“I don’t think I can do that…” she admitted.

A familiar and kind voice sounded from the doorway. “It’s not so hard…”

As Rey turned back, she smiled at Kylo, who had his hands in his pockets as he watched them.

“Good morning, Kylo,” Statura greeted him. “Think you can help Rey get some pancakes going?”

“Yeah, sure!” Kylo said eagerly, glad to help her learn something and he rolled up the sleeves of his sweater, approaching Statura while he put the first pancake on the plate.

“A bit on the brown side,” the keeper admitted critically. “But the next one should be better. Do let Rey help. I’m going to check how far along everyone is.”

“I will,” Kylo promised, and as Statura left, he pointed towards the butter.

“Will you put some in the pan?” Kylo asked, wondering how far she would get without help.

“Eh… Sure,” Rey said awkwardly, carefully slicing a bit of butter with the knife and then carefully dropping it into the pan, pushing it off the knife with her thumb.

Kylo could not help but feel for her. Even cooking was new to her. As the butter melted, he nodded towards the batter.

“Pour some in the pan, won’t you?”

Rey did as he said, and he swirled the pan around for a bit, realizing that she was focused only on the pancakes, her shoulders tense from concentration. It seemed like she didn’t want to screw up this tiny responsibility that had been given to her.

“Sleep alright?” he asked, and she nodded quickly.

“Can’t complain.”

When he thought the pancake was ready, he took the pan in both his hands and flipped over the pancake, winning a bit of Rey’s appreciation in the process.

“That looks difficult,” she said in awe.
He chuckled. “Not as difficult as you think. Just make sure there’s not too much butter in the pan or you’re splashing yourself full of it and that can be quite painful.”

She nodded, taking that advice to heart.

“Would you like to flip the next one?” he asked, putting the pancake on the plate.

She quickly shook her head.

“Oh no, I would ruin it,” she said quickly.

“Don’t feel afraid to ruin it,” he said gently. “If you do, you can just eat it yourself.”

“I don’t want a ruined pancake!” she protested. “I’ve never had pancakes.”

Kylo’s breath hitched in his throat as he turned towards her.

“Never – ever?” he asked, finding that one of the hardest things to accept about her.

“Never – ever,” she repeated seriously, and he could only look at her with raised eyebrows and a lump in his throat.

“Not… not even before you ended up on the street?”

Rey didn’t look at him, but instead just stared at the plate of pancakes, thinking. “I can’t recall anything from before that time.”

“Not even pancakes?”

“Not even pancakes.”

She put another bit of butter in the pan, and while they were both silently standing behind the stove, Poe had also awoken, and he looked at them from the doorframe, curious what the two lovebirds had been talking about.

They remained quiet though, but seemed to work well as a team. Rey poured in the batter, Kylo swirled the pan, and when the pancake was almost done, Rey said so.

“All right,” Kylo said in a voice of pure concentration. “I’m going to flip it. Watch carefully how I do it.”

Poe suddenly grinned, a brilliant idea popping into his mind.

The moment Kylo flipped the pancake in the air, Poe roared.

The result wasn’t pretty.

Kylo startled so much that he dropped the pan from his hand, and it landed straight on his toes, causing him to cry out in pain. Rey jumped back, hit the bowl of batter as it stood next to her, which then fell to the floor as well, covering most of the kitchen and part of her pants in batter. The pancake itself ended up on one of the fire pits. Both Rey and Kylo’s hearts were racing as though someone had just attacked them, and in a way that was true, and as Poe saw their terrified expressions, he could not stop hiccupping with laughter.

Rey’s hands were trembling, too shocked by what had just happened to register completely that it had been Poe’s doing. She now also noticed the pancake batter on her pants and shoes, and when
she suddenly heard Poe say: “Uh oh…” she looked up just in time to see how Poe ran away, with Kylo chasing after him in anger.

Not sure what to do, Rey just stood there among all the mess, startling when she suddenly heard loud pounding and Kylo’s roar from the men’s corridor.

“OPEN THE DOOR YOU FUCKING COWARD!” he shouted, trying to open the door by leaning all his weight into it.

“IT WAS JUST A JOKE!” Poe shouted back in fear, and he was actually terrified for his life as he had his back pressed against the other side of his bedroom door, feeling how much strength Kylo was putting in, and hoping that he could hold his fellow patient off long enough for help to arrive.

Rey ran into the men’s corridor to see what was happening, her eyes wide as she saw the rage on Kylo’s face as he suddenly started punching Poe’s door with his bare fists, and she wondered how he wasn’t breaking his own bones doing that.

Statura had heard all of the commotion from the woman’s corridor, and now passed Rey as he headed towards Kylo – but it was too late.

Kylo had already kicked in the door, and they could all hear the two men shouting at each other – both in anger and in pain – as they fell over one another and pounded on each other with their fists.

Statura had heard enough and pressed an alarm that he wore on his belt buckle, and the next thing Rey knew, her ears were buzzing from the loud siren that rang through the corridors, and she pressed her fingers to her ears as she followed Statura towards the room.

She knew she wasn’t even allowed in the corridor, but at this moment, that wasn’t what was on her mind at all. She was trying to make sense of what was happening, and ignored Wexley as he ran past her towards the kitchen, wearing nothing but his bathrobe. Lor San was muttering angrily about the ‘infernal noise’ that could be heard in the hallways and Jess also ran into the men’s corridor – figuring that if Rey was there, she could be there too.

“I HATE YOU! I FUCKING HATE YOU!” Kylo shouted, his voice still clear enough to understand over the loud sirens, and Rey could not stop watching how he kept on hitting Poe, who tried to defend his face by covering it with his arms, crying for him to stop.

Statura wasn’t even sure if he could take on Kylo himself, and hoped it would be enough to startle him, and so he took Kylo by the hair and yanked him back, but this only made Kylo more violent, and he kept on trying to leap at Poe, like a rabid dog unable to stop the hunt.

Rey didn’t dare to intervene. She had no idea what to do, and gasped when Statura suddenly punched Kylo in the face, causing him to black out and fall limply to the floor.

The Keeper was panting, his hands shaking in anger as he looked at Poe. “ARE YOU ALRIGHT?” he shouted over the deafening noise of the alarm that was still sounding all around them, and Poe finally lowered his arms a little and nodded, and Rey gulped as she saw how his eye was already swelling up and there was a line of blood trailing down his chin.

“WHAT ON EARTH IS GOING ON HERE?”

Rey startled and Jess quickly ran out of the corridor again as she saw the backup had arrived. One woman and one man – also keepers, but from other departments – had responded to the alarm, and Statura finally turned it off.
“They had a fight,” Statura answered immediately, his voice still shaken from adrenaline. “Get Kylo to isolation. He’s knocked out for now. I will call Kanata and try and see what I can do for Poe.”

The keepers headed towards Kylo, asking no questions about why he was unconscious, and Rey wasn’t sure what she was seeing as one of them lifted him underneath his shoulder and the other grabbed his feet.

“Looks heavier than he is,” one of the keepers remarked.

“Good for us,” the other replied, and Rey felt how tears stung in her eyes at that senseless remark.

Statura noticed how Rey was still standing in the hallway, looking into the room, and he suddenly beckoned her to come closer, his gaze made of steel.

“Rey, come here.”

As Rey stepped into the room, her hands were trembling, and she wasn’t even sure why she was invited in.

Statura looked from Rey to Poe, then said quietly: “If anyone asks, Poe, you were the one to knock Kylo unconscious.”

Poe seemed outraged by this, his face wincing in pain as he tried to protest. “But!”

Statura pointed a finger at him. “I could get your ass into forensics alongside with Kylo’s, if that is what you want!”

Poe quickly shook his head, not wanting to end up in forensics as well.

“Now you both listen to me,” Statura hissed. “I don’t want anyone here to end up in forensics, understood? Not even Kylo. I don’t know what you did, but he was perfectly calm this morning and the moment you got to him, you ruined it, Poe. So it’s your own fault. And I knocked out Kylo for your own safety, so you can show a little gratitude and do something in return.”

Poe seemed upset by all of this, but he remained eerily quiet, unusually quiet for his doing, nodding in resignation.

“Rey…” Statura looked at her to see if she had understood the message, and with tears in her eyes she nodded. At least Kylo would not be sent to forensics, and she assumed that that was a good thing.

“I see your pants are dirty. I don’t even want to know what the kitchen looks like. Go to your room and get changed.”

Tears were now rolling freely down Rey’s cheeks and she left Poe’s room, trembling all over. She heard the other two keepers talking to one another from the room opposite the keeper’s office, and saw that Lor San was still muttering angrily about all of the commotion and complaining that breakfast was late. As she looked into the room opposite Poe’s, she saw Finn was sitting on his bed, his head between his knees and his hands in his neck, shaking and looking just as broken as Rey felt inside. She didn’t even know what was wrong with him – what he was doing – but it did nothing to relieve the ache she felt inside.

In the living room, she saw Jess sit in the sofa, her shoulders tense and her gaze sadder than Rey had ever seen it – staring blankly ahead, like she was no longer even alive.
Only one person was sitting at the dining room table – Wexley, still in his bathrobe – who had treated himself to the pancakes that had survived the fiasco, and was gingerly buttering them up with no sign that he was upset at all about what had happened. Had he even noticed anything at all?

Strangely enough, Wexley’s indifference only affected Rey more, and as she headed to her room and closed the door behind her, she could no longer hold it in. She sobbed her heart out, her face a blubbing mess as she realized this life was hell, and she held onto the small sink as she cried, looking at her face in the mirror, not recognizing herself.

She didn’t take off her pants, even if they were dirty. What was the use in it? What was the use in any of it? She was only losing time and wasting resources the longer she stayed. But she could not run either. There was no way she could return to her old life – not while she was being monitored in this prison – and so she was doomed to suffer in agony instead.

Nothing here would ever make her happy. Not the keepers. Not the patients. Not even the pancakes.
Breakdown

Doctor Kanata parked her car with a heavy sigh. She had made big plans for today – baking, meeting friends, going to an art exhibit, dinner in a nice restaurant – but those plans had been cancelled now. When Statura had called her in a mild panic, she had gone to work as fast as she could.

As she walked into the building and opened the door to her ward, she noticed how eerily quiet it was. There was muttering though – coming from the isolation cell opposite the Keeper’s room, and as she gazed through the small window, she saw Kylo laying on the ground, moving in agony as he cried and muttered to himself. His cheek seemed a little swollen, and apparently her colleagues had seen a need to put him in a straitjacket. She did not immediately disagree with that decision.

“Kanata!” Statura’s voice was impatient as he headed towards her and he immediately pointed to the Keeper’s room. “A word?”

The doctor nodded, noticing how tense Statura was. Even before Kanata had closed the door behind them, Statura already began talking.

“This is no longer doable. You guys need more keepers in your group. I don’t mind filling in for people who are ill or on holiday, but I’ve been here about every weekend the past three months and it just doesn’t feel right doing this. I feel like I’m cleaning up shit that shouldn’t even be there.”

It wasn’t a lie. They were severely undermanned. But solving the problem was easier said than done.

“I think every keeper in this group will agree with you,” doctor Kanata said softly. “We have asked for at least one other full-timer to join our group, but the board has been reluctant to approve it. Our patients are pretty self-sufficient and that’s reason enough for them to want one person on the job in the evenings and weekends.”

“Fuck the board,” Statura said angrily. “I just had to punch Kylo unconscious because I would not have been able to contain him otherwise.”

Kanata gulped, surprised to hear that.

“These people need more keepers if they’re ever going to get better,” Statura continued in frustration. “In school we’re taught that people with these kinds of issues have it ten times as hard to get their life back in order unless they have a support group. Well, most of these people have no support group whatsoever besides us, and how can we expect guys like Kylo and Poe to ever get back on their feet if there’s no one waiting for them on the other side? Are we just keeping them here so they can become the next Lor San?”

The Doctor remained completely quiet as she listened, unable to find it in her heart to argue with Statura when she knew he was right.

Statura had a lot more to get off his chest, and said: “I was hired to take care of the daytime activities at the farm. I already work forty hours a week, spend a great deal of my free time on taking care of the animals – with love, I must add – and then I do one 14-hour shift extra during one day in the weekend. I get paid for that, true, but these patients deserve better help than we can fucking provide and I’m tired of always cleaning up shit instead of actually helping these people.”

“You are helping people,” Maz said softly. “Cleaning up their shit – as you put it – is also part of
helping them. You’re a good man. Even if you did punch Kylo in the face.”

Maz was still curious about that, and Statura sighed.

“T really didn’t know what else to do! He was so angry with Poe, and I didn’t know how to stop him from hitting him. I had pressed the alarm, but I knew that it would take a few minutes for backup to arrive from forensics. I needed to get the situation under control, and I felt like I had no other option but to punch Kylo unconscious.”

“I thought Kylo was doing so well the past week…” Maz sighed as she leaned with her back against the meeting table. “I don’t understand how he lost it like that.”

“Well it was Poe’s fault. While Kylo and Rey were baking pancakes, he went into the kitchen and suddenly startled them. The kitchen was a complete mess. Pan on the floor, pancake batter everywhere, and I think Kylo only needed a second to snap. Poe then ran to his room, Kylo chased him, tried to ram in his door, and before I could get to them, Kylo had already entered his room and they were on the floor, fighting one another – though I suppose Poe was just trying to protect his face for the largest part of it.”

Maz shook her head. “This isn’t good for Kylo’s file. If Poe didn’t fight back, that would mean Kylo would need to get transferred to forensics.”

“No,” Statura said immediately. “I won’t have it. Kylo had a good reason to be upset – and Poe was the one that angered him in the first place. I have already written it down. Poe fought back and was the one to knock him unconscious.”

Maz raised an eyebrow at Statura, who was as serious as ever when he replied: “Look. You can write on my file that it was me and get me suspended for a month or so. But we both know they’re not going to look for a replacement in the meanwhile. And we also both know that Kylo and Poe are too sensitive for forensics. They wouldn’t ever get out of there. They shouldn’t be the ones suffering because there were no keepers around to break them up before the fight could escalate.”

Kanata nodded. “Understood. Thank you for telling me though, that it was you who knocked Kylo unconscious.”

“The truth always comes out, and besides, I trust your common sense, doctor Kanata,” Statura said solemnly. “I could really use your help for a few hours though. We only have an hour left to go until lunchtime and a few of the patients really aren’t well after what happened. Wexley and Lor San and Jess are the only ones that had some breakfast. Wexley went into the kitchen the moment the commotion started, turned down the fire, and basically took all the pancakes that had been made and then ate them himself. I told him that he had to clean up the kitchen then, and he did that without protests. Lor San and Jess ate some bread. Finn has been in his room, shaking. Poe’s been laying on the couch and I’ve given him a cold compress to stop the swelling on his eye. I sent Rey to put on some other pants but she hasn’t come out of her room and last time I went to check I heard her crying, so I left her be. And Kylo woke up about an hour ago. At first he was screaming and he tried to ram the door, but he seems to be slowly calming down at last.”

Kanata was glad for the status update and nodded.

“Allright. Here’s what I suggest. We wait until lunch, try and get them all something to eat. Then we can send Lor San, Jess, Wexley and Finn to go shopping – if Finn has calmed down by then. Seems like it’s best to keep Poe here so we can keep an eye on his injury. As for Rey, she can’t leave the grounds yet, so she has no choice but to stay here. And then we can see if we can get Kylo calmed down enough to talk to Poe and have them apologize to one another.”
“Agreed,” Statura said.

“If you make sure Jess, Wexley and Lor San are dressed properly to go outside today, I’ll check up on the rest.”

When Statura left the office again, Kanata followed him into the corridor, looking through the tiny window of the isolation door cell to see that Kylo was still laying on the floor, shaking, but also still talking to himself, and she decided to leave him be a little while longer.

Finn was in his room, sitting on the bed, with his knees pulled up against his chest, focusing on deep breaths, and Kanata gently cleared her throat before she joined him, sitting beside him and offering a comforting hug. It wasn’t hard to learn what had bothered him that morning. He was incredibly sensitive to aggression, and hearing Kylo pound on the door opposite his room had sent him into a fit of panic himself, which had only gotten worse as the fight had continued. Kanata gently rubbed his back as he told her that, and when she asked him if he wanted to eat something soon and felt like going outside to go shopping, he nodded. Going outside would do him good, and it gave him the chance to buy something nice for himself. That always cheered his spirits.

A few minutes later, doctor Kanata found herself sitting next to Poe, inspecting his face as she carefully lifted the cold compress. Poe was quiet, still shaken by what had happened. There had been more fights between Poe and Kylo the past years – but most of them had been interrupted by keepers before any of them had gotten hurt so badly.

“Where do you think it went wrong this morning?” Kanata asked kindly, wondering if Poe would blame Kylo or himself.

“I shouldn’t have startled him,” Poe said quietly. “I should have known better, but… I didn’t think it through. I thought it would be funny.”

It was rare for Poe to admit that he had been the cause for a problem, and Kanata gently patted his hand.

“I bet it could have been funny, had it been someone else than Kylo,” Kanata offered with a comforting smile. “But I’m really glad that you realize that startling Kylo wasn’t a good idea. I hope that Kylo will also realize that punching you in the face wasn’t a good way to deal with being startled. Do you think you can apologize to Kylo – once he is calm again?”

Poe kept still for a few moments, but then nodded, and Kanata squeezed his hand in appreciation.

She sat by him a little while longer, made sure he got another cold compress, and then left to check up on Rey. Her door was locked, but Kanata could indeed hear sniffing from inside. She knocked two times, then entered, a little shocked to see Rey was sitting on the ground, her back against the wall as she had her arms around her legs, her face red from all the tears.

“Oh, sweetie…” Kanata said compassionately, moving closer towards her, but also noticing how her shoulders tensed because of that.

She was mindful not to touch Rey as she sat on her knees beside her.

“Tell me what’s wrong.”

Rey didn’t know where to begin. Didn’t know if she even should.

“Just leave me alone,” Rey said, refusing to speak, and she put her head down on her knees, making it impossible for Kanata to look her in the eye.
But Kanata had no intention of leaving her like that.

“It must have been scary… Seeing your friend get so angry at Poe.”

Rey gulped at the mention of the word *friend*. She hadn’t even considered having a friend, but inside, she knew it was the truth. Kylo was her friend now – and she had cried just as much for his horrible situation as she had for hers.

“Is he going to forensics?” she suddenly asked, her tone full of fear. She dared to turn her head to look at doctor Kanata. She needed to know if the doctor wasn’t lying.

“No,” the doctor replied honestly. “We don’t want him to go to forensics. It’s not the first time either that he has fought Poe – but usually it’s more of a mutual thing… If it were anyone but Poe, we would be more alarmed about Kylo’s display of anger…”

Rey didn’t really understand why he was given leniency, but she was glad for it.

“Is he alright?” Rey continued, still with tears in her eyes.

Kanata wasn’t sure what to reply to that. He really wasn’t alright, but it could be far worse.

“He will be,” Kanata said after a long beat.

“Can I see him?” Rey asked immediately, trying to dry her tears. In a way, she much preferred to talk and think about Kylo than about her own feelings of desperation.

Truthfully, that question came rather unexpected to Kanata. If she were to go by the book, then she had to go to Kylo herself, check if she could get him to calm down, and if not prescribe him a sedative. Depending on how well he calmed down, he could be out of the isolation cell in a matter of hours, but it could also be quite the opposite. The longest he had spent in isolation had been three days – and Kanata felt no pleasure at the prospect of breaking him like that again.

But involving Rey in his recovery was unconventional, to say the least. Yet Statura’s words echoed through her head. These people had no support group – no one besides the Keepers. But Statura had forgotten that the patients also had each other. And if Rey was able to appeal to him, to lift his spirits, then it would be a waste not to use that power.

Though a bit of doubt was still nagging at her, Kanata got up from her knees. “Alright. Follow me. But let me speak to him first and don’t enter the cell unless I invite you.”

Rey gulped, but immediately got up as well.

“Hold on,” she said briefly, and she shrugged off her pants to switch into ones that weren’t covered in pancake batter.

Kanata felt like she needed to remark upon Rey’s lack of inhibitions in that regard, but decided to bite her tongue instead. At this moment, there were other things that were more important. And besides, she was a figure of confidence to the patients. Telling Rey she could not be herself right now would break the little confidence they had built up.

Once she had changed into her sweatpants, she followed Kanata through the living room, noticing how the eyes of Poe followed her curiously as they went into the men’s corridor. At the end of the corridor, she halted as Kanata took out her keys and opened the door to the isolation cell. She could hear Kylo’s mumbling, and she wished she could make out what he was saying.
Doctor Kanata gave Rey a meaningful look, and she knew that she had to stay in the corridor for now.

"Kylo?" the doctor asked gently as she stepped inside, and Kylo visually startled at the sound of his own name.

"Go away," he cried, turning away from Maz, hiding his face from her, but only crying louder as he did so. "I bet I need to go to forensics now… But I didn’t mean to kill him… I really didn’t mean to kill him…"

Rey could not help but look inside, her heart clenching at the sight of her tall friend laying on the ground in agony – his arms and hands constrained by the jacket they had put him in. She couldn’t see his face properly, just his dark hair, messy in his face and on the floor – hiding his expression from her.

He appeared to be inconsolable, and Maz took a few steps closer before she crouched down, keeping her distance as she did not want to risk him lashing out at her – even if he was still wearing the straitjacket.

"Kylo, you did not kill him," she said softly. "Poe is fine. A swollen eye and some bruises, but he’ll be fine."

"But I hurt people," Kylo sobbed. "Poe and Statura and Rey…"

Rey felt a small shock go through her at the mention of her own name, and almost wanted to walk inside the cell, but stopped herself just in time.

"They’re all fine," Maz said softly, and she did not understand why he only cried louder as she said that.

"I did hurt them," he told himself. "I hurt Rey. I knew it. I knew it would happen."

"No…"

Rey’s voice sounded weakly from the door frame, and at the sound of her voice, he immediately turned his head, looking for her.

"You didn’t hurt me at all," she immediately continued, and as she saw how frightened he was as he looked at her, she could not stand it anymore. She could not bear the thought of him being so afraid and alone, of Kanata keeping her distance when it was so obvious that he was drowning in his own misery, and she stepped into the cell, past Kanata, and knelt down right next to him.

Kanata involuntarily reached for Rey as she passed by her, but stopped herself as she realized forcing her out now would be worse to Kylo’s state of mind than letting her stay. She remained quiet instead, a silent observer to the scene.

Rey could see how much he had cried – and how he had even been unable to wipe the tears away for himself – and gently touched his cheek, only stopping when she noticed how he winced as she touched the cheek Statura had punched.

"I’m so sorry about what happened, Kylo," Rey said softly, tears in her own eyes as she recognized her own misery in his gaze. "But you didn’t hurt me."

"But…” Kylo seemed confused. "When I dropped the pan on you…”
Rey frowned, then shook her head. “You never dropped the pan on me. It never hit me.”

“But Snoke said…” Kylo gulped, trying to figure out if it had been a lie or not.

Rey blinked, confused as well now. “Snoke?” she asked gently.

Kylo felt his heart race as she uttered that name. Just the thought of Snoke got him angry at this point, and he spat out: “The filthy traitor within me – the voice that speaks to me – the one that tries to anger me at every turn, who…”

Rey had heard enough. She understood. To shut him up, she gently put her finger on his lips, and this confused him so much that he just blinked as he looked at her, the anger slowly subsiding again.

“Listen, I’m fine. We’re all fine. Even Statura and Poe. But are you alright?”

Those words however did not calm him. He felt his heart fill with feelings of relief and self-hate and sadness and anger – all at once – and as he suddenly started crying again, he shook his head. He was far from alright – never would be alright – and admitting it to Rey was nothing short of painful, his breath hitching in his throat as he still lay on the floor, uncomfortable and cold and completely miserable.

Rey saw how absolutely pathetic he was left – and suddenly put her arms underneath his shoulders, trying to lift him up a bit, and he complied because it was her, sitting up with her help, but not able to stop his tears.

She wiped his tears again, and as he looked at her, he noticed something, and he whispered brokenly: “You’re crying…”

Through her tears, she managed a small smile, and unwilling to talk about herself, she just replied: “Look who’s talking.”

She saw his shoulders shake briefly as he smiled his broken smile, lowering his head to her level, bringing his forehead closer to hers, and in an instinct she gently leaned in, closing her eyes as their foreheads touched.

For a moment there was peace – but it was not enough for Rey. She wanted to take his hands, but they were still stuck inside the straitjacket, and she broke away from him to figure out how the jacket worked.

“Help me out here, doctor,” she heard herself say as her fingers tried to undo one the many buckles, and strangely enough, even to doctor Kanata herself, she was soon by Rey’s side, helping along to release Kylo from his restraints.

Together, they helped Kylo pull the jacket over his head, and when his hands and arms were free again, he dried his cheeks himself, one final time, or so he hoped.

Rey took his hand and squeezed it, but just that simple, kind gesture affected him more than he would have been able to foresee himself, and soon tears were once more rolling down his cheeks.

“Kylo,” Maz said softly. “Would you like me to get Poe in here so you could apologize to him? It might make you feel better?”

He shook his head, his shoulders slouching a bit as he tried to dry his tears. “I don’t want him to see me like this,” he cried.
In the hallway, the food cart was being rolled in at that moment, and Kanata got up from the floor to check it. The sound did distract all of them a bit, and as Rey looked into the hallway, she suddenly felt Kylo’s hands firmly clamp onto hers.

“Rey,” he muttered urgently now that Kanata was no longer listening. “Did I really not hurt you? You didn’t say that to protect me, did you?”

She immediately turned back to him and shook her head, and in an instinct she put her hand on his cheek, calming him down. “You really didn’t. You didn’t hurt me. Don’t let Snoke get inside your head.”

“It’s hard,” he admitted with a sob. “You have no idea what it’s like.”

“I don’t,” she agreed. “But you need to stop punishing yourself for things you did not do. We’re all fine. I’m fine.”

Those words were hard to say – and strictly speaking they were a lie – and Kylo sensed it.

“You’re not,” he whispered, his gaze both sad and kind as he looked into her eyes. “You’ve been crying.”

She knew that he wanted to help her – that he wanted to talk to her about it – but she didn’t know how to. Words didn’t always come particularly easy to her – and right now they didn’t come at all. Her lips started to tremble and her shoulders shook as she was trying to fight back her own tears, and he noticed it straight away.

She looked defeated – hopeless – and it was a look he had recognized in many eyes before hers. But never before had he cared more about others than he had about himself – not until now.

And as he looked at her with full understanding of what she was going through – with nothing but kindness and patience and compassion – she could not contain herself any longer. She sobbed again, lowered her head in shame, and felt the next moment how his arms wrapped around her shoulders and pulled her into his embrace.

It was strange and new and she hated it when people touched her – but this… This was an exception. It was warm and caring and innocent – and no one had ever been warm and caring and innocent before. Not with her. And she couldn’t explain why it suddenly bothered her so much – why it actually felt good while she was also completely miserable. And her tears would not stop coming now. She didn’t think they would ever stop.

He cradled her head gently as she shook in his arms, resting his own cheek on top of her head, feeling like his own breakdown had led to hers, and that she was his responsibility now. His resolve to care for her only strengthened as he pushed his self-pity aside. He could be strong for her – would be strong for her.

She didn’t know how she was ever going to recover – how she was going to be able to crawl out of this pit or how she was ever going to feel an inch of hope again, and she clung to him in her need. She would have begged him for help if she had known how to, but her mouth was dry and she did not know the proper words for it.

As doctor Kanata entered the isolation cell again, she did not understand how their roles had been reversed in so short a time. But it was clear to her eyes that Kylo was the one comforting Rey now, and that Rey was having the breakdown she had fought against in Kanata’s presence. The doctor even feared Rey would end up hyperventilating if she did not get a grip on herself soon, for she
was shaking as she sobbed, her tears painful and her breathing uneven, and her cheeks were red from frustration.

But Kylo needed no help. He had the situation under control, even if he did not know it himself. The words he spoke were simple, but they were enough for Rey to slowly calm down, and he whispered them over and over again, like a mantra, until she stopped shaking and her tears grew cold.

“It’s okay… You’re not alone.”
A Private Dinner

By the time Rey and Kylo returned to the living room, most of the others had left to spend a few free hours outside of the ward. Only Poe was left, still pressing a cold compress to his swollen eye as he watched Kanata guide Rey and Kylo to a table so they could have something to eat.

Poe immediately dropped his compress, got up from his seat and headed straight for them, though he made sure not to get too close to Kylo.

“Look, Kylo,” he said quickly. “I need to apologize. I’m sorry for startling you. I didn’t mean to anger you.”

It wasn’t easy for Kylo to look Poe in the eye, feeling guilt swarm him in that moment, but Rey’s hand gently taking his and squeezing it urged him to reply.

“I know,” he replied. “I’m sorry for losing my temper so quickly. And for punching you in the face.”

He didn’t dare to look at Poe as he spoke those words, but that did not mean that he wasn’t honest about it.

“Apology accepted,” Poe said quickly, eagerly rubbing his hands as he looked at Rey and Kylo. “Say why don’t you sit down and I’ll get your lunch ready?”

Doctor Kanata had kept a wary eye on Poe and was wondering what he was up to.

“You need not do that. I will get their lunch ready, Poe,” she said slowly.

“No, no, I insist!” And with those words he hurried into the kitchen, where they could all hear how he put a plate in the microwave and turned it on.

Rey and Kylo sat down at the table that was usually Poe and Jess’s, and didn’t immediately know what to say or do as they waited. Doctor Kanata headed into the kitchen to make sure Poe wasn’t planning any further pranks, and as they were by themselves in the large room, Kylo and Rey just smiled awkwardly at one another.

Anyone who knew them could see they had cried despite their careful smiles – and their hair was messier than usual.

“Where are all the others?” Rey asked quietly, not used to this sort of silence in the ward.

“Outside. We get a few hours a week to go shopping if we’re good. I haven’t been in a few months… Had a few anger outbursts and I only get to go if I’m calm for seven days in a row.”

“Your outbursts… They’re a weekly thing?” Rey asked, worried by this news.

Kylo’s cheeks turned red as he looked away and said: “Bi-weekly, I suppose… Though… Kanata says I should be able to get better.”

Rey tilted her head curiously, and Kylo continued: “When I lived on the streets, I had less anger issues… In fact, hardly any… Snoke was… different then.”

Seeing Rey’s curious and interested gaze, he dared to continue. He usually didn’t tell other patients about his problems, but with Rey, it was different. He feared that she would never open up to him
either unless he did to her.

“Here, he feels trapped, much like me, and he encourages me to lash out, and sometimes it works – a lot of the times, it works… But outside, I was alone… And I didn’t lash out when I was on my own, only when people really bothered me.”

“Is that how you got here?” Rey wondered. “Did you lash out on the street?”

Strangely enough, he just laughed awkwardly for a moment, before he shook his head. “No… No… Not really that… Though Snoke was to blame.”

Rey wanted to ask him how he had ended up in the ward then, but looked up when Poe suddenly entered the room, elegantly carrying two plates of spaghetti on his arms, and held a jug of water in his other hand.

“Mademoiselle et monsieur, your dinner,” he said formally, and Rey frowned at the foreign language she didn’t understand, but she was still impressed by how elegantly he served them their meals.

Kylo had a frown on his face as he looked at Poe, wondering not only why he was doing this, but also where he had learned this.

“I used to be a waiter,” Poe explained. “At a French restaurant.”

“You lived in France?” Rey asked, surprised.


“I thought you were a pilot,” Kylo muttered.

“I was!” Poe replied, a little undignified. “But how do you think I paid for flying lessons?”

Kylo remained quiet, still a little baffled by Poe’s decision to serve them their meal, and Rey, noticing the awkward silence between the two men, said: “Thank you, Poe.”

Poe bowed with a gracious smile and headed back to the sofa again. “Bon appetite!”

As Kylo took the jug of water in his hands, he wanted to fill up his own glass. He was thirsty, but he also realized that Rey had to be as well, and so he filled up Rey’s glass first. She noticed this small gesture, but did not know how to acknowledge it. Instead, she looked down, unable to hide her small smile from him, and as he noticed it, he accidentally spilled some water on the table.

“Oh, oh, sorry,” he apologized in shame, but Rey just chuckled.

“No worries. It’s just a drip of water,” she assured him gently, quickly wiping it away with her sleeve.

_Completely ruined it, Kylo. Now she too thinks you’re a loser!_

But as Kylo looked at Rey, who was blushing, he didn’t feel like Snoke was right about that at all, and so he ignored Snoke’s voice as he sang ‘loser!’ in his ear.

It was true that she looked away a little awkwardly, but she ate slower than usual, as though she was deep in thought. Kylo could not help but hope that she too felt those awkward butterflies that made him lose his appetite, and ate just as slowly, every now and then looking up at her to catch her glancing away or blushing furiously as she looked down at her plate.
He did not know why she was looking at him so much, and Rey wouldn’t tell him why. She was trying to count how many beauty marks and freckles he had – or perhaps that was just what she told herself to have a valid excuse to look at him. His long face – with those deep eyes – was one she just didn’t want to forget. She doubted she ever could.

As he grew more convinced that Snoke was wrong, the voice went away, but he startled a little when he suddenly heard music.

Rey and Kylo both looked for the source at the same time, noticing that Poe was sitting in the sofa, only his eyes popping up above it as he held his smartphone next to his face, into their direction. He did not stop looking at him as the voice sang: “When the moon hits your eye like a big pizza pie… that’s amore…”

Rey was confused – not familiar with the song anyway – but Kylo recognized the sappy tune and felt targeted.

Luckily, Kanata had held a close eye on the situation from the kitchen, and she immediately stepped toward Poe.

“All right, that’s enough, mister Dameron,” she said strictly. “You’ve had enough fun here. Follow me to your room.”

“Doctor Kanata!” he replied with a cheeky grin, immediately sitting straight again. “I thought you’d never ask!”

He eagerly got up from the couch and followed Kanata, who inwardly was counting to ten in order not to reply in anger to Poe’s antagonizing behavior.

While the doctor left to have a word with Poe about this strange change in his treatment of Kylo, Kylo and Rey were left on their own again, and Rey didn’t really understand why Kylo was looking so flustered.

“Did he make you mad?” she asked carefully, and after a few moments of careful thought, Kylo shook his head.

“No, but he was starting to…”

“Are you okay now?” Rey double-checked, and as Kylo noticed how prudent she now was in the way she spoke to him, he quickly offered her a reassuring smile.

“Yes,” he said as he looked her in the eye. “I’m not going to freak out now. Don’t be afraid.”

“I’m not,” she replied warmly, but Snoke did not approve.

She’s lying. And if she isn’t, she’s really really stupid.

“She’s not stupid!” Kylo muttered angrily, and Rey gulped as she heard that.

“Excuse me?”

Kylo moaned in agony. “I’m sorry,” he apologized immediately. “I can’t help it, Snoke’s being annoying.”

“What’s he saying about me?” she asked him, mildly intrigued, and her small smile gave him the courage to tell her.
“That you’re lying when you say you’re not afraid – and that if you’re not lying, you’re really stupid.”

Rey grinned as he admitted that to her, finding it a little amusing that this voice in his head was trying to insult her.

“Well, maybe I am stupid then,” she said with a smile. “But between you and me, Snoke not included, do you really think you would hurt someone you cared about?”

His reaction was not what she had expected. It seemed like nearly all color drained from his cheeks and he almost seemed to stare right through her, only getting a grip on himself when she reached for his hand and her fingers touched his.

“It could be an accident,” he muttered in reply, fear in his eyes as he looked away from her. “But I don’t want to.”

The obvious anxiety in his eyes left her rather anxious herself, but she did not betray it and instead took a firm hold of his hand as she said: “You won’t. If you had a grip on your anger when you lived on the streets, then you can learn to get a grip on it again.”

His gaze was almost hopeful as he looked at her again, and she said determinedly: “Next time Snoke tries to tell you some lies, just ask me what I think about it. It might help to have another opinion besides your own on what he says.”

She sounded so brave and certain of herself that he wanted nothing more but to agree with her, and he nodded with a small lump in his throat. She was so beautiful – it truly made no sense to him how she could have lived a life without love. She was deserving of it – more than anyone he had ever known.

“Our food is getting cold,” she remarked a little awkwardly as she realized he was staring at her, and he quickly averted his eyes again.

“Oh, yes!” he said, clumsily picking up his fork before he continued eating.

Everything was quiet for a little while, though the awkward glances did continue every now and then, and even Rey knew that it wasn’t entirely normal to feel this way. She did not mind it though. She rather felt like this than completely alone in this world – and Kylo had been able to make her feel like she wasn’t alone – and like he would be enough to lift her spirits.

“It is nice though,” she said softly when she was done with her plate, not wanting to be silent anymore. “Not having everyone around while we eat… I like it quiet.”

She had said that before, and he smiled because of it.

“I know. And if… if we get out of here…” He hesitated, not sure whether he should continue, but he could not shake the thought from his mind, and he had to get it out. “… then I want to take you out to dinner. Proper dinner. With a better waiter than Poe.”

He had used all of his courage to tell her this, to admit this deep desire that he felt, because he wanted nothing more than to keep her in his life, and now he looked at her with nothing but dread as he feared her response.

She wasn’t sure what to say. She had never had a proper dinner before – at a proper diner – nor had she ever had anyone suggest anything like that to her. It was an intimate question – a very personal one – and as she looked into his eyes for deceit, she found nothing but the frightened bit of hope
that he was holding on to.

“Dinner?” she repeated weakly, wondering why the thought alone made her voice tremble.

He gulped.

“Yeah,” he replied anxiously, his ears now flushing just as badly as his cheeks, and he did not want to know how ridiculous he looked. “At an Italian place, or Spanish place, or a steakhouse or… I dunno… Maybe… maybe just Garfunkels? Anything better than this…”

He no longer dared to look at her, but Rey still didn’t fully understand. Was he just being a friend, or trying to give her hope, or was it actually more than that? Whatever it was, the thought of sitting in a restaurant with Kylo didn’t repulse her. Far from it. Especially if it meant that they’d both be out of this hellish place. She could not imagine what a normal life would look like for her, but if it meant that she could go to a restaurant with Kylo and eat some good food, then a normal life couldn’t be such a bad thing.

“Sure,” she said softly, biting her lip as she noticed he was too ashamed to look at her. “I can’t wait.”

He looked up in surprise, his eyes wide as he searched hers for a sign that she wasn’t serious, but she even seemed excited, and this made his heart jump.

“Really?” he asked hopefully, an oafish grin on his face.

She nodded and smiled, trying not to grin as oafishly as he did. “Yeah… I mean… Getting out of here will be scary – but it’s nice to know we could still see each other.”

No insult Poe could have thrown at him would have fazed him in that moment. He could not stop his silly smile.

“Yeah,” he said breathlessly. “It would be nice to have a friend on the other side…”

Rey could only agree. For now, a friend would do. And she couldn’t imagine a better one than Kylo.
Willing Friends

Luckily, the Saturday morning breakdown didn’t linger too long in Rey’s mind. She certainly didn’t feel like her stay in the ward was making her happy, but it was doable. She could survive it – and once she had a chance, she could run for it and never look back.

She still thought of running before she went to sleep. The streets still seemed like a better place to her than the ward. But her dreams were slowly changing. No longer did she dream of going back on her own – she now dreamed of having Kylo by her side – of spending a warm summer’s evening in Hyde Park with him, sleeping under the stars, or of squatting in an old abandoned factory – not on her own anymore, but with a friend.

Ever since Unkar had disappeared from the streets, she had been on her own – as she preferred it. But she had spent many hours in fear of strangers that harassed her – had spent even more time running away from them. And she had always run away because that was the only way she knew how to protect herself.

Yet if she had Kylo by her side, she would not need to run. His mere presence would probably keep most assholes at bay anyway, and she wouldn’t be alone. To her, it almost seemed a fairy tale ending.

What wasn’t a fairy tale ending, was the end to the book Kylo had chosen for her. As they both sat on their usual bench outside – not too bothered by the cold, even if it was January – Rey could not stop her sniffing as she had finished The Little Match Girl.

Kylo looked up from his own book, alarmed to see Rey crying.

“Rey?”

She looked up at him with tears in her eyes, but her gaze almost looked angry.

“Why did you want me to read this book? The ending is stupid!”

She closed the book furiously and shoved it away from her.

Kylo was in fact a little amused by her small outburst, and slowly put down his own book, shifting a little closer to her on the bench.

“You mean that it’s heartbreaking?” he asked slowly, and he could see how her chest was heaving from emotion. “That the girl in the book dies?”

“It’s cruel!” she argued. “Why pick this book for me? Do you like to see me cry?”

He couldn’t help but chuckle.

“No, Rey… I don’t like to see you cry,” he assured her, though she didn’t seem to buy that as he was still smiling. “But I do like seeing that you still have feelings.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” She was offended, but also willing to give him the chance to explain himself.

He shrugged for a moment. “That it’s pretty easy to get depressed in a place like this… In theory we’re here to get better, but I’ve seen many people get worse first. Like Finn. I don’t think I heard
him laugh until he’d been here for about nine months. And I can’t remember Lor San ever laughing at all. I just… I thought it would be a good way to see if you… if you care.”

Rey could only look at him as she processed what he meant. He nervously licked his lips and she frowned because that distracted her a little.

“So… crying is a good thing?” she asked unsurely, and he nodded solemnly.

“It means you are feeling something - in here…” He tapped his chest, and she involuntarily placed her hand over her own heart, mirroring his movement. “Even if you’re not feeling something for yourself – but about this character, suffering, then… that means that you’re not broken.”

His words made a surprising amount of sense to her, and she asked: “So… you were testing me? If I was okay?”

He nodded again, complete honesty on his face. “Yeah… I knew that the story had to affect you. I mean… It’s about a child living on the streets, and everyone is cruel to her, and then she dies, but the spirit of her grandmother is there for her.”

Another small tear fell down Rey’s cheek as he reminded her of the story again, and she admitted: “It’s very sad. That she dies, I mean, and that no one will help her, and then when she is dead, suddenly the same people that turned her down are saying they are sad she died and wish they could have helped her!”

“Yes, hypocrites, that’s what we call people like that,” Kylo explained briefly, quite amused to see Rey so wound up about it.

“Stupid hypocrites,” Rey muttered as she frowned angrily.

“Don’t you fear, perhaps, that, if you go back to the streets, that story might become your own?” he asked slowly.

Rey looked up in mild alarm. “You mean that I will freeze to death at night?” She didn’t wait for his response. “I don’t think so. I mean… It’s London, after all.”

Kylo smiled. It was true that winters didn’t seem to get as cold in London as the ones he had known at home.

“Yeah, and with global warming I suppose you’re quite safe from freezing nowadays.”

She frowned. “What’s global warming?”

Kylo chuckled, her ignorance one of her most endearing qualities. He knew he could talk with her for hours without ever growing bored of her. He would gladly teach her all he had learned in his own miserable life.

“Never mind,” he replied with a smile. “But are you really still thinking of going back to the streets?”

He braced himself for her response, and she shrugged indifferently.

“Yeah,” she replied briefly. “Where else would I go?”

“Well… That’s the thing… They will try to get you back into society – like – with your own place to live, and a job to pay for everything.”
Rey immediately shook her head. “That wouldn’t work. I haven’t even been to school. I would never get a job.”

“Don’t say that! I think you could make it,” he said, a little in awe of all that she was, and he moved even closer towards her. “You’re intelligent, Rey. Uneducated, true, but still clever enough. Surviving on the streets and coming out as strong as you are… I can’t imagine how you did it! I was horrible at the survival aspect when I lived on the street…”

She wasn’t completely unmoved by those words. In fact, his compliment had brought a small blush to her cheeks, but she honestly did not want to talk about herself. So when he brought up his own experience on the street, she quickly changed the subject.

“How so?” she asked curiously.

“I think I nearly starved my first months,” he admitted. “Took me a while to figure out where to get some food or where I could spend my nights safely. It wasn’t like I knew London very well when I arrived here. I didn’t have any money on me either.”

“You’re not from London?” Rey asked curiously.

He suddenly laughed. “You don’t recognize my accent?”

She shook her head, and looked completely clueless about his question. He couldn’t help but grin.

“I’m not even from the UK, Rey.”

Her mouth dropped and she looked at him with wide eyes.

“You’re a foreigner?” she asked. “But your English is perfect!”

Now it was his turn to frown again, not completely understanding how she thought English wasn’t his first language.

“Rey, I’m American.”

And once more it was Rey who was confused now.

“But that’s so far from here!”

“I am aware of that,” he replied dryly.

“Why on earth would you come to London to be homeless?” she asked, truly not understanding how an American could end up on the streets of London. She knew there were many immigrants trying to get into England. She had often heard Unkar complain about the foreigners that were trying to get into England from Calais – about refugees from war zones – and about Unkar’s conviction that they were giving the homeless a bad name. “But there’s no war in America, is there?”

He smiled, amused by her thought pattern.

“No, there isn’t,” he replied honestly. “I wasn’t running from war, I was just running from home.”

“Must have been a bad home, if you ran from it,” she said softly.

He didn’t respond though. Nor did he continue to smile as before. He grew very quiet, and Rey wondered why.
“How old where you when you came here?”

“How old are you now?” Rey asked gently, noticing how he didn’t seem particularly eager to talk with her about this – but she was curious and hoped to get as much out of him as she could.

“Twenty-seven.”

She wondered what had happened ten years ago – to make him run all the way to London to get away from his family. But his family seemed to be a tense subject, and she knew how horrible it could be to ask questions about topics one didn’t want to discuss, and so she decided to drop it for now.

“Arrived in London at the age of seventeen… Got into the ward at the age of twenty-three.”

“How did you end up in the ward?” she continued instead, curious if he had also had a run-in with the cops like she had, but he suddenly got up from the bench, desperate to end the conversation for now, and Rey immediately realized she had pushed too far.

Before he could step away, she reached for his hand and grabbed a firm hold of it.

“Kylo, I’m sorry,” she said immediately. “No more questions. We can just sit.”

As he looked at her, she noticed a vulnerability in him that he didn’t often show. But he was hesitating, not sure whether sitting down was a good idea or not, but as long as they held hands, she knew that he could still change his mind.

“Not everyone knows,” he suddenly said, and Rey wondered what he meant.

“Knows what?”

“How I ended up here,” he replied softly, their hands still linked as he stood before her. “Lor San knows. The Keepers know.”

She noticed how her heart skipped a beat as she realized he was considering to tell her.

“You won’t tell anyone, will you?” he asked, even though he did not seem certain about having this conversation with her.

“You’re not going to think the same of me when I tell you,” he continued, still doubting whether to go on or not.

As he grew quiet, she once again wondered whether it was even right to push him in this. “You don’t have to tell me,” she eventually decided, but he shook his head.

“How can I expect to be a friend to you when I’m not honest with you,” he muttered, and this left Rey speechless for a moment.

He was willingly offering himself to be her friend, and she could not help but smile. No one had ever wanted to be her friend before.
“And how can I expect to be a friend to you when I force you to tell me things you’re not ready for?” she replied sweetly, and as he looked up at her, he smiled warmly, amazed by the kindness she was capable of.

“I’m just afraid you’ll think of me as a complete loser,” he admitted slowly.

She was unable to stop herself from chuckling. “I suppose we’re all losers for being here,” she muttered darkly.

He chuckled along with her, but then gently disagreed: “I don’t think you’re a loser though.”

She looked into his eyes with a kind gaze of her own, but quickly lowered her head again to look at their entwined hands. Without saying a word, he lifted their hands though, and she could not tear her gaze away as he brought them closer to his lips, surprising her when he suddenly pressed them to her knuckles. She wasn’t sure what to make of his shy gaze, but she was aware that she was blushing, and at the same time completely unaware that she was biting her own lip. When he smiled next, she had no explanation for the fact that she felt a little dizzy and nauseous at the same time, and he playfully said: “I wouldn’t kiss the hand of a loser, trust me.”

She laughed softly, and he seemed to be quite pleased with himself that he had been responsible for bringing that beautiful smile to her face.

They lowered their hands between them again, not letting go of one another, and Rey moved a little closer to him, her own arm leaning against his as they looked out over the small courtyard. There wasn’t anything interesting there for them to see, but that didn’t mean that they were bored.

For now, they were perfectly content just sitting there, enjoying each other’s company, holding hands, and carefully hoping that maybe one day there would be no need for secrets anymore between them. But until then, they would not complain either. There were worse people to be stuck with in a psychiatric ward.
Hux's Run

Hux had always been a bit of a control freak. So when he entered the Keeper’s office on Monday morning, and read in the journals what kind of situation Statura had found himself in on Saturday morning, he did not blame the lack of Keepers, nor did he blame Kylo or Poe. The blame was completely with Statura, who had just proven his incompetence by not being able to foresee the situation in time.

Hux was the only one that thought that way though. When Phasma read the journal, she considered herself lucky that it had not happened on her watch. Thanisson also felt some relief that he had not been the one in that situation, and hoped that more Keepers would be assigned to their group. Though he would never admit it, he thought it was irresponsible that he was sometimes on his own for hours in a row with a dozen adults that were mentally unstable. School had warned him for it, had told him and his classmates plenty of times that it was possible they could find themselves in critical situations without a colleague for backup. He just wondered how he were to survive a situation if Kylo would ever lose his temper against him.

But Hux had no such fears. He felt like he had complete control over the group. He had studied everyone’s profile and knew what made each patient tick, or so he told himself.

Rey was the exception though. She hardly had a profile and was difficult to read – at least to Hux. Though she seemed asocial in some ways, she seemed to deal pretty well with at least one other patient – Kylo. The fact that it had been Rey who had helped Kylo calm down after his outburst, had been surprising and mildly unsettling to the Keeper. But Hux could not deny that he too had noticed that the two had formed an alliance of a sort.

Rey and Kylo sat together during therapies, spent more time outside than any of the other patients and though they were very quiet and reserved people, it looked like they had normal conversations every now and then. When one looked out the window when they were sitting outside, one could see them smiling and talking – but the moment people neared them, they always shut up.

Whenever Hux asked Rey something, she always replied as briefly as she could. Almost as though she feared him. Hux wasn’t sure if he should take that as a compliment or not.

As they found themselves back on the running track a week after Rey’s arrival, Phasma looked up in surprise to see Hux suddenly join the warmups. She had noticed his sporty attire for the day, but had not remarked on it at first. But now that he seemed to be getting ready for a run, she knew what was going on in his annoyingly aggravating mind.

He even joined the patients for their warm-up lap around the track, and this confused all of them. Even Poe didn’t know what to say about that – and he was usually the last of the group to be at a loss for words.

“I’d say it’s about time for a race,” Hux said after their warm-up lap. “Kylo and Finn, the two of you against one another. Then Poe against Jess. Then Rey against me.”

At those last words, everyone just stared at Hux as though he had grown an extra head. It was rather unusual for a Keeper to join in on the activities, especially in a competitive way. What was even stranger about the situation, was that it wasn’t even a particularly friendly competition. It wasn’t done out of pity. It was done out of a sense of vanity, and it made many of the patients rather uncomfortable. Thankfully, Rey was unaware of how strange the request was, and though she wasn’t sure what to think of Hux’s wish to run against her, she did not object to it.
Phasma, however, shook her head once she realized what this was about.

“You gotta be kidding me,” she muttered. “Is this still about me saying that women are the stronger gender?”

As everyone looked at Hux for an explanation, he tried to shrug it off as casually as he could. “I just enjoy a good challenge, Phasma,” he said dryly, but she could not stop shaking her head in disbelief.

“The frailty of the male ego! I can’t believe this. You have never been this competitive with Finn and Kylo before, and they’re good runners too.”

Finn and Kylo looked up at Phasma, then back at Hux, almost as though they were children that were watching their parents argue.

“I figured that Rey could use a challenge,” he said as graciously as he could, but Rey just narrowed her eyes at him, not really trusting him, and unable to hide it.

“Alright,” Rey said warily. “Let’s race then.”

As she got ready behind the starting line, Hux did the same, taking a whistle from his pocket and tossing it at Phasma, who caught it before she rolled her eyes.

“Rey, you don’t have to do this,” she insisted. “No one is forcing you to.”

Rey shrugged, not really finding it that big of a deal.

“I’ll race him,” she said bravely. “I don’t mind a challenge.”

Phasma nodded respectfully, honestly hoping that Rey would beat Hux’s arrogant ass in the race.

“On your places. Get set… On my mark…” She whistled loudly, and off they went.

“Come on, Rey, beat his ass,” Poe muttered, making sure that Hux could not hear, and Phasma could not help but grin because of it, watching how they were both struggling to take the lead.

“They are both fast,” Finn said. “I didn’t know Hux could run like that.”

Kylo had his fists clenched as he watched them. He was hoping with all his might that Rey had it in her to beat Hux. He didn’t want the bastard to have the chance to gloat.

Even Jess was hoping that Rey would win, and as the two of them neared the finish line, it was eventually Hux that took the lead, crossing over the line before Rey was able to.

Jess and Poe moaned in frustration, Kylo kept quiet despite his annoyance, and Finn tried to be cheerful: “Well done, mister Hux. You too, Rey! That was very exciting to watch!”

As Hux caught his breath, he grinned, then looked at Rey and offered her his hand.

“I must admit, that was quite the challenge.”

As Rey shook his hand, she offered him a small smile. “It was. Congratulations on winning.”

Phasma shook her head, annoyed that Hux had won. Even if he wasn’t condescending about it towards Rey, she knew that she had lost the bragging rights concerning Rey’s special talent to Hux.
“Well, I wonder if Rey would have been able to win if she had actually worn decent sport shoes like you, Hux,” she continued. “Unfortunately our patients can’t afford running shoes that cost two hundred Pounds a pair.”

Hux narrowed his eyes at her, his hands in his sides.

“Are you suggesting we run barefoot?” he asked sarcastically, but she shook her head immediately.

“No. Not barefoot. I’m sure Rey will be able to afford some better running shoes soon. I feel like it’s only fair to give her a rematch then.”

Rey wasn’t sure what kind of battle was going on between Phasma and Hux, and she also had no idea where the money for running shoes was going to come from, but she kept quiet, an unwilling participant in their little feud, just like the others.

“I doubt it would make much of a difference,” Hux reluctantly replied. “But I am willing to humor you.”

Phasma seemed pleased enough with that and even offered a small smile, though the light didn’t quite reach her eyes as she glared at Hux.

“Thank you,” she replied in mock-gratitude. “Now then, how about a race for actual patients now?”

It was obvious that Phasma was pissed at Hux, yet Hux did not seem to mind it at all. Fact was, he sooner seemed to enjoy it. As everyone was given some water to drink, he continued to antagonize his colleague about sports, and the patients were all a little quieter than usual, wondering what the hell was going on between the two of them. It was no secret that almost all Keepers always disagreed with Hux, but they always kept it to themselves. Now, it was out in the open that Phasma did not approve of him challenging Rey. And while Hux had always taken pleasure in getting under a patient’s skin, this was the first time he did it so openly to another Keeper. It was actually making everyone a little uncomfortable.

“Look, you don’t have to be so upset about it, Phasma,” Hux said slyly. “There really is no shame whatsoever in a woman losing to a man in any branch of sports.”

“I disagree,” she argued. “What you are basically saying is that a woman should just resign in advance, before even properly challenging the man.”

“I’m not saying she should resign,” Hux continued. “I’m saying she should not pick her battles with men.”

“Yet you picked a battle with Rey!” Phasma cried out in disbelief. “Do you even hear what you’re saying?”

“I wanted to give her a challenge – something to aspire to!” he defended himself.

“Pardon me but if she now aspires to be like you, I’d rather quit my job straight away!”

Rey sipped from her cup of water as she looked at the two keepers going at one another with their arguments and threats, quite entertained by the discussion itself.
“Are they always like this?” she muttered as Kylo sat next to her, also looking at Phasma as she was fiercely using her hands to demonstrate her passion, while Hux stood completely still besides her, as stoic as ever, but with his lips curled up in an amused way.

“They’re eh… unconventional colleagues of one another, I suppose,” Kylo admitted.

As Finn overheard them, he said: “I don’t mind if they keep on arguing. The more they argue, the less we need to run.”

“I like running,” Rey objected softly.

“Do you think they fight a lot?” Jess wondered. “When we’re not there to see it?”

“Probably fuck a lot,” Poe muttered darkly.

“Ew!” Jess closed her eyes and shook her head in disgust. “I can’t unsee this now.”

“I’m not even kidding,” Poe defended himself seriously. “I see some serious unresolved sexual tension between those two.”

Finn shook his head and furrowed his brow. “Poe, you see unresolved sexual tension in everything. That’s a meaningless statement, coming from you.”

Poe shrugged, not bothering to argue with that.

“Alright, break’s over,” Phasma suddenly said, walking away from Hux as she had decided she had wasted enough time on arguing with her colleague. “Have another run. Pick your own pace.”

Finn, Poe and Jess grunted as they got up again, but Rey was eager to run again, and Kylo secretly wished he could run just as fast – just so he could run with her. He really tried as hard as he could, and thinking that it would make Rey proud was all the motivation he needed.

By the time they needed to leave the track, he was exhausted and thirsty, and Rey gladly handed him a cup of water.

“You really pushed yourself today,” she remarked with a smile, and he was pleased to hear her say that.

“Wish I could be as good as you,” he sighed longingly, and this flattered her.

“Wish I could be as good as Hux,” she admitted to him, but Kylo immediately shook his head.

“Don’t say that. You’re already better than him.”

“Lost the race, though,” she reminded him.

“So what? Phasma was right – he has better gear. You aren’t even wearing proper sneakers.”

Rey appreciated how he stuck up for her. She wasn’t sure if she believed that better shoes would make a difference, but she wasn’t going to argue with him about that.

Someone else who didn’t forget the race, was Phasma. The moment they got back to the ward, she went into the Keeper’s office to check up on Rey’s finances. When Hux entered the office to hang his coat, she only glared at him from over the monitor, not saying a word to him.

Two could play that game, and Hux remained quiet as he gathered the medication that the patients
would require for lunch, only looking up when Phasma suddenly got up from behind the desk, her chair making quite some noise as she shoved it back.

As she tried to walk behind him though, he turned around, stopping her by grabbing her arm.

“Come on, Phasma,” he said in a slightly resigned tone. “I was only trying to have some fun.”

Phasma’s eyes burned, nothing but hatred on her face as she looked down at him.

“You don’t get to have fun on the backs of our own patients, Hux,” she hissed quietly, making sure no one out in the corridor could overhear them. “Rey is a nobody. No education. No family. No friends. The only thing she’s actually good at, is running. And you think it’s funny when an entitled privileged prick like yourself beats her at the only thing she’s got?”

Hux gulped, still not understanding why Phasma was so upset about it.

“Rey didn’t seem as bothered by it as you are…” he defended himself weakly.

“You’re the most arrogant asshole I’ve ever met – and that’s saying something, considering the fact I used to work in a prison before I got here. You need to learn your place, Hux!”

She was entirely serious about that, and not any less angry than she had been a moment before, but Hux did not seem intimidated or offended. In fact, he had a small twinkle in his eyes, amused by how close her face was to his, and he licked his lips playfully before he suddenly leaned in and pressed a brief kiss to hers.

Phasma startled. That was the last thing she had expected. But it wasn’t a cruel kiss – or a forced one – it was almost soft and sweet – and so short that she still had no idea what to think about it when he pulled back, a small smile on his face as he whispered playfully: “Then teach me my place…”

She gulped, completely dumbstruck by this unexpected behavior of her colleague. She more often than not hated his guts, and for a moment she wanted nothing more than to shout at him, to tell him just what kind of an asshole he was, and how the patients would be better off without him.

But as he looked up at her – almost hopefully – she forgot her hate – but not her anger. His blue eyes seemed to plead with hers to consider it – to consider them.

Phasma usually had a good grip on herself – an excellent grip, in fact – but right now, something inside of her was different. She knew this was a disaster waiting to happen – yet she dove right in, hushing the voices of protest inside of her as she suddenly grabbed him by his shirt and kissed him angrily, and she didn’t even realize how he swooned against her because of it. Only when she bit his lip – not completely by accident – and he moaned, did she let go of him, pushing him off her.

“Fuck off, Hux,” she muttered, finally yanking her arm away from his hand before she rushed into the corridor, forcing herself to focus on her job, even if she was now unable to stop thinking of the biggest asshole she had ever had the displeasure to work with.

As Hux was left behind in the Keeper’s Room, he had a pleased smile on his lips. He straightened his shirt again and brushed his hand through his hair before he headed into the corridor, just in time to see Phasma head into the living room, her fists clenched and her shoulders tense in frustration.

He could only hope she would be so kind as to vent that frustration on him.
“Pass me the scissors, please,” Kylo asked politely as the group was seated around the therapy table, and Rey immediately reached for them as they lay in front of Finn and passed them to her friend.

Kanata had an eye on them, noticing that Rey’s presence was indeed a positive influence on him. He was calmer and tried harder during their therapy sessions, and she didn’t hear him talk so much to himself anymore.

They were working on a creative project today. Kanata had brought dozens of magazines with her in a variety of subjects, and had instructed them all to look through the magazines for things they liked – images and words – that they could then cut out and paste on a new paper to make a pretty collage.

Each of them had already gathered quite a few images, and none of their choices were really surprising to Kanata. She knew these people well enough by now. Jess had cut out pictures of boy bands, of fashion and expensive accessories, a testament to how she seemed to be stuck in her teenage years. Wexley had found a foodie magazine and had gathered so many images of desserts that it made Kanata’s mouth water. Besides that, he had gathered a picture of a happy family from an ad about butter. Poe’s collection included many beautiful models – both male and female – as well as an image of an airplane flying over a beautiful beach. Not surprising, considering his love for flying and beauty.

As Maz saw how many images Kylo had gathered, she figured that he was once more trying to give it all he had. He hadn’t just gathered normal photographs, many of them of animals and pictures of the countryside, but he had also gathered colors and sorted them. She had no doubt that his piece would be the prettiest of the group. He did have an eye for that sort of thing, and took great pleasure from expressing himself through art.

Rey was hesitant though. She had only cut out one image so far – an image of a beautiful medieval castle – and as she slowly browsed through the magazines, it seemed like she had trouble finding things she liked – almost as though she didn’t even know what it was that she truly liked. Maz was sad to see that, but it wasn’t really surprising.

When Phasma entered the room, she headed straight for the therapy table – still wearing her jacket and not bothering to take it off.

“If I may disturb, doctor Kanata, I’d like to take Rey along with me for shopping.”

Rey had heard that and looked up in mild alarm. She wasn’t aware that Phasma had made plans for her.

“Of course,” Kanata said graciously. “Rey?”

Rey wasn’t entirely sure what they would go shopping for – unless it was still for the running shoes – and she gulped as she got up from her seat.

Kylo had also looked up in surprise, and as he saw Rey get up, he looked at Phasma, catching her gaze, as though she had been able to feel it. He hoped with all his heart that he could come along. Usually, when patients went out shopping with the Keepers, it was never one-on-one. Whenever he had gone out with Phasma or Hux, they had always picked someone else to join them.
“Kylo, would you like to come too?” Phasma asked after a few moments of thought, and he immediately got up from his seat.

“Yes!” he replied a little too eagerly.

Poe heard it and snickered as he bit his lip.

“Okay, grab your jackets,” Phasma said. “And scarfs, it’s cold out there.”

As Rey and Kylo hurried off to get their jackets from their rooms, Kanata smiled at the other Keeper. It was nice for her to see that she wasn’t the only one that was willing to let Kylo and Rey have their moments together. For both of them it was important that they learned to build a relationship. They had been loners for far too long.

Rey didn’t feel as anxious about leaving the ward with Phasma if Kylo was with her, and was actually quite excited as they followed Phasma to her own car.

“Where are we going?” Kylo asked curiously.

“The mall,” Phasma replied. “There are quite a few sales and discounts going on right now. I thought it would be a good idea to see if we could get some decent running shoes for Rey, for a low price.”

Rey was rather happy to have that confirmed, and she had a little smile on her face as they walked towards Phasma’s car. It was a rather small car, especially for such a big woman.

“Do you mind sitting in the back?” Kylo asked, scratching the back of his head a little awkwardly. “Or else my knees would probably just poke you in your back.”

Rey shook her head. “No problem.”

To make it up to her, Kylo did open the car door for her and waited until she was sitting inside before he closed it again, and as he sat in front of her he felt a little giddy, pleased to be out of the ward for a while, even if it would only be for an hour or so. And he had no reason to complain about the company either.

“Alright, fasten your seatbelts,” Phasma said as she turned on the car, and Rey awkwardly looked for the seatbelt, struggling a little before it was secured. Phasma had noticed. “Not used to being in a car, Rey?”

Rey gulped and shook her head, but Phasma was not judging her.

“Don’t worry about it. I’m a safe driver. And I’m sure you’ll get used to it.”

As Phasma drove them off the premises, Rey looked out the window – at the large forest that seemed to surround the entire domain. She had not seen much of the environment when she had been brought in, probably because she had been too anxious to properly look around, but now she felt a little more relaxed, and her head leaned against the window as she looked at the few houses on the edge of the forest, before the forest seemed to completely disappear and make way for a busier road, and a few more before they finally drove up to the parking lot of a mall.

She had never been there before – had no idea how far she was from the London streets she was actually familiar with – and was the last one to get out of the car as she once more struggled with her seatbelt.
Kylo had patiently opened the door for her, and smiled at her as she got out of the car. As he slammed the door shut, Phasma locked the car, and started walking towards the entrance of the mall.

It was rather crowded in the parking lot already, and once they were in the mall, it only got louder and busier. Rey was used to walking through loud and crowded streets, but not while she was with others, and as Phasma and Kylo continued going, Rey feared she would lose them. For some strange reason, she no longer felt inclined to run away – at least not now. She honestly did not want to be separated from them. It didn’t help that they took rather large steps with their massive legs, and she found herself jogging every few steps in order to keep up with them.

Kylo noticed that she wasn’t fully at ease – and honestly, he wasn’t that at ease either. He never was when he mingled with the masses. As he caught Rey’s eye, he offered her his hand, and she took it without hesitation, glad she would not lose him this way if she looked away for a moment.

Phasma headed into a sports store, and as she checked up on Rey and Kylo to see if they were following, she noticed how they were holding hands, and how Rey’s shoulders were a little tense as she looked around her. Phasma honestly felt for the girl, and could not help but empathize with Kylo as well. He truly seemed to care for Rey – maybe more like a big brother than like a lover – but the affection was real, and he seemed intent on protecting her and keeping her safe.

Rey had spent many hours in stores in her life – looking at items she could not afford – just trying to keep herself warm and dry and busy, but it was quite a different experience to actually go shopping with an actual purpose. Phasma asked her for her shoe size, then started looking for running shoes that weren’t too brightly colored.

“Best to stick to a white or black shoe, I think,” Phasma said. “That way you can combine it with a lot of clothes.”

“How about blue?” Kylo suggested, taking one of the shoes from the rack, and Rey really liked the shoes he had picked.

Phasma took them from him, then looked at the price tag.

“A little too expensive. These are 150 Pounds.”

As she put them back, Kylo wondered: “What is our budget then?”

“Up to a 100 Pounds, preferably less.”

“A 100 Pounds?!” Rey repeated, completely flabbergasted. She had no idea that the state would supply that much money for her – least of all to buy running shoes.

Even Kylo was surprised, and Phasma noticed it.

“The budget was lower, but I spoke to some of the other Keepers and we decided to sponsor you.”

Neither Rey nor Kylo understood why they would do that, and Phasma continued: “Let’s just say that quite a few Keepers want to see you beat Hux, Rey.”

Kylo grinned, not that surprised to hear that, and Rey smiled awkwardly.

“Are you sure running shoes will do the trick?” she asked cautiously.

“Oh yeah,” Phasma replied with a wide smile. “You got the skill and talent to do this. We believe
in you. Now all you need to kick his ass are some proper shoes.”

They picked some nice, white running shoes for Rey, as well as some sporty socks with the money that was left, and before they headed back to the car, Phasma bought Kylo and Rey a warm waffle from a little food stand in the mall. Rey really enjoyed it and ate it so fast that she finished when Kylo was only halfway through. When he noticed, he gave her half of what was left of his, and she gratefully accepted it, a small spring in her step as they headed back to the car.

It pleased Phasma to see Rey so happy, and it really wasn’t surprising to her that Kylo doted so much on her.

Back at the ward, most patients had finished up their projects, and so Kylo and Rey continued on their own, not finishing their own projects until later that evening. Rey’s finished hers first, but kept on watching as Kylo perfected his.

Before doctor Kanata went home, she checked up on them, sitting down beside them to look at what they had made.

As she took Kylo’s artwork in her hands, she was impressed. He had pasted little pieces of colored paper around each of the pictures that spoke of his interests, making it look like a mosaic of sorts.

“Love the use of colors, Kylo,” she complimented him. “This is very creative. And I see that your theme seems to be the great outdoors? And animals?”

He had chosen a picture of a little cottage on a green hill – possibly somewhere in Scotland – and pictures of chickens in a pen, of a vegetable garden, of goats and cows. Though doctor Kanata knew that Kylo liked animals, she had not thought of him as a farmer.

“Is this what you want when you get out of here? To be a farmer?” she wondered.

Kylo looked down shyly. “I just like the peace and quiet of living somewhere like that. Far away from everyone, and I suppose that if I had some animals, then I could take care of them and myself. I wouldn’t need another job. I could sell eggs and milk or something.”

“You know how to milk cows?” Kanata asked, curious if Kylo had been raised on a farm. He never spoke of his past.

“No,” he replied honestly. “But I can’t imagine it’s very hard.”

Kanata smiled. “Well if you really want to learn more about farming, I suppose I could ask Mister Statura if he can spare you some of his time. He might be able to teach you a thing or two. Though he doesn’t have any cows.”

Kylo grinned. “I won’t hold it against him.”

Maz handed him back the artwork before she took Rey’s. It wasn’t very arty compared to Kylo’s. The background was just white, with some smudges of glue here and there, but it was interesting enough to see what her interests were.

“Waffles, ice cream,” doctor Kanata pointed out. “You’d like to be able to have those in your future?”
Rey shrugged. “I like them. I hardly ever had them, but I like waffles and ice cream. Would be nice if I could afford them.”

“And a big castle, I see. Beautiful location, on top of a mountain… Seems to be pretty isolated as well.”

“If I lived in a castle,” Rey explained. “Then I could charge people money for entering the castle. And that’s how I could pay for my food. But in the evening, it would be really quiet.”

Kylo chuckled, finding her logic adorable, and Maz also smiled. It seemed that both Kylo and Rey just wanted to move somewhere quiet once they got out of the ward. She could not blame them for wanting to escape London.

“And this is a beautiful model. Is it about her or about the dress?”

“The dress,” Rey quickly said. “It’s like something from a fairy tale. I really liked it. I think that if I have too much money, I would buy something like that and wear it at home.”

“That would make you happy?” Kanata asked, and Rey nodded.

Kylo had no trouble at all imagining Rey in such a beautiful ball gown, and he could not help but smile as he imagined the two of them living in a castle – dancing – being happy – and eating lots of waffles with ice cream. He honestly didn’t want to remind himself that the chances of that ever happening were very slim.

“Well, I think it’s beautiful. And I totally understand your desire to own pretty dresses. I spend way too much money on dresses myself, which I then never wear to work.” Doctor Kanata winked at Rey, and this caused her to giggle briefly. “You could put your collage in your rooms, if you like…”

Rey didn’t seem particularly bothered, and as Kylo noticed, he reached for her paper.

“May I have it?” he asked, and though Rey was surprised by the question, she nodded.

“Thanks!” Kylo happily took her collage and looked at the image of the beautiful castle. It was quite a contrast with the tiny cottage on his own artwork, but Rey didn’t seem to mind as she took his paper.

“And may I have yours then?” she asked, thinking that his pretty artwork would indeed brighten up her room quite a bit. Hers was rubbish, but his was actually mesmerizing to look at.

“Of course, I’d be honored,” he said happily, and doctor Kanata patted Kylo on his shoulder as she got up.

“I must be off now. Have a good evening!”

As doctor Kanata said her goodbyes to the rest of the group, Kylo went into his room to hang Rey’s collage on his wall. He knew he was never going to be able to give her a life in a castle. But spoil her with waffles, ice cream and pretty dresses? Maybe he could manage that.

Meanwhile, Phasma had not sat still. She had called Hux from the Keeper’s Office to inform him
that the rematch was on and that he should bring along his sporting gear next week if he was willing to race Rey again.

It was very quiet on the other side of the line, until Hux suddenly said: “And you did not dare to come and tell me this in person?”

“I was too eager. I could not wait a minute longer,” Phasma teased him.

“So this is why you switched your morning shift with Thanisson – just so you could take Rey shopping during Kanata’s afternoon therapy?”

Now Phasma was the one who kept quiet. Awkward question, but only because it was true.

“Or are you just trying to avoid me, dear Phasma?”

His voice sounded slimy and Phasma growled into the phone. She still hated his guts.

“Would I call you if I was trying to avoid you?” she replied in an annoyed tone.

“I’m not sure,” he said slowly. “Maybe you’re just trying to cover up your unease about what happened.”

Phasma kept quiet, her heart racing in her throat. She really didn’t know what to say to that – probably because she didn’t know what to say about them. She liked the push and pull – but she also hated it because it was just the wrong thing to do – or wasn’t it?

“Gotta go,” she quickly said into the phone. “I think I hear some commotion in the corridor.”

“Yeah right, you –“

But she had already hung up the phone, once more growling to herself as she wondered if it had been a clever idea to call him. He was a stupid git, but wasn’t she playing right into his cards by making this personal between them? Wasn’t that what he wanted?

Well, when Rey beat Hux, she wasn’t going to be the only one gloating, she knew that much.

Picking up the phone again, she dialed another number.

“Yeah hello, Thanisson? Phasma here. Say how would you like to come in a little earlier next week, just to watch Rey beat Hux’s ass on the running track?”

As the week went by, Hux was blissfully unaware of the preparations Phasma had set in motion. In fact, she had gone a little overboard, with the help of her colleagues and patients.

Hux had noticed the bag that Phasma had carried as they had walked to the racing track, but had not remarked on it. He had noticed something odd about the patients. Something secretive. Poe had been unable to stop grinning, and Finn was unable to keep a straight face most of that morning. Rey was incredibly focused on the task at hand – and looked like the weight of the world had been dropped on her shoulders. Kylo kept a close eye on her, ready to support her in any way he could.
As they arrived at the race track, Hux frowned. Kanata was there, along with Thanisson, and that wasn’t the worst. They actually had a table set up with a little fire plate and it appeared they were making hot dogs. On the small tribune behind them, was Unamo’s group of the day – a group of patients from the elderly ward, and they seemed very eager about the arrival of Hux and Rey, clapping when Unamo told them to.

Hux’s cheeks turned as red as his hair and Phasma grinned as she noticed.

“I was too eager,” she sang teasingly, before she walked straight past him, towards the tribune.

“Alright group,” she called out. “Warmups first – race and hotdogs afterwards! Let’s do this!”

Hux’s blush had disappeared somewhat by the time they ran their warmup lap, but he was still incredibly annoyed with Phasma for doing all of this behind his back.

As the warmup lap was done, Kylo stuck around Rey for a while.

“Alright, Rey… You know what Phasma said… You got to win this. Is there any way I can stimulate you? Something I can promise you, so that you run faster?”

Rey looked a little anxious and shook her head. “Not that I know of?”

“A kiss?” he suggested sheepishly, hoping no one overheard him, and as Rey looked at him with wide, shocked eyes, his ears turned red and he quickly said: “Dessert? Shall I give you my dessert as you win?”

“Dessert!” she quickly repeated, not realizing how badly she was blushing or how panicked her voice sounded. “Dessert sounds fine!”

“Good!” Kylo cried out oafishly, “If that encourages you, you can get my dessert today.”

Poe had overheard that last sentence. “And my dessert too, Rey! Kick his ass!”

“Oh she can have mine too!” Finn said eagerly. “If you beat Hux, you can have all our desserts, even Wexley’s!”

“Hey!”

Wexley resented that.

“Okay, maybe not Wexley’s,” Finn corrected himself. “But everyone else’s.”

Rey smiled, glad with the encouragement, though still a little confused about Kylo’s first proposal of a reward.

“You can do this, Rey,” Kylo said solemnly. “You’re the best runner this ward has ever seen. We all believe in you.”

In the meanwhile, Phasma was talking to Unamo and her patients, handing out little flags that they had crafted on Sunday afternoon. They all spelled out Rey’s name, and one of the elderly ladies asked: “Who are we supporting for?”

“Rey,” Phasma answered. “She’s a patient too. A very young one. Only nineteen and she is one of the best runners you’ll ever see.”

“Not for that man with the red hair?” the old woman asked suspiciously.
“No,” Phasma replied briefly.

“Shame, he’s handsome,” the old woman said knowingly, and Phasma looked over her shoulder to cast a glance at Hux.

She wouldn’t describe him as much as handsome as she would describe him ‘pissed off’ in that moment. His jaw was clenched as he shook his fingers loose and stretched, getting ready for the race. But she had to admit that he did look good in such a tight, sporty shirt – even if he was nearly skin over bones.

“I hadn’t noticed,” Phasma lied, continuing to pass out the little flags.

Her own patients also took a seat on the tribune, gathering the flags they had made during the weekend, and Poe seemed especially excited.

“Whoo! Go Rey! Kick his ass!”

“Language!” Thanisson said immediately, frowning as he looked at Poe, who just frowned back in return.

“What? Can’t I say the word ‘ass’ anymore? Do you want me to say ‘kick his donkey’ instead?” Thanisson seemed at a loss for words and looked at Kanata, who shrugged forgivingly.

“Ass isn’t such a bad word, I suppose,” she said sweetly.

Phasma walked up to the starting line.

“Alright. If you are both ready?”

Hux and Rey nodded briefly, focused on the race at hand and not even looking at her, and when Phasma suddenly whistled, they were off.

Poe and Finn were crying their lungs out as they cheered for Rey, and Kylo was unable to sit still, standing up as he clapped his hands, shouting along with the other patients and keepers.

“She’s gaining!” Wexley cried out happily, and this only led to the rest of them supporting her even louder.

“She’s amazing,” Maz said in complete awe, and Thanisson nodded in agreement. “Do you know if she’s good enough to do this professionally?”

“No idea,” Thanisson admitted. “But that might be worth looking into. Look at how Hux is struggling!”

Kanata laughed. “Poor Hux. I almost feel sorry for him.”

“Almost,” Thanisson said with a wicked grin.

As Rey crossed the finish line, Kylo, Finn and Poe ran up to her, lifting her in the air as they cheered for her, and this was only encouraged by the elderly patients as they cried out in support as well, amused to see her lifted so high.

Rey was incredibly happy she had won, but now also a little anxious to be up so high.

“Oh Gods, let me down!” she cried suddenly, and Kylo immediately lowered her again.
“Sorry!” he apologized happily. “But you won! You beat him!”

“You were amazing!” Finn agreed. “He had no chance to catch up with you at all!”

“You’ve definitely earned that extra dessert,” Poe said with a grin, but he shut up when he noticed Hux approach, and the Keeper wasn’t looking particularly happy.

As he extended his hand to Rey, she shook it.

“Congratulations,” he said a little out of breath. “You have quite the talent.”

Rey wasn’t sure how to reply to that, and she slowly said: “You’re not so bad yourself.”

Hux narrowed his eyes, not even sure if she was trying to be condescending or not, but he would let it slip for now.

“Alright team,” Phasma cried out. “Three laps, then hotdogs for all of you. Go!”

As the patients ran, Phasma stepped up next to Hux, who was putting on his jacket.

“You did well, you know,” she said in a voice as sweet as honey. “For your gender, I mean.”

“You just can’t help but humiliate me, can you?” he sneered at her with narrowed eyes.

“Tut tut… I thought that was what you liked, Hux?” she asked with a sly grin, and as she licked her lips, it did not go unnoticed to him.

“I don’t like being humiliated in public,” he admitted slowly, really wondering if Phasma thought he got a kick out of that.

She shrugged. “Yeah… Neither do your patients, Hux, but you don’t hear them complain.”

She waggled her eyebrows playfully before she skipped of in the direction of Thanisson and Kanata.

Hux was fuming. He knew that he had every reason to resent her for this – that he would feel humiliated for a very long time after what had happened today – but he could not bring himself to hate her. She was a freaking genius for playing him like that – a Goddess he was unworthy of – she had beat him at his own game of humiliation. It was for that reason that he wanted nothing more than to offer himself to her. He just wasn’t sure if that was what she wanted of him. Perhaps it was nothing more than petty revenge after all.
A week after Kylo’s last outburst, he was one of the first to be up that Saturday morning. After he had taken a shower and gotten dressed, he had looked for Thanisson, who was on duty. He had asked the Keeper if he was allowed to go out that day – considering the fact there had not been any incidents for seven days – and Thanisson had smiled encouragingly.

“Of course! If you feel like you’re ready to go out, that is!”

“Yes!” Kylo said immediately. “Very much so.”

“Great! No worries, I’ll check up on your finances to see how much you can take along. I bet you have quite a bit of cash saved up, after not going out in a while. I’ll check it after breakfast.”

Kylo nodded, quite eager to go out, even if it was without Rey. Maybe he could even bring her a waffle – anything to spoil her and make her Saturday a little more bearable.

As he headed into the living room, he noticed that Rey was already sitting in one of the sofas, reading some Garfield, and as he noticed that her hair was down for a change, he paused in surprise.

She had always worn her hair up so far, and seeing her with her hair down took his breath away. In that moment she was even more beautiful to him – and he had assumed that was impossible.

As she noticed his presence in the room, she turned her head.

“Hey,” she said softly. “Good morning.”

He walked over to her – even though it felt more like he was floating in her general direction – and sat down beside her.

“Hey,” he said with a small smile. “Your hair’s down…”

She shrugged and cast her gaze down. “My hair tie sprung…”

“It’s pretty,” he said shyly, and as she looked up at him, he swore that she had to notice his blush, for she looked at him with slightly narrowed eyes, as though she was trying to read him.

He felt rather self-conscious. He also still felt shame whenever he thought about that small moment on the track – when he had offered her a kiss – and she had rejected it. For a moment he was afraid she would reject his compliment as well.

You’re creeping her out…

Snoke’s voice made him a little upset, and as he frowned, Rey noticed it.

“What is it?” she asked. “Snoke?”

He nodded and looked away, trying to gather his composure.

Now you’re probably creeping her out even more…

He clenched his fists and wished desperately for Snoke’s voice to go away, but he was just intent on annoying him for now.
Creep. You’re a creep. Everyone knows it. Before you know it, you’re going to creep out and then you can’t go to the mall. You’ll be spending the day in isolation. Fun fun fun!

He closed his eyes and grunted, and Rey immediately put her hand on his.

“Talk to me, Kylo,” she said softly, and he let out a soft sobbing sound.

“Snoke’s being annoying,” he moaned. “I have been on my best behavior for a week – and now I can go out in the afternoon because of it – and Snoke just wants to get on my nerves so that I do something stupid again.”

As she gently caressed his hand with her fingers, he did calm down a little, and as he looked at her tiny hand on his, he was aware of how Snoke was chanting the word “creep” at the same time.

“Do you think I’m a creep?” he asked suddenly, sucking in his bottom lip as he tried to contain his emotions – but he was failing. Snoke was right – he had to be a creep, perhaps more to Rey than to anyone else.

“No!” she replied immediately. “Not at all! Why would you believe that about yourself, Kylo?”

He shrugged. “Just… everything… The way I hear this voice all the time… the way I look… and I feel like I’m even creeping you out.”

Rey frowned and moved a little closer to him, trying to force him to look at her.

“No, you’re not. Why do you think that?”

He shrugged, though he had his reasons for thinking it was the truth. “Because it was a creepy thing when I suggested that kiss as a reward to you, and because it’s creepy that I’m sitting here telling you that you’re beautiful with your hair down, even though you probably just want a new hair tie and not a compliment about how beautiful you are.”

He didn’t look at her as he said that, and if he would have, he would have seen Rey’s touched expression. She bit her lip for a moment before she replied: “That’s not creepy, Kylo.”

“You’re just saying that not to upset me,” he muttered in a frustrated tone, his cheeks red from embarrassment. “It’s creepy. I’m a creep.”

“No!” she once more protested, shaking her head as she smiled. “It’s sweet! You’re sweet!”

He felt his heart beat a little faster at those words, and looked up at her with his mouth slightly open. She was smiling bravely, and he simply did not understand her.

“Sweet?” he replied weakly.

Rey was blushing now. “Yes. Very sweet, even. Not creepy at all. Creepy is people who don’t know me asking me for kisses or throwing me shallow compliments. That’s creepy. That’s the kind of stuff that makes me run five miles just to get away from those people.” She wasn’t joking about it. She had ran off in plenty of situations where she had met creepy guys. “I’ve never wanted to run from you, Kylo. So, no, I don’t think you’re creepy at all.”

He looked at her with wide eyes, hardly daring to breathe. But he did believe her – which was only proven by the fact that Snoke seemed to be completely gone now.

As Poe entered the living room at that moment, he whistled when he saw that Rey had her hand on
Kylo’s. “Am I interrupting something?” he asked with a cheeky smile, and Kylo grunted.

“Shut up, Poe. If I don’t beat you up I get to go outside today, so don’t give me an excuse to do just that.”

Poe wanted to reply, but quickly sucked in his lips, nodding to himself. His eye still hurt from last time – he’d be quite an idiot to provoke Kylo now.

“I’ll just sit here and say nothing then,” Poe murmured quickly, sitting down in his usual seat.

“Will everyone be gone today?” Rey asked quietly, her hand still on Kylo’s. She had not seen a need to remove it when Poe had entered.

He nodded. “Probably. I’ve spent many Saturday afternoons here on my own… But good news is that you’ll probably be allowed to leave the ward too in a few weeks. Then we can go to the mall together!”

Rey liked that, and she offered him a careful smile. “That would be nice.”

As more people entered the living room, they moved from the sofa to their own seats, waiting for mister Thanisson before they began their breakfast. After breakfast, Rey and Kylo had kitchen duty, while the others spent their time in the living room. While it was relaxation for some, it was nothing but boredom for others, and after lunch, everyone hurried out of the ward, except for Kylo, who stuck with Rey a little longer.

“If you grow too bored, ask if Thanisson puts on a movie for you. Or you could take one of the books I borrowed and try to read them? I left them on the reading rack. They’re a little wordy, but it would be good exercise, right?”

He was fussing over her – hesitant to say goodbye and leave her alone – and she could not express how much it moved her.

“I’ll be alright, Kylo,” she said gently. “You should go. Have some fun, buy something nice.”

“I’ll bring you a gift,” he promised her. “Something you’ll like.”

Once more she was moved. No one had ever been this considerate with her before. It almost made her feel wanted.

He was more than she had ever hoped for in her life. She certainly had not expected to meet someone like him in the ward, yet here they were, and her heart ached in agony at the thought they weren’t truly free. But if they were back on the street, she would hold his hand everywhere and sleep besides him every night. She would stay by his side – forever – to scare his demons away and to be the friend he deserved, just like he was hers.

He awkwardly leaned in and kissed her forehead, saying: “I’ll be back as soon as I can.”

She chuckled because of how delicately he was handling her. “Kylo, it’s okay. I’ll be fine. Go now.”

His cheeks were red as he turned around and left her, and Rey sighed as she looked around the empty living room. She didn’t feel like reading or anything, and just lay down on the sofa. Luckily, she never had a problem taking a nap during the daytime, and she was asleep in minutes.
It was a forty-five-minute walk to the mall, and when Kylo arrived, it was even more crowded than it had been earlier that week. He had forty Pounds on him and he was eager to look for something nice to buy Rey. Usually he bought himself some drinks or candy – and occasionally a magazine or book – but none of that really mattered to him now – not as much as Rey did.

As he entered a gift store, he immediately noticed that they had a ton of stuff for Valentine’s Day. He wondered what day it actually was. It had to be February by now, but the exact date escaped him. Surely Rey would not mind getting a Valentine’s Day card from him?

He was browsing through the Valentine cards when he felt someone pat his shoulder. He startled a little, but when he looked to the side he saw it was Finn, who was grinning.

“Hey Kylo,” he said warmly. “Imagine seeing you browse through valentine cards… Rey’s got you good, doesn’t she?”

Kylo wasn’t sure whether to get upset about those words or not. He wasn’t fond of the fact that Finn seemed to know how much he cared for Rey, but at the same time he could hardly blame him for noticing something that he found very difficult to hide.

“Why don’t you get this one with the bunnies?” Finn asked as he pulled a card out of the rack. “This one even looks like BB-8!”

Kylo just shook his head. “No animals. She doesn’t like animals.”

Finn raised his eyebrows, surprised to learn that. “Alright… Eh…” He pulled out a card with some roses on it. “Flowers then?”

Kylo put the card back. “That’s so standard. All of this is so standard.” He sounded completely bored as he pulled out more cards. “Be mine.” Another one. “Will you be my valentine? Look here – bear hug – with a stupid bear on it that’s holding a heart. She’s probably terrified of bears… This one’s got a bicycle on it, for some random reason. And look at this one… I love you to pieces. Alright, this one’s rather witty, with the puzzle pieces, but still… It’s stupid! It’s all stupid. And these cards cost a fortune! Three pounds for these shitty cards?” He moaned, putting them all back again, and Finn just patted his shoulder in a comforting way, taking the card with the bunny for himself.

“Look, you don’t need to get her a card, you know,” he said. “Besides, you could probably make her a gift that is ten times as beautiful – and it would be something that comes from the heart. Get her a gift instead. Some chocolates or something, I’m sure she’d appreciate that much more.”

Kylo nodded, not completely awkward to be taking this advice from Finn.

“I was thinking,” he muttered out loud. “She doesn’t know much about anything, really… Doesn’t know the lyrics to any song… Perhaps I could buy her some music player?”

“A radio?” Finn suggested.

Kylo shook his head. “No, like an mp3-player, and with music on it from the Guitar Hero games we play. Like Hotel California and Bohemian Rhapsody…”

Finn nodded slowly. “Not necessarily very romantic, but very thoughtful,” he agreed. “But I thought you had no laptop or anything to download music with?”
“I don’t… But you do, don’t you?” Kylo anxiously looked at Finn, hoping that he could count on the young man’s assistance.

Finn raised an eyebrow. “You’re asking for my help?”

Kylo bit his own lip, hesitating only one moment before he said: “Yes.”

Finn pretended to consider it for a long time, but after watching Kylo look at him with the most pleading eyes ever, he eventually grinned and nodded.

“Sure, mate. I can get all the songs from those games. And an mp3-player shouldn’t be too expensive. I bet you can get one for ten quid.”

“Do you know where?” Kylo asked, glad to take any help he could get, and Finn nodded.

“Yeah, sure. Lemme just buy this card.”

Kylo followed Finn as he bought the valentine’s card with the bunny on it, wondering if Finn had a girl at home that was waiting for him. He didn’t know much about the young man – just that he had fought in the war, that it had been rough on him, and that he was haunted by memories of what he had seen.

“Do you have a girlfriend?” Kylo asked carefully, hoping not to upset Finn by asking him that question.

The young man immediately shook his head. “Nah, man. Haven’t had much luck with girls, to be honest.”

“But you do have some experience with them?” Kylo asked hopefully. “Like… Buying stuff for them?”

Finn shrugged. “When I was younger, I suppose. But it never got super-serious. I had a few dates, stole a few kisses here and there… But honestly, that was during my experimental phase… I just wanted to know what it was like. You know, teenager stuff.”

Kylo laughed nervously, and this caused Finn to narrow his eyes suspiciously.

“You’ve never had a girlfriend?”

Kylo gulped nervously. “No…”

Finn frowned. “Man, aren’t you like… twenty-eight or something?”

“Twenty-seven,” Kylo quickly corrected him, not that it really mattered. He already felt ridiculous.

“No wonder you’re such an awkward giant,” Finn said with a sigh, actually feeling sorry for Kylo. “But trust me, I think you stand a good chance with Rey. She looks at you in a way she doesn’t look at anyone else in the ward.”

Kylo could only feel the butterflies in his stomach as Finn admitted that. He couldn’t stop grinning as he followed Finn into a tech store.

“Let’s see if we can get her an mp3-player then, right?” Finn suggested warmly. “I bet she’ll love that.”

Finn was very helpful indeed. Not only did he help Kylo find a good mp3-player, but he also joined
Kylo into Tesco’s, where they bought Rey a box of chocolates – even if they argued about ten minutes about what kind of chocolate would be Rey’s favorite.

“Should I buy her a rose?” Kylo asked, thinking it over as he stared at a flower shop when they were outside Tesco’s again, and Finn shrugged.

“A rose does speak of love, but it might be scary if you overwhelm her, you know? If you get her an mp3-player, and chocolate, and make her a card yourself… That’s quite a lot already. The rose might just be overdoing it, and that could potentially frighten her…”

“You think?”

Finn shrugged again.

“I don’t know, man. I’d be a little freaked out if you gave me so many gifts.”

Kylo chuckled. “You have nothing to fear from me, though.”

“Thank the Lord,” Finn said ironically.

“Any idea what day it is today, actually? I have no idea what day it is. When’s Valentine’s Day?”

“Man, you still have five days to get everything sorted. Don’t worry.”

“Oh!” Kylo remembered something. “I need to get her hair ties. Hers broke.”

“A girl’s store it is then,” Finn said eagerly as he wrapped his hands together. “I’ve always wanted a valid excuse to go shopping at Claire’s!”

Not really understanding that desire, Kylo just frowned, following Finn as they headed to their next destination. Finally, before they headed back towards the ward, Kylo bought two waffles. One for Rey – and the other one for Finn, who was slightly surprised.

“For your help,” Kylo said gratefully as they headed outside. “And your advice. God knows I can use it.”

Finn chuckled as he accepted the waffle. “Mate, you’re really not so bad. I personally don’t really get how a guy as soft as you can have such anger issues. What’s it even like for you to have to live with these two opposites within yourself?”

Kylo smiled sadly and sighed. “Sometimes it’s not so bad. At other times I just feel like I’m a volcano who is ready to erupt at any second, and I never know when it’s going to happen – what is going to trigger me.”

“Guess that’s something we have in common. I never know when my PTSD is going to come out. For all I know a guy might honk his car at me when we walk home and I go into full panic attack. Like I can’t even control it myself.”

“That sounds even worse,” Kylo admitted. “At least I know when I hear the voice in my head that shit might go down. It’s like a little warning, but when I don’t heed it in time, I’m often too far gone to stop it.”

As they headed back towards the ward, it almost felt to them like perhaps they could be friends. There was no anger or frustration towards one another, just compassion and kindness. It was a surprising discovery for Kylo, who had always thought that Finn just hated him, like everyone else
did. But talking to him privately was different than seeing him hang out with the rest of the group, and he was almost about to ask why Finn wasn’t with Poe and Jess when they reached the edge of the forest and the question was answered by what they saw.

Poe and Jess stumbled from the forest’s edge onto the road, Jess’s hair a complete mess as she was laughing with what Poe said, who had his arm around her shoulders, and they didn’t notice Kylo and Finn until they were about to cross paths.

“He-hey!” Poe said as he noticed his two fellow patients. “Heading back already?” He seemed confused for a moment as he turned to Jess. “What time is it? We still have time to head to the mall, right?”

Jess got out her cell phone to check the time. “Yeah we can spend about ten minutes in the mall if we leave now. We’ll still be back at the ward in time.”

Kylo gulped, slowly realizing that Jess and Poe had left the ward before he had – and had apparently spent all that time in the forest. As he looked at Jess’s messy hair, it did not take much longer before he understood what they had been up to.

Finn sounded agitated.

“Well, I was wondering where you guys were, but I guess that question is answered now.”

As Kylo looked to the side, he realized he had never seen such an amount of resentment in Finn’s expression.

Poe noticed and seemed a little startled. “Mate, you’re not going to tell, are you?”

“What am I? Five?” Finn angrily looked at Poe, not even believing that he had the audacity to suggest he would betray them. “Come on, Kylo, let’s get back to Rey. Wouldn’t want to leave her alone.”

He walked past Poe and Jess, and Kylo did not hesitate before he followed Finn, wondering what was up with him to react in such a fierce way.

Finn’s last words stuck with him, and after a minute or so, Kylo finally asked: “What eh… What’s wrong?”

The young man had his hands in his pockets as he tried to ignore Kylo’s question, but he found that nearly impossible to do.

“Poe told me he needed alone-time.”

Kylo frowned, then nodded.

“And now you caught him… with Jess.”

“Who is only going to break his heart!” Finn added fiercely. “She might like him in some way – but what she likes even more is the push and pull of it all! She is using him now, and by next week she won’t talk to him anymore, and that’s going to break his heart because he does have feelings – and then once he’s healed she’ll be back for him, and it always goes like that. And in the meanwhile I feel like shit too – like I’m not even worth spending time with. Just because he can’t keep his dick in his pants!”

Kylo gulped. Finn had never looked angrier than in that moment.
“Why… why do you even want to be friends with Poe?” Kylo asked, truly not understanding what was so great about him.

Finn shrugged, letting out a deep sigh. “He’s funny, kind, intelligent… He has a good heart – a great heart even – and he has been there for me when I needed someone. It’s just… I feel like I’m not allowed to be there for him in return.”

Kylo still didn’t truly understand what was going on in Finn’s mind.

“So eh…” Kylo awkwardly scratched the back of his head. “So you’re upset because of… a *bros before hoes* thing?”

A small smile appeared on Finn’s lips as he shook his head.

“Maybe. Maybe not,” he said mysteriously. “I’m just a fool to believe…” He stopped, then continued on another train of thought. “We can’t depend on others to make us better, I suppose. We need to do that ourselves.”

Kylo slowly nodded, mulling over those words until they finally arrived back at the ward. Thanisson opened the door for them and asked them to give him the receipts and spare cash, and in the hallway, Kylo handed the mp3-player to Finn.

“Will you… will you get the music on here before it’s Valentine’s Day?”

“Sure,” Finn said with a small smile. “Glad to be of help, to be honest.” Finn suddenly pulled the card he had bought out of his pocket and handed it to Kylo. “You can give this one to Rey, if you like. I’m not gonna give it to anyone anyway.”

Kylo frowned, a little confused about the reason why he had bought the card then.

“Oh. Thanks.”

“Alright, mate, I’ll get started on the mp3-player, I’ll let you know when it’s ready.”

“Thanks,” Kylo said again, still confused as he returned to his room to sort out the stuff he had bought, and he could not help but look at the valentine’s card Finn had given him.

The bunny did indeed look like BB-8, and the text beneath it said “Some bunny loves you”. He was hesitant to give Rey that particular card – after all, she really wasn’t into bunnies. Only Poe was, actually.

Kylo hesitated as he put the card down, a big frown on his face as realization slowly dawned on him.

*Finn had bought that card for Poe.*

And Finn had not known that Poe would be in the forest – doing god-knew-what with Jess.

And suddenly all the rest seemed to make more sense as well. That was why he had been so upset about discovering Poe and Jess, why he had given a rather elaborate response about what he liked about Poe, why he hadn’t been *that* comfortable giving advice on dating girls. He had even mentioned it had been an experimental phase for him.

Besides the fact that he felt like an idiot for not realizing sooner, he could not help but feel sorry for Finn. He truly deserved better.
He considered himself lucky for falling for Rey – who wasn’t as unstable as Poe was. He only hoped that she did not regret spending time with him in return.

Taking the waffle and hair ties with him into the living room, he found her sleeping on the sofa, and he knelt down in front of her as he gently touched her hand. She woke in an instant, her chest heaving in mild alarm until she saw him, and she smiled widely as he lifted the waffle in front of her.

“Hungry?” he teased her, and she looked at him like she could not believe it.

“Is the waffle for me?”

He nodded as he gave it to her, and she sat up in the sofa, making room for him.

“That’s so sweet!”

“And I’ve got you this,” he added bravely, offering her the hair ties, which caused her to gasp.

“You bought this for me?” She hardly seemed to be able to grasp the idea that anyone would be willing to buy her anything, and she did not know how it made her feel precisely – but she could not stop smiling at him. “I’ve never had anyone buy me presents before…”

He chuckled. “Well… This isn’t such an amazing present, honestly, but perhaps you’ll get a better one soon…”

She narrowed her eyes, not keeping up with him, and he smiled mysteriously.

“Just wait,” he continued teasing her. “It will all become clear to you, eventually.”

Rey bit her waffle as she suspiciously looked at him, slowly munching on her waffle until she broke off half of it and offered it to him. He took it from her, feeling quite hungry from all the walking he had done, and looked at her while they simply sat and ate the waffle in silence.

Finn’s words were not forgotten. He could not depend on Rey to make him better. But he could try his hardest to be better – for Rey.

*You’ll just fuck it up, like you fuck up everything.*

“No I won’t,” he whispered, and as he saw Rey’s questioning gaze, he explained: “Snoke thinks I’m going to fuck up my recovery.” He smiled. “I won’t. I’m going to get better.”

Rey smiled, glad to hear it – and even gladder to see that he truly believed it himself.

“I know you are,” she said with a brave smile. “We’ll be out of here in no time!”

“And then we can have waffles every day!” he said in celebration, and Rey laughed.

“Deal. And ice cream.”

“And ice cream!”

Kylo extended his hand to Rey, and as she shook it, they both chuckled, glad they weren’t alone in this. They could do this.
Rey was up early that day, waiting on the sofa for Kylo to arrive. For some reason, he had asked her to be up earlier than usual that morning, but he had been unwilling to tell her why, saying that it would be a “surprise”.

When he eventually came in, he was holding some gifts in his hands – all wrapped in old newspapers, since he had lacked any actual wrapping paper. Not just that, but he was wearing very fine clothes. Black pants, a white shirt and a waistcoat – it was more formal than anything he’d ever worn before in her presence, and she couldn’t deny that she found him to look incredibly handsome that way.

Rey frowned in slight confusion as he sat next to her, then handed her one of the gifts.

“For you,” he said with a playful smile on his lips, and Rey truly didn’t understand what was going on.

She indulged him though, and slowly unwrapped the gift to reveal a heart-shaped box of chocolates.

She was completely stunned for a moment, not understanding the meaning behind it, and looked up in mild alarm.

“Kylo, why?” she asked, her voice slightly afraid.

“It’s Valentine’s Day!” he said warmly, giving her the card. “I wanted to do something special for you, because you’re my friend here, and I care about you.” He was once again blushing, and smiled hopefully as she took the card from his hands.

When she opened it, she realized he had made the card himself. He had made a drawing on white paper and had pasted in on a red card. The drawing itself was beautiful, and she recognized the same castle she had picked for her collage in the background, with the drawing of a young woman in a beautiful dress at the front, as she was headed towards the castle, rose bushes surrounding her. Rey thought it was gorgeous, and when she opened the card, she read the words: “To my princess Rey… Happy Valentine’s Day… Love – Kylo.”

She didn’t know what to feel or think, but she was incredibly moved by the gift, and could not stop the few tears that rolled down her cheek all of a sudden.

“It’s beautiful,” she admitted emotionally, unable to look at him, but he had noticed her tears.

“Hey, don’t cry,” he said softly, wiping the tears from her face. “There’s no reason to be sad. Here, I got you something else too…”

As he offered her the last gift, she wondered what it would be this time, and as she unwrapped it and revealed it to be an mp3-player, she was surprised to say the least.

“Let me help,” he said eagerly, taking the mp3 player from the box and showing her how it worked.

As she put one of the ears in, she listened with a small smile on her face.

She grinned as she recognized it. “That’s one of the songs from the game…”
“I figured it would be nice if you knew the songs next time you played the game. That way we can play together.”

She couldn’t possibly be happier with Kylo than she was in that moment. He always knew what to say – always treated her with nothing but kindness – and she felt so grateful for his attention that she had no idea how to repay him. The only thing that came to mind, was something she wasn’t familiar with, but she decided he had earned it anyway.

She took a hold of his hand and leaned closer to him, noticing how he held his breath while she pressed a sweet kiss to his cheek. But as she pulled back, she realized how it just wasn’t enough. It didn’t feel like enough to her. He had gone out of his way to make her a card, get her an mp3-player and chocolates, and all she gave him in return was a kiss on the cheek?

Before she pulled back completely, she leaned in one more time, lightly brushing her lips against his, and she noticed how a little shock of surprise went through him before she sat back again, offering him a sweet smile.

He was stunned, his heart drumming away a million beats a minute – or so it felt to him – and he was a little afraid as he looked at her – afraid that he’d spy some regret on her face. But he didn’t, and he couldn’t be happier because of it.

“Thank you,” she said softly. “You’re so sweet. I feel bad that I don’t have anything to give you in return.”

He was blushing and feeling completely unworthy of her.

“You just gave me the best Valentine’s gift I could have hoped for,” he admitted softly, hoping he would never forget how soft her lips had felt as she had pressed them to his. It had filled him with love, and he could not help but hope that it had meant as much to her as it had to him.

As Finn entered the living room the next moment, he wasn’t aware that he was interrupting a private moment.

“Happy Valentine’s day!” he said cheerfully, looking into Rey’s lap to see she had received the mp3-player. “Do you like the songs?”

Kylo wasn’t even upset in that moment. On the contrary, he was willing to give credit where it was due and added: “Finn helped me get the songs on your mp3-player… He has a laptop.”

“Oh!” Rey was pleasantly surprised to hear that. “Thanks to you too, then!” She wasn’t going to give Finn a kiss though, she knew that much.

“If you grow tired of some songs, I can always put some new stuff on there for you,” he added. “You will find that you have all the songs on there from those Guitar Hero games we played, and I also added Adele’s newest album and Queen’s greatest hits – which is like fifty songs or something. And ‘Who Let the Dogs Out’ cause that’s a really good song for running, in my opinion.”

Kylo raised an eyebrow, not entirely agreeing with the liberties Finn had taken, but Rey seemed pleased.

“Alright! Thanks! I’ll go bring my presents to my room then, but eh… Perhaps we can listen to the music later?” She hoped that he would agree and was relieved to see him nod.

“Yeah! Yeah of course!”
She shyly looked away while she gathered her stuff and went back to her room, and Finn cleared his throat before he whispered: “How did it go? Did she like the gifts?”

Kylo grinned, even if he wasn’t planning on telling Finn everything. “Can’t complain. Went pretty good.”

“Yeah?” Finn asked, noticing Kylo was holding back. “And this swagger I detect in you right now, has that been there all along?”

Kylo laughed in a dorky way as he got up and went to his table.

“Maybe not…”

He paused as he passed by Finn, and took a card from the inside of his waistcoat, handing it to him.

“I gave Rey another card. Made her one myself. I figured perhaps you still have someone to give this card to?”

As he put the card on the table, Finn grew very quiet, but he did not reject the idea straight away.

“Maybe,” Finn said slowly. “I’ll think about it…”

As Rey put the gifts in her room, she could not help but feel incredibly giddy. She had never felt so silly before, and she could not stop grinning and biting her lip. It was all Kylo’s doing – she knew that – and she had not foreseen how much more she would like him after giving him that little kiss.

The card was absolutely perfect – like something from a fairy tale – and the chocolates were just thoughtful – and the mp3-player was the best present she could have imagined. Now she would be able to listen to music in her spare time. Heck, she could even practice dancing in her room because of it, something she had never before imagined herself doing.

As she swayed a little in front of the table where she had left the wonderful presents, Phasma knocked on the door.

“Hey Rey, breakfast in five.” The Keeper immediately noticed Rey’s more-than-positive demeanor that morning. As she also spotted the card and presents, she grinned. “What’s that? Do you have an admirer?”

Rey could not help giggling as she realized that she actually did.

“Yes!” she replied in a giddy tone. “Kylo got these for me!”

Phasma curiously entered Rey’s bedroom and made her way to the table, picking up the chocolates.

“Yummy! If you have any trouble finishing these, do not hesitate to ask for help!” Phasma winked, which caused Rey to smirk. As the Keeper picked up the mp3-player, she seemed even more impressed. “That must have cost him a bit… He obviously values you a lot. Did he draw this for you?” As she looked at the card Rey had gotten, she chuckled. “This is so sweet of him.”

Rey could not stop smiling, though her smile slightly faltered as she thought of something. “I just wish I could do something for him in return. I didn’t even know it was Valentine’s Day… But I
can’t go out and I don’t have money to buy him anything.”

Phasma licked her lips as she thought about it. “Well, Valentine’s Day isn’t always about spending money. There are many things you could do for him… Like… make him a pretty card?”

Rey felt despair sink into her stomach at that suggestion. “I’m really bad at crafting… It would be so ugly compared to what he made me…”

“Maybe you could write him a lovely letter?”

Rey gulped. “I can’t write very well…”

Phasma bit her lip as she tried to think, until her eyes suddenly widened and she looked up: “I got a great idea! You could give him a picture of you!”

That was the last suggestion Rey had expected, and she frowned in confusion.

“But like… I have no pictures of me either?”

“We can make one!” Phasma immediately suggested. “We have a polaroid camera somewhere in the Keeper’s Room. You could dress up nicely if you want, and I could shoot a picture of you, and then you could write him something sweet on the back of it, and give it to him. As a keepsake.”

Rey wasn’t sure about it.

“And do you think he’d like that?”

Phasma shrugged. “I can’t say that I’m an expert on Kylo’s likes and dislikes, but I really think he would be happy for it. Now come, let’s have breakfast first, and afterwards I’ll help you with your gift for him.”

Kylo was a little confused when he noticed Rey immediately went back to her room after breakfast. He had expected to go outside with her to do some reading until it was time for therapy, and he grew increasingly anxious at the thought that she was avoiding him.

Yeah she must have really disliked kissing you…

“Shut up, Snoke,” he muttered to himself, heading outside so no one could upset him and he couldn’t bother anyone in return.

It must have been a really bad kiss!

“No… It was nice.” Kylo felt a little desperate as he thought about it. “It was short, but sweet. Just like Rey…”

You probably overdid it on the gifts too. Good thing you didn’t get her a rose.

Kylo groaned, sitting down at the picnic table where they usually sat and resting his head in his arms in agony.
“Just shut up.”

But Snoke did not give up, even if Kylo tried to ignore the mean thoughts that Snoke was intent on making Kylo believe. The voice inside his head was trying to break his heart – and as he lacked the confidence to stand up to it, it was slowly working.

Tears streamed down his face as he believed he had made a fool of himself, and that Rey did not care for him anymore, and he startled when he heard Rey’s voice besides him about twenty minutes later.

As he looked up, she seemed shocked to find him crying.

“Kylo, what’s wrong?” she asked immediately, awkwardly holding onto an envelope for him, and he tried to dry his tears as fast as he could, noticing that her hair was loose again.

“D-did your hair tie break again?” he asked, too afraid to talk about himself for a moment, and Rey frowned.

“No, silly. I thought you liked my hair better this way?” She offered him the envelope and he took it in confusion, reading his name in her handwriting – the letters big and clumsy, while she sometimes seemed so small and elegant in comparison.

As he opened the envelope, he noticed there were three pictures in there – all of Rey.

“I wrote something on the back of each picture,” she said softly, a little anxious that he would not like the gift, and a little afraid that he wasn’t in the best state of mind to receive it either, but he did not dismiss her.

The first picture was a close-up of Rey smiling, her hair down as she looked into the camera, and on the back he read: “Thank you for all the smiles.” Her handwriting filled out the entire surface. The second picture was one where she had her earplugs in and her new mp3-player in her hand, with the writing on the back saying: “Thank you for the music.” And the third one was a silly one, where she was sitting on the bed, laughing as she was holding the heart-shaped box of chocolates, saying: “Thank you for being my first valentine, Kylo!”

Kylo still felt tears roll down his cheeks, but now it was because he was so moved by her gift. As she saw he was still crying, she slowly put her hand on his shoulder, asking: “Are you alright?”

“It’s perfect,” he said emotionally, opening his arms for her, and as he got up from the bench, he hugged her tight, and she wrapped her arms around his waist in return, closing her eyes as she held him as close as she could, enjoying the warmth and comfort he offered her.

“Aren’t they sweet together?” Phasma sighed dreamily as she and Thanisson stood in the Keeper’s Office, watching them through the window.

Thanisson chuckled. “They are. Quite different from Poe and Jess, I suppose.”

“In what way?” Phasma asked curiously, wondering what the young Keeper had picked up so far.
He shrugged a moment. “I don’t know. Just feels like it’s only about sex. They do share laughs with one another, and perhaps they have the same sense of humor in some ways, but it’s a bit selfish. They’re just… different. I doubt they’d see each other if they both left the ward. Whereas with Kylo and Rey, I don’t want to know how one of them would react if the other were to leave.”

Phasma nodded as she still gazed out the window, watching Rey and Kylo sit down on the bench again, and Rey gently stroking tears from his cheeks, and she felt her heart melt.

“In a way, I guess relationships like Poe and Jess’s are easier to deal with,” she said softly. “If things go wrong, there’s drama, sure… But they’re used to that drama – they almost thrive on it. Whereas with Kylo and Rey… they’re much more vulnerable. It would actually hurt them – badly – in a way that they would not be ready for another relationship for months, perhaps even years to come.”

Thanisson could only agree, and he headed to one of the agendas.

“Well, I’ll go set up some games for the morning activities, and apparently Hux will need to take them to the cafeteria this afternoon. Not exactly a very thrilling schedule for the day, is it?”

Phasma remained quiet as she gazed out the window, Hux’s name was stirring some unease in her mind.

“Why did the two of you change shifts this week?” Phasma asked. She thought that she already knew the answer – after all, it was pretty clear that Hux had been avoiding her. But she really wanted to know what Hux had told Thanisson about it – if he had said anything at all.

“Hux’s request,” Thanisson said briefly, closing the agenda again. “I didn’t ask him why, but I don’t mind being flexible. Besides, it’s fun working alongside you.”

Phasma turned her head and offered the young keeper a small smile, and he smiled widely in return.

“I’ll get started on the games, feel free to join when you’re bored!”

As he left the room, Phasma’s smile dropped again. As wonderful as Thanisson was, she had to admit that she missed working with Hux. Even if he was a complete asshole.

During the therapy session, Rey and Kylo sat beside each other, never leaving each other’s side while they switched from one game to the other. They played checkers, chutes and ladders, mastermind and eventually even monopoly against Lor San and Finn.

As Rey was unaware that Finn had landed on one of her properties, Kylo cleared his throat to give her a subtle hint. When this caused Rey to realize where Finn’s pawn was, Finn complained loudly.

“Ah come on, man! She already owns Mayfair and Oxford Street!”

Kylo chuckled. “Well she’ll need cash if she is to buy Park Lane as well.”

“Yeah, pay up,” Rey added with a wide grin, and Finn grunted as he gathered the money for her.
Rey had just followed Kylo’s advice to buy everything she landed on, and with her luck she was soon owning half the board, causing Lor San to forfeit. Kylo was losing pretty badly, and when he landed on Mayfair, he tried to make a deal so he would not have to sell all of his properties if he gave her Whitehall. She could not resist anything he asked her, and accepted without a moment’s doubt, causing Finn to grunt again.

“I give up! There’s no winning this if you just give her all the cards so she can make complete sets with them!”

Rey did feel pretty good about winning though, and Kylo took her hand and placed a soft kiss on it as he whispered: “May I offer my services to you, rich lady? And would you please be so kind as to not throw me out on the street in return?”

She chuckled, happily playing along. “You may live with me in Mayfair, dearest Kylo. Your sacrifice and service shall never be forgotten.”

They were disturbed all of a sudden when they heard Jess cry out in annoyance.

“Ow my God, Poe, you’re such a prick! Why can’t you just let me win?”

As they looked to the side, it appeared like the two had been playing Stratego, and Poe looked a little startled at Jess’s outburst. Jess, however, angrily slammed the board and all the pieces off the table before she stormed off dramatically, leaving Poe rather pale.

“What happened?” Thanisson asked Poe, who seemed confused as well.

“I don’t know. I was winning, I guess?”

Thanisson frowned. Jess’s outbursts were rare, but it appeared they were once more entering a period where they would become more frequent. She usually had periods of erratic behavior. It was part of the reason why she could not function in normal society.

As Thanisson headed to Jess’s room, Finn had already gotten up from his seat to clean up the pieces that had been slammed to the floor by Jess. Poe got up to help Finn, but as he knelt down, he noticed that Finn’s hands were trembling.

“Are you alright, Finn?” he asked in a slightly worried tone, afraid the man was having a little attack of his own.

Finn continued gathering pieces without looking at Poe. “Just startled, that’s all.”

His hands did not stop shaking though, and Poe suddenly found himself grabbing hold of one, wrapping his fingers around Finn’s hand.

“It’s okay,” Poe said with a small smile. “You’re doing great, Finn. Thank you so much for helping.”

Those words did calm Finn down a little, and as he looked at Poe, he smiled shyly, before he quickly pulled his gaze away from the other man’s eyes. As he drew his hand back, it seemed like Poe’s fingers lingered too long on his, yet they both remained quiet, cleaning up the pieces of the game in silence.
By the afternoon, Jess still hadn’t calmed down completely, and during lunch she had avoided looking at Poe, who had been a bit upset by this. She spent every moment she could get away in her room, and the Keepers let her.

When it was time for Hux to begin his shift, Phasma made sure she was in the Keeper’s office. She felt like it was time to measure the damage she had caused to his ego – and if possible, then it wouldn’t be a bad day to make up. After all – it was Valentine’s Day.

“Afternoon,” she greeted him when he entered, a hint of curiosity on her face, but he didn’t even look at her.

“Afternoon.”

He took off his scarf and jacket and hung them on the coat rack before he left the room again, and Phasma felt her heart sink to her stomach. It couldn’t be clearer that he was avoiding her. If he wasn’t, he certainly wouldn’t have left the office before checking up on the Keeper’s diary.

Ten minutes later, Thanisson entered to gather his stuff.

“Aren’t you coming?” he wondered as he took his car keys.

Phasma shook her head. “No, I’m staying a little longer today. Really need to update Jess’s file.”

Thanisson didn’t question it, and wished her a good evening before he left.

Though Jess’s file was open, Phasma honestly wasn’t doing any work on it. She was waiting. She had no doubt that Hux would be back soon enough to read up on the diary, and when he did…

As she heard him approach in the corridor, she kept quiet, and when he walked in, it took him a moment to realize he wasn’t alone. He froze in his steps as he took her in, and only when his eyes locked on hers, did she speak.

“Sit down, Hux.”

He didn’t.

He picked up the Keeper’s diary instead and opened it, turning his back on her, and it became painfully obvious how much he was trying to ignore her.

“Do you want me to apologize?” Phasma asked with a deep sigh, not believing that she was doing this, but even the possibility of an apology did not seem to faze him and he kept on ignoring her.

 “…Not even an apology?” she asked incredulously.

It seemed like kindness wasn’t having any effect at all.

“Don’t tell me someone with your education and job is unable to discuss his own emotions, Hux.” It was only a small stab, not enough to elicit a response, and so she continued: “Do I really need to ask doctor Kanata for a therapy session so the two of us can talk things out?”

He didn’t seem to like that idea at all, and his jaw was clenched as he replied: “Haven’t you humiliated me enough already, Phasma?”

She let out a deep sigh, wishing he would turn around and look at her.
“I said I was sorry,” she defended herself.

“But you’re not,” he replied immediately, looking over his shoulder with cold eyes. “You hate my methods and my guts, and now you have discredited me in front of our mutual colleagues and the patients. Thank you very much.”

“Ah, come on, I thought humiliation was… your thing or something!” Phasma defended herself, staying in her seat so she wouldn’t anger him even more.

He remained quiet, shaking his head.

“Are you really this hurt?” she asked, her tone surprised though also very empathic at the same time. “I thought we were friends, Hux, I thought you could take it!”

As he turned around, she noticed that a little bit of the harshness in his expression had resolved. If she couldn’t get through to him now, she didn’t know when she could.

“Come on, Hux, talk to me. I want to know what I did precisely that turned you from me so completely.”

He finally sighed and leaned back against a desk, crossing his arms as he looked at the table instead of her. She would have almost described him as fragile in that moment.

“I’m afraid that you’ll do it again,” he spoke honestly. “The public humiliation thing. And I don’t want that.”

Phasma frowned, though she tried not to sound too angry as she replied: “But I really thought that was your thing… You even asked me yourself to teach you your place!”

Hux’s eyes widened and he immediately shook his head as he tried to keep his voice down so that no one could accidentally overhear. “I didn’t mean at work! I meant…”

His cheeks were almost as red as his hair now, but Phasma still didn’t completely understand.

“… in the bedroom or something,” he added awkwardly, quickly looking away again, and perhaps that was a good thing because Phasma was pursing her lips in order not to burst out laughing.

“I wish I could say I didn’t like you,” he continued stubbornly. “But that would be a lie. I can only see this go horribly wrong, so I’m distancing myself from you while I still have a tiny bit of my dignity left.”

Phasma stopped smiling at those words, looking at him with something akin to sadness in her eyes.

“I wish I could say I hated your guts,” she admitted with a sigh. “I know I told myself that I did, many times, actually…” She slowly got up from her chair and moved over to him, noticing how he tensed up because of it, and she wondered if she had always had the power to make him this uncomfortable, or if that was a new thing. “Come on, Hux… Let’s not sink the ship before it has set sail… I promise not to humiliate you in public. Only in the bedroom from now on, if you’re willing to take this further…”

Her tone was playful, and as he dared to look at her again, she noticed that there was a tiny bit of hope in his gaze, as though he rather liked that idea, and she knew that it wasn’t too late just yet.

As she leaned into him, she gave him a soft kiss on his lips, and though he cast his eyes down as she pulled back, she could see the small smile on the corner of his mouth.
“Think about it,” she said softly. “Should you wish to talk about it… Well… you know where I live.”

She gathered her things and smiled one last time at him before she left the room, and he ordered himself to stop smiling before he left the room himself. He didn’t want the patients to think of him as a complete oaf.

Hux took the patients to the cafeteria which was further on the domain. The place was run by volunteers who sold cheap drinks and candy to the patients. Obviously there was no possibility to get any alcohol there, but it was a good place for the patients to mingle with other groups and relax.

As Hux sat by the bar, he had to admit to himself that he was rather distracted. Sure, he was head over heels with Phasma, but that did not mean that there wasn’t a little voice in his head screaming at him that he needed to get over it. If he could not control his own emotions, then what did that say about him? Did that not make him pathetic?

He tried to focus on the patients instead, listening intently to the conversations that were going on at the table. He noticed how giddy Rey and Kylo seemed to be – how shy and flirty their glances to one another were, like they hardly dared to look at one another and yet wanted to undress each other at the exact same time.

“No, seriously, you gotta try it,” Kylo said softly. “One game. You can be on my team.”

She shook her head and bit her lip, but didn’t stop smiling at the same time. “Alright. Just one game.”

As they both got up, Kylo addressed Finn: “Want to compete against us?”

“Table football?” Finn asked. “Hell yeah.”

Kylo noticed how Poe was stirring his coke with a straw, the very image of a bored man. Though it wasn’t an easy thing to ask for Kylo, he cleared his throat so Poe could hear him. “Poe, wanna help me teach Rey how to kicker?”

Poe looked up in surprise, hardly able to believe Kylo was asking him of all people, and even Hux wasn’t sure what he was witnessing. Never before had Kylo initiated a game with his fellow patients – and it was even stranger that he actually picked Poe to be one of the people to play with.

Cautiously, Poe joined Finn on one side of the playing table, and Rey joined Kylo on the other side.

As Hux watched them from afar, he was frowning, and he was so focused on how they were treating each other that he startled slightly when he heard Kanata’s voice next to him. “Good afternoon, Hux! Everything alright?”

Hux nodded in the direction of the playing tables. “Look there,” he muttered. “Strange thing just happened. Kylo initiated the game, then invited both Finn and Poe to play with him and Rey – himself.”

Kanata smiled, glad to hear it.
“He’s been making good progress since Rey’s arrival,” Kanata said warmly. “He told me yesterday that he bought Rey an mp3-player for Valentine’s - with Finn’s help. And Finn also helped him put music on it. So I can’t say that I’m really surprised that he would ask Finn to be on his team. I think there’s some respect between them now.”

“But Poe?” Hux asked, frowning. “I keep on expecting Kylo to punch him in the face.”

Maz shrugged. “He might. But we need to give them the benefit of the doubt. Perhaps Poe can keep his mouth for once, and then Kylo won’t get mad. Or perhaps Kylo is just testing his own restraint… I’m not sure.”

She patted Hux on the arm.

“Now if you don’t mind, I’m taking Jess back along with me. I read she was troublesome earlier today, so I’m going to see if I can figure out what has been bothering her precisely.”

Hux nodded in agreement, watching how Jess didn’t seem to be eager to go with Maz, but as Jess looked in his direction, he narrowed his eyes threateningly, and Jess immediately kept quiet and went with Maz.

It was good to see that at least some things remained the same.

During the evening, Rey and Kylo sat outside, both of them listening to the music of the mp3-player, enjoying the quiet time together as they sat on the bench and held hands. It was quite cold, but they weren’t particularly bothered by it. They felt at ease with one another, and it was something they treasured.

As Finn watched them through the window, he could not help but feel like Kylo had set him up earlier that afternoon. Why else would Kylo have asked Poe to join their game? He knew that Kylo hated Poe’s guts. Could it be that Kylo had tried to repay Finn in this way? By giving him some quality time with Poe?

He headed back to his room, noticing the Valentine’s Day card next to his bed, and he took a deep sigh. Secretly he had very much wanted Poe to be his Valentine, but was a relationship with that man a wise thing to pursue? Even if Poe seemed to appreciate both male and female models just as much, it didn’t mean that Poe was waiting for a declaration of love. Still, he knew he wouldn’t get another shot at this if not for tonight, and he slowly wrote his name on the card, taking a deep breath before he went to the room opposite his, knocking the door to hear Poe say: “Enter?”

Poe was sitting cross-legged on his bed as Finn opened the door, a book in his lap, and as he looked up and noticed Finn, his eyes lit up.

“Hey buddy! What’s up? Something wrong?”

Finn gulped, realizing he must have had a pretty worried frown on his face, and he tried to relax. “Nah, man, just…” He shrugged. “Just…” He had no idea what to say now, and he was glad that his complexion didn’t give away how much he was blushing as he offered Poe the card. “Just wanted you to have this,” he quickly rambled, before he turned around and left the room again, leaving Poe to frown in confusion.
Curiously, Poe opened the card, and when he saw the bunny on the cover, he grinned, immediately noticing how the bunny resembled BB-8. “Some bunny loves you,” he read with a smile on his face, which only started faltering when he read Finn’s name and realized what it meant.

For a moment he was void of all thoughts, just staring ahead in blank shock. The next, he scrambled off his bed as fast as he could, not minding how his book fell to the floor as he crossed the corridor and headed into Finn’s bedroom, not even bothering to knock.

“Finn!” he called out softly, a massive smile on his face as Finn looked at him with a wary expression. “Man, I didn’t even know you were…”

Poe moved his hands in circles as if he was trying to gesture it, but Finn did not recognize the gesture at all.

“…Gay?” Finn added for him, looking anxious, and Poe noticed the sweat on his brow.

“Look, I don’t have a gaydar!” Poe explained eagerly. “But had I known before!”

Finn gulped. “Then what?”

Poe was still grinning as he took a few steps closer and suddenly kissed Finn, who was a little overwhelmed by Poe’s eager response to the card and gently pushed him away.

“…Then this,” Poe said softly, smiling happily.

Finn was completely overwhelmed though, even if he had been the one to make the first move by giving Poe the card. Tears came to his eyes as he considered how messed up this situation was. Yet even if it was, he didn’t have the strength to push Poe away.

He found himself embracing Poe, holding onto him like his life depended on it, and Poe hugged him close, gently rubbing his back in an attempt to calm him down.

A knock on the door startled them both, and Hux gave them a wary expression from the doorway as they were still hugging.

“What’s going on here?” he wondered, noticing how Finn seemed to be particularly distressed.

“Small anxiety attack.” Poe lied without missing a beat. “But I think we’ve got it under control?”

He did not let go of Finn, and Hux narrowed his eyes as Finn nodded, hoping Hux would sod off.

“Alright,” he said strictly. “I want everyone in their bedrooms in ten minutes.”

Poe nodded quickly, glad to see Hux leave again, and as he looked at Finn, he saw the small smile on his face.

“Anxiety attack?” Finn questioned him.

Poe chuckled. “Isn’t it?”

Finn shrugged. “I guess.”

Poe wrapped his arms firmer around Finn. “Don’t you worry. It’s going to be fine. No rush.”

As Finn smiled, Poe gave him another kiss, and as Finn shyly averted his eyes afterwards, Poe grinned.
“We’ll keep it quiet, alright?”

Hux truly wasn’t aware of what had just happened in Finn’s room, and as he was telling the other patients to get ready for bed, he noticed that he hadn’t spotted Rey and Kylo anywhere. Remembering that they had gone outside earlier that evening, he looked out the window, only to see them standing in the middle of the courtyard, not really hugging, but not really just standing either, more like they were dancing to a really slow song. Rey had her head against Kylo’s chest, and he had his chin on her head while their arms were wrapped around each other and their eyes were closed, gently swaying to the music.

Part of Hux wanted nothing more than to tell the two of them to cut it out and head to their rooms, but another part of him secretly enjoyed the view. He could not help but imagine Phasma’s reaction to the sight. She would have probably slapped his arm in her enthusiasm and spied on them as long as she could, and she would have dragged him to the Keeper’s Office if he had threatened to break them apart.

But he knew that his shift was coming to an end, and he wanted to have all his patients in their rooms by the time the night shift arrived, and so he knocked on the window, which startled them a little, and they immediately broke their hug. Kylo gave her back one of the earplugs of the mp3-player he had gifted her, but as they walked back inside, they were still holding hands, even while Hux held the door open for them.

He narrowed his eyes suspiciously as his two patients walked in, then asked: “So the two of you – you’re a thing now?”

Kylo’s ears turned red as he didn’t know what to say in reply, but Rey just tilted her head as she looked at Hux.

“Yeah,” she said as though it was no big deal. “Problem with that?”

Hux’s stern expression could not hide the bit of amusement he felt about her attitude. She had guts, alright. But that wasn’t necessarily a bad thing.

“Just checking,” Hux said dryly. “Time for bed. Say your goodbyes for the night.”

As Kylo awkwardly smiled at Rey, she stood on her tiptoes and pressed a sweet kiss to his cheek.

“Goodnight, Kylo.”

“Goodnight, Rey,” he replied shyly.

As they both left the living room, Hux just rolled his eyes and shook his head.

Not much more than half an hour later did he find himself in front of a large apartment complex,
standing awkwardly in the hallway as he looked for Phasma’s name. When he found it, he hesitated for a moment, and part of him wanted to turn around and just head back to his car. He was about to do just that when the door to the hallway opened and Phasma greeted him with a radiant grin.

He felt a little caught in the act, a slightly terrified expression on his face which did not disappear when he noticed how she was wearing a black dress and black heels underneath. He felt even smaller than usual when he looked at her. She certainly didn’t wear that sort of thing to work.

“I thought it would be better to come and get you when I saw you walk down the parking lot. Come on in!”

Hux gulped as he followed her inside the hallway, wondering what the hell he was even doing. As she led him into the elevator, she joked: “No gift for me? It’s Valentine’s Day and you turn up empty handed?”

He startled for a moment, not realizing that she would take offense to that.

She laughed so loud that Hux feared for a moment that the entire apartment complex could hear. She could not stop grinning as she saw Hux’s alarmed expression. He looked like a deer caught in headlights and she truly wondered if he was afraid of her sometimes.

“Hux, relax, I’m joking.”

He gulped. He was definitely out of his element. As the doors of the elevator closed, he noticed how she looked at him – almost as though he was the prey and she was nothing but the hunter. But when she suddenly bit her lip, he could not hold back any longer. Even if one part of him wanted to run, another part wanted in on the action, and by the time the elevator reached Phasma’s floor, his scarf and jacket were already on the floor as they were entangled in a fierce and passionate embrace, kissing like they had waited years for this moment – and perhaps that wasn’t even a lie.

The doors of the elevator opened, then closed again, and only when the light inside the elevator went out, did Phasma realize they needed to get out.

As she pushed him off her and slammed her hand against the elevator button, she grinned.

“Sex in an elevator sounds like fun, but eh… Let’s not get carried away just yet. The night is still young.”

The door opened again and she winked at him, encouraging him to follow her. With a wide grin on his face, he picked up his scarf and jacket and followed her into her apartment.

The night was still young indeed.
Phasma startled awake when she heard her mobile go off. Only problem was – it wasn’t her alarm sound – someone was actually calling her. As she noticed there was already morning light in her bedroom and that Hux’s arm was around her waist, she cursed. Hux grunted at the sudden noise, apparently not a morning person, and as Phasma looked at her mobile she saw it was Thanisson who was trying to reach her.

*Just great.* She had completely forgotten to set the alarm after what had happened last night.

Picking up the phone, she brought it to her ear and immediately said: “I’m terribly sorry, I overslept.”

She heard Thanisson chuckle on the other side. “I can hear in your voice that I just woke you. I’m glad it’s nothing worse. I was worried. Do you think you can be here before we leave for the morning therapy?”

“I’ll try,” she promised. “I’ll be there as soon as I can. See ya later.”

As she hung up the phone, she sighed, looking at Hux as he lay curled up against her, his head resting against her shoulder, his hair a little messy, though it didn’t make him less attractive to her. He reminded her of a cat, the way he laid there. She rolled her eyes as she gently shook him, but that didn’t faze him much.

“Seriously?” she asked. “I know it was late, but aren’t you even going to try to wake up?”

She heard him grunt and felt how his grip on her waist tightened in response, and deciding she had no time for this nonsense, she sat up, took his wrists and pinned them besides his head, which caused him to finally open his eyes a bit, and he smiled as he realized she was still naked after last night, looking at her breasts with eager approval.

Phasma frowned as she noticed his delighted expression. “For God’s sake, Hux, I overslept. You need to get up and leave.”

His expression fell a little, but he nodded slowly.

“Straight away?” he asked, his voice still deep with sleep – deeper than Phasma had ever heard it, and she smiled because of it, letting go of his wrists as she let one hand rest on his chest. He had such a lean frame compared to hers, and part of her really didn’t want to get up yet and end the memories of the two of them together for the first time, but there was no alternative.

She leaned in to give him a soft kiss, and while he curiously awaited her answer, she replied: “I’ll let you share a shower with me, if you hurry up.”

His eyes lit up at that offer, and he eagerly followed her out of bed.

Thanisson wasn’t particularly worried about covering the morning shift without Phasma. He had done shifts by himself before – mostly evening shifts – but he knew the morning schedule well enough to know what he needed to do.
To him, it didn’t seem like anyone was behaving oddly - except for Jess. He had noticed the drop in her mood the past days, and he could not get her out of bed this morning. She claimed to be sick, and as he did not believe she was really physically ill, he tried to lure her out with promises of fun activities during the day, but she seemed to hold no interest in petting animals or having omelets for breakfast.

He tried to get to the core of the matter, to figure out what it was precisely that was bothering her, but she really did not want to tell him what was going on in her mind, and so he left her be for the moment, sending a text to doctor Kanata instead to inform her of Jess’s odd behavior. Hopefully she could help him out as soon as she arrived.

But Kanata was later than usual as well, and after breakfast, the patients were eager to head to the farm, leaving Thanisson with a dilemma. He did not want to allow Jess to keep all the patients hostage because she was unwilling to get out of bed. He just wasn’t sure if he could trust all of them to behave properly without him, and he knew that Statura wouldn’t be happy if all the patients would arrive without a single Keeper.

Thinking fast, he eventually decided to let Kylo, Rey, Finn and Lor San leave. Finn and Lor San usually helped out with the horses and Kylo and Rey had a lot of cages to muck out. The others could wait with him, until Phasma or Kanata arrived – whoever would be there first to take care of Jess.

As Rey left the building without supervision of a Keeper, she was very quiet, walking besides Kylo towards the farm. Finn and Lor San walked ahead of them, as fast as they could because they feared they would be late for their weekly job of leading the horses around the pen, and they hated to keep the patients of the other ward waiting for them.

Kylo had noticed that Rey had been very quiet that morning. She had hardly wished him a good morning, and they hadn’t had the chance to talk yet, and now that they were alone, it was still quiet between them. He wondered if she was having second thoughts about them – about him. He had looked forward to seeing her that morning, but it was obvious that the feeling hadn’t been mutual, and part of him felt distraught because of it.

He stopped in his tracks, however, when he saw Rey had knelt down to tie her shoe lace.

“Go ahead,” she said without looking up at him. “I’ll catch up.”

He hesitated and frowned. He had no intention of continuing without her and waited for her, but he also noticed that her shoulders were rather tense, and that she wasn’t looking at him, but at the road behind her – the road that led to the entrance of the domain.

“Go on!” she said quickly as she realized he wasn’t listening to her, and he gulped nervously.

“My wait,” he offered softly, but he saw how this only caused Rey to frown, her mood agitated because of that reply.

He had never seen her so annoyed before, and he suddenly realized: “You don’t want me here…”

Rey finally looked up at him, her gaze a little alarmed, and he continued: “You want to run, don’t you? Without me.” He had only just figured that out, and he felt numb because of it. “You want to run away, and never look back.”

She slowly got up. It wasn’t like her laces had ever really been loose in the first place, and seeing the devastated look in Kylo’s eyes didn’t make her feel better about what she wanted to do.
“When will I get a better shot at this?” she said quietly. “Thanisson isn’t around, nor are any of the other keepers, and before they figure out I’m missing, I’m long gone.”

He wasn’t sure what cut him more: that she was thinking of running – or that she was thinking of doing it without a single thought of him.

“What about us?” he asked, trying to keep his voice from shaking, hoping that the stress he was feeling wouldn’t cause Snoke to pop up and make things worse between them.

A pang of guilt hit Rey right in the heart, and she had to admit that she had not considered him – them. Perhaps that was the worst thing about it all.

“You can come along,” she said straight away.

He shook his head. “Rey, I’m not going back to the street. And besides, you wanted me to keep on walking just a minute ago. Whatever your plan was, I wasn’t a part of it, was I?”

Rey’s hands were now trembling, and the guilt was slowly beginning to drown her, and she hadn’t felt so awful in her entire life.

“Kylo, please listen,” she pleaded softly, her hands in her pocket now and her shoulders tense. “I… I can’t stay here forever. It’s all lies. It’s not real. I want to go back to the real world. But you can come too, if you want to.”

He frowned as he looked at her, not agreeing with her at all. “The street is not the real world. The street is where people go when they can’t or won’t deal with the real world. It’s no better than this place. It’s a lousy means of escape, a lousy means to live, and you’re not going to get your life together living there. But here, maybe here they can help.” He hoped that she was listening to him – that she understood what he meant, and he continued in a defeated tone: “And yeah, it won’t go fast. And maybe it’s not completely real. But at least there can be progress here. At least we can pick up some new skills.”

“Skills?” Rey didn’t seem to believe him. “What kind of skills that they teach us here will make people want to hire us? In the eyes of the rest of the world, we’re just unstable now. The stigma will be with us forever and the rest of the world doesn’t want us near. That’s why we’re hidden away here in the middle of a forest in the first place.”

“Hate to break it to you,” Kylo said coldly, finding it very upsetting that Rey’s vision was so different from his own in this regard. “But out on the street, the world doesn’t want you near either. At least here, we’re not in their way.”

Those words felt like a slap to Rey’s face, and she was visibly upset, her lip trembling now.

He knew that his words had reached her in some mean way, and it did not lessen the ache in his heart. She had wanted to leave him behind – without as much as a proper goodbye. She had almost abandoned him – like almost everyone he had ever loved in his life had abandoned him in one way or another. Perhaps it was just his lot in life, and he felt pretty miserable about that.

“You want to run?” he said coldly, his eyes determined as he looked straight into hers. “Run. Go back to your streets, if you get that far. Eat from dumpsters, if that’s what you prefer. Steal what you need from shops and try not to get caught or they’ll send you right back here. And be alone for the rest of your life, if that is what you want. Cause if that is the life you prefer, then go for it. But I have come too far to go back to that miserable kind of life, so you’re on your own. Do what you must, but don’t count on me to give you my blessing if you go through with that. You’re wasting
the best shot at a normal life you’ll ever get.”

He was shaking from frustration and helplessness, and Rey could see it, her heart aching for him almost more than it was for herself. As he turned and headed towards the farmhouse, Rey stood still for a few moments, tears falling down her cheeks as she was trying to figure out what it was she should do.

As she looked back towards the entrance, she saw another car pull up to the parking lot, and she realized that the tall blonde woman that stepped out of the car was Phasma. Well, running would not be a good idea now, and so she hurried until she was stepping next to Kylo, who was miserable and angry, both at the same time.

“So I really mean nothing to you?” he asked, keeping his gaze straight ahead. “You would run away from me without a goodbye?”

“It’s not that I don’t care for you, Kylo,” she said softly. “But let’s be real… I have absolutely nothing to offer you. I’ll only hold you back.”

He couldn’t believe the words he was hearing. “Are you serious?” he asked her with his brows knit together in confusion. “You’re not holding me back at all! You’re probably the only reason why I’ve been able to hold it together the past weeks. And why would you think you have nothing to offer me?”

Rey shrugged. “I’m absolutely useless. I have no money, no talents, nothing I can give you. I wouldn’t even be able to cook you a meal if we were to live together. I’d just get you in trouble.”

“No, no, don’t say that!” he argued, taking her hand while they were walking and holding it tightly. He had been so angry the moment he had found out that she had considered leaving him, but perhaps he hadn’t been the issue at all, and that made him feel a little better. “Love isn’t about giving people money or items or cooking them meals. It’s about giving them time – spending time with them – and just loving them. I really want to do just that – to spend time with you – to love you… But…” He gulped slowly. “If you don’t want that… I will leave you be.”

His heart was racing, fearing her response, and when he finally dared to look in her direction, he saw that there were tears running down her cheeks. His grip on her hand lessened and he wanted to let go of her, but she gently squeezed his hand and held him where he was.

“It sounds like so little,” she said weakly. “I could spend time with you – try to see if I can love you – but will it be enough for you? It’s just… I think you deserve better.”

“Well I think you deserve much better than me too,” Kylo immediately responded, standing still and pulling her a little closer to him, grabbing her other hand too. They were just outside the gates of the farm, and though they heard voices on the other side, they were quite alone where they were.

As he looked into her eyes, her misery and guilt were all too clear to him, and he pulled her into a tight embrace, resting his chin on the top of her head.

“Please don’t run away, Rey… I really think we stand a chance here,” he said hopefully. “You have made me stronger. I haven’t felt this in control of myself in years. If I can be stronger, I can get out of here. And I wouldn’t go without you.”

“I’m so sorry,” she sobbed against him, her eyes closed as she buried her face in his shirt. “I have never had anyone care for me – and I’ve never cared for anyone myself. I’m so bad at this.”
He chuckled, finding her words a little funny, though sad at the same time, and he kissed the top of her head.

“I had a bad dream last night,” she suddenly admitted, and she felt like she had to share it with him, that perhaps it would be some sort of an explanation for her behavior. “I dreamed there was a fire in the ward, while we were all sleeping, and we couldn’t get out because all the doors and windows were locked. And I eventually threw my chair through the window and I could get out, and then I ran into the forest, where all was safe, and I didn’t look back. And that is where it ended.”

Kylo had listened in silence, but now felt a twang of fear. “You didn’t think of me and the others in the building?”

Rey shook her head. “I just thought about me – feared for my own life – and all that mattered was surviving. And I did. So… this morning… I wasn’t sure what mattered most. But I thought… maybe it was surviving. I would survive if I ran and left everyone right now.”

“You’ll also survive if you stay,” he offered gently. “It was a nightmare. Not reality. It doesn’t mean you need to do the things you saw in your nightmare. Besides, some say dreams and nightmares are there to teach you lessons, as mirrors to the soul.”

“What do you think my dream meant then?”

He gently pulled away from her, putting his hands on her shoulders as he looked at her. “That your instinct is still to survive above all other things. And there’s nothing wrong with that. But there’s one major difference between your dream and reality.”

She looked at him with wide eyes. “What’s that?”

He smiled. “You aren’t in danger here. There’s no fire here. No reason to run.”

As Rey looked into his eyes, she slowly began to smile. He was absolutely right. She had been stupid. Incredibly stupid. And to think that she had dismissed him so easily… She knew she was going to have to live with that guilt for a while. He truly did not deserve that kind of treatment.

Putting her own hands in his neck, she pulled him down to her level, gently pressing her lips against his. He seemed a little surprised, but eagerly returned the kiss all the same, smiling when she let go of him again.

“I’m sorry if I hurt your feelings,” she whispered, but his gaze was forgiving.

“Well… One thing I have learned in this place, is that everyone makes mistakes… It doesn’t need to mean the end of us. If you’ll have me, I would like to remain your friend.”

Rey’s smile could hardly be any wider as she heard him say those words.

“I will have you – as long as you will put up with me in return.”

They both grinned, then shared another brief kiss before they finally opened the gate to begin their work.
Phasma was grateful that Thanisson didn’t ask questions upon her arrival. He was eager to take the group and head to the farm with them, and that left Phasma to look after Jess.

The girl was in an odd mood. Though she claimed she wasn’t well, it wasn’t like Phasma really detected a reason to call doctor Kalonia – one of the doctors in town that was dedicated to the patients of the ward if they needed medical attention.

Jess had no fever, and though she said she could not eat because she felt like she would throw up, she appeared to be fine. She wasn’t particularly talkative either, quite the opposite, and so Phasma hoped doctor Kanata could shed some light on Jess’s weird behavior.

Once Kanata took over from Phasma, she headed to the rest of the patients as they were all on the farm now, glad to see that at least most of them seemed to be having a good day.

Poe was watching Finn and Lor San as they guided the horses around the pen, Kylo and Rey were busy cleaning the stables, and Wexley was with the goats, brushing them and drowning in their attention as both Poe and Jess weren’t there with him for a change.

As Phasma stood by the fence, watching Wexley, her thoughts were miles away. She remembered standing in that very same spot, Hux by her side as they had kept an eye out on the patients. It was something that Hux and she had done for years, every single week, and never had she realized in any moment that there was any attraction between them.

She did not blame herself for not noticing Hux’s attraction – she blamed herself for not noticing her own. But she knew that she had been attracted to him for longer than just a few weeks, even if she had not consciously realized it. What had probably fooled her, was that there had always been this ease working with him. When he was with her she always felt in control of the situation – even if the patients were fighting or there was other drama to be handled. Hux always made her feel safe – safer than Thanisson or Kanata.

Sure, she had hated his guts at the same time. He could be obnoxious and rude to the patients, but that was how he kept control. He was quite different from her in how he approached his job, but he did his job and he did it well. He had never bailed on her or even staid home sick. She could remember him with a horrible cold a few years earlier, his eyes puffy as he sniffed constantly, surviving on the medication the doctor had prescribed him, hardly able to breathe at times. She had told him a dozen times to go home, but he had refused.

She now wondered if it had been for her sake that he had remained at work that day – for her support. Or perhaps he was just that dedicated to his work? Whatever the reason had been, she still felt like she did not truly know the man she had worked with all those years – even despite the fact that they had just had sex.

She had always thought Hux could not enjoy anything. She had never seen him happy – or so she thought. But the night before, she thought she had seen an inkling of the man behind the stern face. While he was usually in control of everything, he had relented all control to her the moment he had ended up in her bed. His eyes had worshipped her as she had saddled him and his touch had been so soft… To Phasma, it had almost seemed loving, and his gaze had almost been kind.

As she stood there, she realized how much she missed him, and this was cause for her to chuckle. She had fallen hard – and she could not wait for what the future would bring. Could a normal relationship come from this? Could they come out to their colleagues about this at some point? Could they marry and have children? And when such a future came to pass, would they still be working here then? It was dazzling to think about all that.
For now, it was easier to just think about their hot night together – about the pleasure they had both experienced. Remembering the sound of his soft gasps of breath as she had tried to bring him to his release, and his whispered: “Can I come?” when he had felt like he could hold it no longer. The thought alone was leaving her with a blush on her cheeks, and she wondered how she was going to face him during the Keeper’s meeting later that day.

Hux tried not to look at Phasma during that week’s meeting, knowing that if he looked at her, his focus would be off – and that was the last thing he wanted.

He had seen her radiant smile the moment he had entered the room though, and it had almost been enough to melt his heart completely. Last night had been the best night of his life – and to realize that she had enjoyed it as well was a giant relief to him. He could not wait until he was in her arms again, until he felt like perhaps he was allowed to feel good about himself as well.

But for now – thoughts of another hot night together were what he needed to ban from his mind. Thanisson was talking about his morning, and how Jess hadn’t been willing to cooperate at all. It was an interesting case, to say the least.

“She was incredibly stubborn,” Phasma added. “It’s not new though… She has a stubborn streak.”

“But pretending to be ill?” Thanisson asked in a disbelieving way. “She was eating just fine at lunch.”

Phasma shook her head. “No, not as much as usual. And if she truly was as sick as she said she was, then it’s logical she would feel peckish around lunch.”

Hux remained quiet for a few moments, but his gaze froze as he considered something, then got up from his seat, which surprised all of them.

“What is it?” doctor Kanata wondered immediately, but he kept his lips locked tightly together for a few more moments.

“I’ll be back in about fifteen minutes,” he suddenly said, and he only grabbed his keeper keys before he headed out of the room, leaving the others rather baffled.

Thanisson seemed a little annoyed. “Isn’t it important that we discuss these things together? What could he be doing that’s more important than our meeting?”

Phasma hadn’t been as intrigued in ages, and she smiled warmly, wondering what Hux was up to. “I have a feeling that we’ll learn that from him soon enough.”

“Still,” doctor Kanata said, agreeing with Thanisson. “We’re a team. He should not run off during the one hour a week we actually sit together to discuss our patients.”

Phasma would not hold it against him – heck, she would probably forgive him for worse now that she had slept with him, and tried to distract her other two team members by bringing up another subject. “So did you guys see the gifts Kylo and Rey exchanged for Valentine’s?”

She eagerly told them about Valentine’s, and as they discussed the nature of Kylo and Rey’s
relationship, they didn’t notice how much time they spent on the subject. Just as they were talking about the future of that relationship, Hux walked in again.

“…but would it really be unwise to sit down with Rey and talk to her about sexuality?” Phasma wondered. “We can’t assume she learned everything from the street.”

“Agreed,” Hux said, even though he hadn’t heard anything besides what Phasma had just said, and he tossed something on the table, leaving the other Keepers to frown as they looked at the white stick with the pink marks that now lay in the middle of the table.

“What’s that?” Thanisson asked, completely confused as he looked at it, never having seen anything quite like it before.

“That, dear mister Thanisson, is a pregnancy test,” Hux explained, his eyebrow raised but his tone dead serious. “Jess just took it after I rushed to the apothecary next door to get it.”

Kanata looked at Hux with wide eyes, suddenly realizing why Jess had been so moody, sick and emotional.

Phasma’s mouth dropped, her head slightly shaking from side to side as she muttered: “Is it…”

She was quiet, paling visibly while Hux continued for her, his voice softer than before: “Positive? Afraid so. Jess is crying in her room now that she knows as well. She had no idea.”

At those words, Phasma felt even worse than before. Jess was her patient – her responsibility – and not only had she failed to interpret the signals, she needed to tell Jess’s parents about this too – and this was horrible, not just for Jess, or for her parents, or for whoever the father was (though Phasma assumed that it was Poe), but for the institution too. They had failed their patients. They had tried to give Jess stability and a means to find peace – and now her life was turned upside down once more.

Doctor Kanata wasn’t amused either. “Hux, you can’t just head to a patient and make them take a pregnancy test like that.”

“I know, that’s why I did it without consulting you first,” Hux said stubbornly. “I know you prefer to play by the book, but that would have been too slow in this case. By the time you would get a doctor to drop by, and the parents to admit to pay for the test, and the test ordered, we’d be over a week further, and we’d just overanalyze the situation and point fingers at one another if my hunch was wrong. Not to mention that in order to get an abortion, there is never any time to lose.” He sounded as arrogant as ever as he crossed his arms and looked at Kanata defensively. “Well, hate to say that my hunch wasn’t wrong this time. So when do we tell Poe?”

It was clear that Hux didn’t want to lose any time, but Kanata still needed a moment to get to grips with this news and so she remained quiet.

“I need to go to Jess,” Phasma said, standing up, still pale and clearly shaken by the news, and before she could walk away, she suddenly felt Hux’s hand tugging at hers.

“They both realized they could not just stand there and hold hands in front of Kanata and Thanisson.

The other two keepers had not noticed anything off though, and even Thanisson agreed with Hux on this.
“We will need to support Jess on this, but it might help to talk this through before we go and see her. How did this even happen? Wasn’t she supposed to be on the pill?”

Doctor Kanata sighed, shaken by this news as well. “That will be the first enquiry the directors will make. How could she get pregnant when we are in charge of medication, and when we are the ones dividing the pills and distributing them?”

“Has she been hiding the fact that she hasn’t taken her pills?” Thanisson wondered.

“Or did we simply make a mistake and did one of us forget to add her pill one week?” Hux suggested.

“We need to get her off the pill now…” Phasma said, still looking rather faint, though the strength in her voice was returning. “If she decides to keep this baby, it can’t be good unless we get her off those hormones.”

“Do you think we’ll get sued?” Thanisson asked, his voice fearful as he looked at Phasma, knowing that she knew Jess’s family best.

Phasma’s lip trembled now. “If her family thinks they can get money out of this, they will go for it… They don’t care about her well-being as much as they do about their own. I don’t trust them, to be honest. She doesn’t come from the most stable of families… But they have every right to be upset with us.”

“Does Poe get a say in anything?” Thanisson wondered next, looking at Hux because he knew Hux was in charge of him.

The other keeper shook his head. “Probably not. They’re hardly even a couple – and admitting that we knew Poe and Jess were screwing would probably get us in more trouble with her parents. Best we pretend we don’t know for certain who the father is.”

“It still isn’t certain Poe is the father,” Kanata reminded them all. “It is most likely… But still. We need to ask Jess about this.”

Hux took a deep breath before he sat down again, folding his hands together on the table.

“I don’t want to create any false hopes…” he started slowly. “…but this test might still be wrong. It’s only one test. We should take another one too. And get a doctor’s opinion. One positive test is not conclusive.”

Phasma shook her head. “But with the change in her behavior and the morning sickness and the fact we all know she’s sort of messing with Poe whenever they’re alone… It’s not rocket science to figure out that the test isn’t lying.” She paused for a moment before she glanced at him, a small and miserable smile on her face. “I’m glad you spotted it.”

She was genuinely grateful for that. Jess was in a horrible situation, but at least Hux had made a quick and correct assessment. If Jess would want to go for an abortion, it probably wouldn’t be too late now.

“I’ll go and see how Jess is doing,” she continued bravely. “If she wants to keep the baby, we should know this, so that we can plan accordingly. I will see how she feels about contacting her family about this – and we’ll agree on a time to invite them here.”

“They haven’t been here a lot, have they?” Thanisson wondered.
“They didn’t even come for Christmas,” Phasma said, also knowing that they never came for other occasions. “I have a feeling they’ll come for this though…”

Kanata nodded in agreement, and as Hux looked at Phasma, he tried to offer her strength through his gaze alone. He knew this was a horrible situation to be in for any Keeper, and she was the last Keeper he would wish such a thing upon. Thanisson just looked sad, like he hated the thought that they were all in trouble and that they had delivered such a bad service to Jess.

“We’ll get through this,” Kanata reminded them all. “Let’s take a little more time tomorrow to discuss this when we switch shifts. And should any of you wish to discuss this with me, do not hesitate to call me when I’m not here.”

Thanisson nodded gratefully, and so did Hux and Phasma, and when Phasma left the room, the other three grew quiet again.

They were all in quite a bit of trouble now.
Kylo and Rey were blissfully unaware of any of the troubles that surrounded Jess in the week that followed. They didn't really notice how Jess was absent from practically all activities, how the girl stayed in her room, or how her mother had created quite a bit of drama in the meeting room just outside their ward. Phasma and Kanata had been present for that – and Phasma had almost spent the entire evening with tears in her eyes while she had worked – but she had tried to hide that from her patients, and Kylo and Rey hadn’t noticed a thing.

They had been too busy enjoying each other’s company, and Rey still felt guilty for almost leaving Kylo. Her direct reaction to that was that she now clung to him a lot more, and Kylo did not complain about her frequent hugs or the way she always looked for his hand to hold whenever they had a moment to themselves.

Snoke was rather quiet too, and when he said something, it wasn’t particularly bothersome, as though he was more relaxed now that Kylo felt better about himself.

Two people who weren’t quite as at ease with one another, were Poe and Finn. Though Poe now sat in Finn’s bedroom each evening, and they spent a good deal of time kissing and talking, Finn was still skittish about being caught. Just the idea of getting caught was enough to make him extra susceptible to his panic attacks, and he felt more unstable than ever, and one hour he could be crying, the next laughing in Poe’s company. A part of him had never been happier, yet this did not mean that his panic attacks were gone – far from it – they were worse now. It was distressing to say the least.

Poe was happy with Finn’s attention. It seemed like he had lost Jess’s completely. She still sat opposite him during lunch and dinner, but she didn’t look at him at all. She just stared at her plate, and though he saw she was sometimes crying, he had no idea what he could do for her.

It was clear to him that she didn’t want anything to do with him, and he certainly wasn’t going to wait for her. He cared for her, of course he did, but it wasn’t the first time she had pushed him away, only to pull him in later whenever she felt like it again. He didn’t hold a grudge about that, for he knew that was how she was, and how they had always worked together, but for now he simply liked to focus his own attention on Finn. The guy was a lot of fun, and much more affectionate than Jess had ever been. Poe quite liked feeling loved, as opposed to feeling desired.

One evening, while he was fixing his hair in the mirror before he was about to head to Finn’s room, he heard a knock on the door. When it opened, he was surprised to see it was Hux who peered in.

“Poe, do you have a moment?”

Even if Hux was his keeper, Poe didn’t confide much in Hux. The fact that he would come to him now, was suspicious to say the least. For a moment he feared that Hux had found out about him and Finn.

“Jess would like to talk to you for a while, if that’s alright with you. Will you follow me?”

This confused Poe more than anything. Of all things, he had not expected to be summoned to a rendez-vous with Jess. Why did she want to talk to him all of a sudden, after ignoring him for over a week? And why had she involved Hux?
He had a strange feeling as he nodded and then followed Hux down the hallway, through the living room, his mind reeling as he realized they were heading into the girl’s corridor.

As Rey emerged from the bathroom in her pajamas, she pulled wide eyes when she almost bumped into Hux and Poe. The former gave a brief apology, the latter was just as confused as Rey was.

Rey watched as she saw how the two of them headed to Jess’s room, knocked on the door and then entered, and she shook her head as she stepped into her own room, heading to the window to close her curtains.

She paused, however, when she saw the rooms on the other side of the courtyard – and she immediately recognized Kylo as he was fixing one of the curtains in his own room, feeding some of the eyelets over the poles where they had fallen off.

Amused that he had not noticed her yet, she continued to watch him as he reached out for the pole, not even needing to get a chair as he was tall enough to do it without, and only when he was done and about to close the curtains, did he spot her. He immediately waved and pressed his hand against the window, and she did the same, looking at him with a big smile.

Not sure what else she could do – for they were too far to lip-read, not that she knew how to do that anyways – she was reminded of something that had happened earlier that day.

They had all gone for a run on the track, and at the end of it, they had all been quite sweaty. Kylo had taken the bottom of his shirt and wiped his face with it, and Rey had been caught staring at his belly. Honestly, she had been a little mesmerized in that moment – not really used to seeing much bare skin, not to mention Kylo’s.

He hadn’t noticed her gaze, but Poe had, and he had begun to tease them: “Kylo, I think Rey wants you to take your shirt off.”

She had turned as red as a tomato at those words, but luckily, Kylo hadn’t been offended. He had been surprised and slightly confused, and he had looked at her with an amused grin. “Really?”

While Rey had been too embarrassed to say anything, it was Poe who had continued: “If you play it smart, Kylo, you give her a show and then ask her to do the same. Heaven knows you’ve never seen a half-naked woman before.”

That was the moment when Kylo had turned red in the face as well, and both he and her had said: “No!” at the same time.

Thanisson had interrupted them then – but she had noticed how Kylo had been quite shy with her for the rest of the morning. He was just as inexperienced as her, she supposed, and as she realized that all the other curtains of the other rooms around the courtyard were closed, she suddenly pulled off her shirt, her heart beating a little faster as she gazed out the window, relieved to see she still had Kylo’s attention.

He stood completely motionless, just looking at her with his mouth slightly open, and she bit her lip as she looked down. She was aware that her breasts weren’t particularly big, but did that really matter to Kylo? As she smiled at him again, he smiled back, and when he suddenly pulled off his own shirt as well, she could not help but grin.

Sometimes, she had wondered about him shirtless. He always felt so massive whenever he hugged her, and she realized now that he was almost twice as wide as her, his shoulders and arms so buff that she felt very small indeed in that moment.
She hoped that he realized as well that they were even now – and that Poe would never need to tease them about not having seen half-naked people before.

As she blew him a kiss, he was quick to blow one back, and as she headed to the curtains to close them, he did the same, but not before they had both waved at one another once more.

Just as Rey had put on her shirt again, Phasma knocked on the door.

“Ready for bed?” Phasma asked as she looked inside with a soft smile, and Rey nodded and crawled underneath the warm sheets. She had begun to sleep in her bed instead of on the floor the past week – and so far it had gone quite well. She was starting to like the warmth of the bed and blankets all around her.

“Yes,” she replied softly, rearranging the blankets over her legs before she suddenly bit her lip, considering a question for the Keeper. “Madame Phasma?”

Realizing that Rey was reaching out to her, Phasma smiled and walked closer, sitting down on the chair that stood against the wall besides her bed.

“Why are you here again?” Rey wondered.

It was supposed to be Phasma’s day off, yet she had come after dinner. But for what? To help Hux? Hux didn’t really need help, did he?

Phasma chuckled, amused by the question. “Well… Honestly, we should be here with two keepers at all times, but at this moment that’s not possible.”

“Why not?” Rey asked.

The keeper shrugged. “At this moment, three keepers and a psychologist, doctor Kanata, are assigned to this ward. And then we have a few other keepers from other departments that help out during weekends or when someone has a day off, like madame Unamo and mister Statura. Since Hux was alone for most of the afternoon, I thought I would come and help him for a few hours.”

“Do you get paid for being here now?”

This time, Phasma hesitated for a moment, not sure what to answer immediately. “No, Rey, this is… voluntary.”

As Rey was frowning, the keeper realized she needed to explain.

“I feel responsible for you and the other patients... I feel like, with extra hours, I can give you the attention you deserve. If you need extra help, I can be there for you then.”

Feeling bad for Phasma, Rey suddenly said: “I’m doing alright, madame Phasma. You don’t need to work overtime on my behalf.”

Phasma smiled warmly, finding that a very considerate thing for the girl to say, but she wasn’t going to tell Rey that she wasn’t here for her precisely. Jess’s situation required more attention right now, but the other patients didn’t know that just yet.

As she got up from her chair, she gently touched Rey’s shoulder.

“Sleep well, Rey…”

“Sleep well, madame Phasma,” she replied, smiling as she pulled up the blanket a little higher and
Phasma closed the door behind her, to find Hux waiting in the corridor, outside Jess’s door.

“How’s it going?” she asked, keeping her voice low.

Hux shook his head. “No idea. It’s very quiet. I haven’t been able to pick up their voices.”

She took a deep breath and shuddered, and as he noticed this, he walked closer and took her hand for a moment, squeezing it gently.

“They’re going to be fine,” Hux tried to cheer her up. “Maybe not straight away, but we’re going to help them get through this, right?”

She nodded, a small smile on her face.

“I hope so. I just fear for her family’s response. When her mother came two days ago, she said she would discuss it with Jess’s father and get back to us.”

“Her family hasn’t called back yet?”

She shook her head.

“I have no idea what to expect,” she admitted. “Are they just going to let her deal with this on her own? Thing is, only if she gets an abortion, she can stay here. If she doesn’t, then what? She can’t stay here with a baby. She’ll need to go back home and they’re not particularly happy to take her back in, I suppose. Or we’re going to need to look for a psychiatric ward that takes both mothers and their infants. In a way that might be best for her, but she’s just a kid – worse than a teenager in some ways. She is nowhere near ready for this responsibility. I just feel so bad for her.”

Hux rubbed her shoulders briefly.

“This is not your fault, Phasma…” he said sternly. “It was Jess who decided to fuck Poe, and now she’s pregnant. You’re doing everything you can to support her – but you can’t blame yourself for Jess being pregnant now. These things happen.”

Though he sounded quite harsh, it meant a lot to Phasma that he was trying to cheer her up. The way he stared into her eyes with a certain gaze made her heart warm up to him, and she reached out for his hand as it rested on her shoulder.

“Thank you,” she said softly, and they both didn’t notice it immediately when the door opened and Poe walked out.

He noticed how Hux had his hand on Phasma’s shoulder, and though it was just another sign to Poe that those two were fucking, it didn’t amuse him to notice it this time. He looked a little haunted as he stepped out, gulping heavily as he looked for something to say.

Hux noticed him though and immediately let go of Phasma, taking a few steps closer to his patient.

“Are you alright?” he asked, and though Poe nodded, Hux could tell that it wasn’t as well with Poe as he pretended it was.

Phasma entered Jess’s room and closed the door behind her while Hux escorted Poe back to the living room. He offered Poe a seat and got them both a glass of water from the kitchen before he sat down as well.
“Will I be transferred now?” Poe asked, paler than ever as he looked at Hux.

The Keeper just shook his head. “No, Poe. I think it’s very unlikely that you’ll be transferred for this. As your keeper, I’m not going to ask anyone to transfer you. What happened, happened. What did Jess tell you?”

“That she’s pregnant,” Poe repeated, still pale as he gazed at the glass of water in his hands. “That she’s been having morning sickness and that she blames me, in a way, yet in another way she’s not really angry with me, but with herself too. And with her family.”

“With her family?” Hux asked, wondering what that was about. From what he had heard Phasma say, she never spoke ill of her family. Ever. To the point of it being unhealthy, for that family was flawed to a point. The only time they contacted the ward or Jess was whenever there was money involved.

“She blames them for not getting her out of here sooner. She felt like she has been doing much better lately, but even despite her progress, they were still unwilling to take her home. That’s all she wants. To go home.”

Poe didn’t find it easy to keep his cool and had tears in his eyes as he continued: “And now she might need to leave this home too… If she keeps the baby, then she can’t stay. And as for an abortion… she doesn’t know if she wants the child or not.”

“And you?” Hux asked. “If you had the choice?”

He shrugged, a pained expression on his face. “I’m in no place to be a father,” he said honestly. “But one day… maybe… when I’m better… Yeah, kids would be great. Just not now. But like… I can’t even live together with Jess, can I? I can’t see us parenting a child – not in a way that I would want any child to be parented. She’s not what I’d truly want in a partner. To me, she’s just a…” He hesitated for a long time before he continued: “…friend.”

Poe didn’t even seem convinced that that last word was the proper word to describe her, and looked as though he had said something foul, and Hux said: “If you wish to use the term fuckbuddy, you know I don’t judge you for naming things the way you perceive them.”

“It’s not like I don’t know she’s a person,” Poe said a little defensively, frowning. “It’s just… It was just a temporary thing. That was what it was meant to be from the very first day. It was lust and desire and sex and yes, perhaps a bit of friendship too. Which is logical, I suppose. And I am truly grateful for the time we spent together. But when one of us gets out of here, the other one isn’t going to create drama about it – that is one of the first things we agreed upon. It would just be a fling. I’m too old for her, she always says, and she is too childish for me – at least for a serious relationship.”

“Does she want you to start a family with her?” Hux wondered, and at this Poe immediately shook his head.

“She asked about money – seemed willing to discuss a system where I could take the child some days and she some others – but that’s not what I want either… And at this point I don’t have the money I need to support them. I would need a job first. And that’s not possible while I’m in here…”

Hux remained quiet, a little bothered that Jess had already addressed the situation like they were out on the street again, living a normal, yet messy life. They weren’t anywhere near that point yet.
Poe drank a bit of water, then closed his eyes. “Yet if this child is mine, then I want to be there for this kid. Take some responsibility. But this never should have happened.”

Hux agreed.

“Next time, you should use a condom,” he said sternly, and Poe could not laugh with that remark, even though the Keeper was completely right.

“I know.” He sighed deeply. “My bad.”

His thoughts didn’t just go out to Jess or the unborn child, but they also went out to Finn. How was he going to break this news? He couldn’t ask Hux for advice on that, not while Finn and he were still a secret.

“You should get some rest,” Hux decided, and Poe drank the rest of his water before he got up and headed into the hallway. Finn was standing in his doorframe, confused to see Poe come in with Hux from the living room area. Everyone else had been sent to their rooms thirty minutes earlier – and he had wanted to wish Poe a sweet goodnight.

Seeing how pale his friend looked, Finn immediately frowned.

“Are you alright?” Finn asked, realizing that Poe didn’t dare to look at him, and Hux’s stern voice cut him off.

“Go to sleep, Finn. You too, Poe. Have a good night.”

“Good night,” Poe mumbled, and as he closed the door behind him, Finn’s mouth dropped a little, but he entered his room all the same.

Finn truly didn’t understand what had happened. Poe looked as though someone had died. Had he received some bad news about his family? They weren’t particularly close according to Poe, but that didn’t mean he didn’t care…

A few minutes later, while Finn lay in bed, Hux knocked on the door and wished him a good night, and he mumbled “Good night” back, though there wasn’t any warmth in his voice.

He waited for a long while, until he was certain that Hux and Phasma had left and only the night shift was still present in the building.

As he opened his door, he peeked into the hallway. It appeared like a light was on in the living room, and he could hear that the television was on. Glad that there was something muffling the sound of him closing his door again, he headed into Poe’s room, who immediately sat up when he realized someone had entered the darkness of his sleeping quarters.

As Finn closed the door behind him and walked into the darkness of the room, he whispered: “Poe? It’s me…”

He sounded a little desperate as he walked closer to the bed, and in the darkness of the room, he could now see how Poe was sitting with his back against the wall, moving over for him.

He crawled into bed next to him and immediately reached out for his hand, alarmed by how desperately Poe clung to it.

“How are you?” he asked, just as he had done before, but now he could see how Poe shook his head. He even thought that he saw tears on his face, and as he put his hand against Poe’s cheek,
could feel how he was burning up, and how his cheeks were indeed wet from crying.

“What is it?” he whispered compassionately, wrapping one arm around Poe. “What’s wrong?”

Poe shook his head, conflicted by everything. He couldn’t tell Finn – not just because he was supposed to keep this a secret on Jess’s behalf – but also because he couldn’t begin to explain what this would mean for the two of them together. He had no idea what this meant for the future, and it scared him.

“Talk to me, baby,” Finn tried again, feeling rather helpless as he had never known Poe to be this quiet. “What can I do for you?”

Words could not make the situation better – not to Poe at least.

In the darkness, Poe brought his face closer to Finn’s, kissing him briefly, only to realize that it felt good. Even after this complete mess, kissing Finn still felt better than anything, and it was still better than talking about his own problems.

He kissed Finn again, who eagerly met his lips, as though he was trying to tell Poe that he was there for him no matter what, and it managed to unwind Poe’s mind for a bit. The heaviness of the future dropped away a little, and he knew that kissing would give him some peace of mind.

“Just kiss me,” Poe whispered emotionally, and this was something Finn felt he could do. Usually it was Poe who took the lead in their make-out sessions, but now Finn wanted to prove that he could as well. As they began kissing, Finn soon managed to urge his friend to lay down again, and as he lay on top of him, he realized that his tears were growing less and he was soon giving into the heat of the moment, kissing him back as passionately as he could.

“Touch me,” Poe whispered next – his voice almost broken – desperate beyond measure as he held Finn in his arms. “Please.”

Finn was grateful for the darkness and his complexion, for he was certain he had started blushing like the virgin that he was. They were both quite hard – and it wasn’t like it was the first time. Many evenings together, they had worked up quite an appetite for more than just kisses – but they had never given into any of that. Finn had always felt like he would get caught, but right now, he felt more at ease than ever before – and he desperately wanted to make Poe feel better. Whatever had troubled him so, whatever Hux had said to him, he wanted Poe to feel better and to give him a moment he could forget all that.

Not to mention that touching Poe was something that had intrigued him ever since his crush had developed. As he teased Poe through his pants, feeling how hard he was, Poe was already bucking into his hand for more, unable to contain his enthusiasm for what his friend was doing.

His instincts were taking over – rational thought numbed completely as all he wanted was to kiss and touch and be touched and rubbed to a fast release. He moaned against Finn’s mouth and the bed creaked a little as he bucked again in his friend’s hand.

Finn tried to hush his friend, realizing that his sudden movements were making the bed quite noisy, and as Poe lay down more quietly than before, whining gently because he felt it difficult to contain his enthusiasm, Finn went into his pants to feel him up at first, realizing that Poe was getting wetter by the second as he explored him further.

Poe was the one who lowered his pajama pants to make it easier for Finn, and Finn kissed him fiercely as he began jerking him off. Poe’s breath was growing more irregular by the moment now,
and when Finn started kissing his neck as well, was when he was starting to lose it completely. He bucked again and made an urgent sound when he realized he was going to come, and Finn kissed his lips to shut him up, feeling rather good about himself as he felt how Poe trembled and made quite a mess between them.

When they broke the kiss, Poe was panting, but that didn’t mean that he was tired just yet – not really. Now it was his turn, and as he pulled down Finn’s pants in return, Finn was excited to just let it happen.

Poe didn’t need to be told what to do, for Finn was left breathing heavily and biting his lip as he tried not to make a sound of approval as Poe jerked him off. He wanted to moan and cry out in happiness, but kept quiet instead, glad when Poe’s lips were on his so that he could show how eager and pleased he was with what Poe was doing to him.

“Poe,” he whispered hoarsely as he was about to come, and immediately he felt how Poe’s lips were on his, shutting him up like he had shut him up as well, and he felt a little guilty about leaving such a mess in Poe’s bed when he finally came.

As they lay besides each other a minute later, they were both a complete mess – and not just literally.

Finn felt great – like he had finally accomplished something in this godforsaken place. He actually felt good about being there for his lover – though he did not realize immediately that there were actually a dozen different ways to be there for someone who was hurting – and this had possibly been the worst way to be there for Poe.

Poe felt guilty – like he had again proven how incapable he was of making wise decisions. It wasn’t that he felt guilty for loving Finn – for he did love Finn more than he had loved anyone in years, and he still wanted love more than anything. But at the same time he realized that keeping the truth from Finn was probably going to bite him in the arse – things like that always did. And jerking off with Finn had not uncomplicated the situation with Jess one bit.

For a few glorious minutes his brain had relaxed and his lusts and desires had been sated, but as his mind returned to the ward he was in, he realized that he hadn’t made progress at all.

“I love you,” Finn whispered in his ear, hugging him close, and once more there were tears in Poe’s eyes – but this time Finn did not notice that.

When he replied, he didn’t lie. He always tried to be truthful – he just kept quiet about those things that he could not discuss. And those things that were left unspoken between them were already beginning to eat him alive.

“I love you too, Finn…”

Pressing a gentle kiss to his forehead, Poe held him close in return. He couldn’t come clean – not when he knew he could lose Finn forever. That was one sacrifice he was unwilling to make.
As the alarm went off, Phasma was the first out of bed, and while she took a shower, Hux had the time to slowly wake up as well.

It had been a short night – not just because of the sex – but because their evening shift was immediately followed by a morning one. They had gotten home at eleven and now it was six and they were up again so that they could be at work around seven.

It certainly wasn’t a glamorous way to live, but as Hux entered the bathroom as well, he took the utmost care in making himself look absolute perfect. Not just for himself – but also for Phasma. She deserved the best – and though he thought quite highly of himself in some ways, he no longer thought of himself as perfect boyfriend material, quite the opposite. But he was always willing to follow her lead and to do anything she asked of him – and he was good at that – and he was appreciated for that – and that was enough.

As she wrapped a towel around herself when she climbed out of the shower, Hux let an approving gaze travel over her body, and she seemed amused by this, smirking as she gave him a kiss on the cheek – her wet hair tickling his skin.

As she dried herself off – not hiding anything from him – he bit his lip, once more approving what he saw, and Phasma smirked because of it.

She had told him a few nights before that she believed a man’s next orgasm started the moment his last one had ended, and as she had explained how she believed that teasing a man relentlessly throughout the day only made his orgasms better, she had tried to do just that. Though, he had to be honest, not at work.

That was one thing that had to be said: work wasn’t sexy. At all.

And they kept it professional. More professional at least than those days before they had ended up in bed together. There were no more stolen kisses and also less flirting than before, but at work, he had seldom felt as strongly about them. They had always been a team, but right now the trust between them could not be rivaled by anyone.

And though the situation at the moment was difficult, they were doing well. Though Jess and Poe were having a rough time, at least the others were alright. Kylo hadn’t been as stable in years, Rey was making great progress opening up to others, Wexley’s medication really seemed to be helping him properly this time and Finn seemed reasonably happy. Lor San was always the same, but that was alright.

All in all, the situation was under control.

They drove to work in their separate cars, still a little paranoid about any colleagues finding out, and once inside, they didn’t talk of themselves or their unforgettable nights together. All they discussed, were their patients, and they both felt good about it. They were able to separate their relationship from their work, and they both hoped it would remain that way.

As Hux woke the men, he felt confident. He had no idea that Finn and Poe had spent most of their night together – or that Kylo had been awake for hours, grinning to himself as he remembered the
small moment before bedtime where he had been allowed to look at Rey through her window –
shirtless and beautiful and too inspiring for him to sleep at all.

He took an extra-long shower, realizing he wasn’t the only one as he heard several of the other men
in the cubicles nearby. Though Finn was singing, Poe was very quiet, and even more so as he
shaved himself, not even looking at Kylo while he passed by.

It was unusual to say the least. Poe always had his attention on everything, but now he seemed too
distracted to even notice Kylo, and even Snoke noticed it.

Something’s up with him. Something bad.

Kylo feared Snoke was right, but could not let it ruin his day as he shaved as well and then dressed
and headed into the living room, finding Rey in the kitchen, where she was gathering the pots of
jam and marmite and Nutella to put on the tables.

As Kylo entered the kitchen as well, he grinned eagerly, and pressed a kiss to her forehead as she
smiled at him, blushing a little.

“Good morning,” Kylo said gently, and she was still blushing quite a bit as she looked at him.

“Hey…”

They were both uncertain what to say as they looked at one another, though they recognized the
shy and excited gaze in each other all too well.

“Sleep well?” Rey finally managed to ask, glad she had come up with something to ask him about.

“Better than ever,” he replied immediately, and this made Rey avert her eyes again as she took it as
a compliment.

“And thank you,” he continued honestly, bravely ignoring Snoke’s voice as he urged Kylo not to
make a fool of himself. He didn’t mind making a fool of himself in front of Rey as much. She liked
him no matter what. He kept his voice down as he said: “Next time Poe teases me about not having
seen any tits, I’ll just tell him I saw yours.”

Rey nearly dropped the pots of jam out of her hands as he said that, her gaze startled as she looked
at him, and he chuckled.

“She’s joking, Rey!” he quickly added, reaching out to her before any of the pots could slip from her
arms. He grinned happily. “It was just a joke.”

She relaxed visibly at that, laughing as well.

“Don’t worry, your secret’s safe with me,” he added with a wink, and she smiled again before they
both headed to the living room, where they put the pots on all of the tables.

As Phasma entered after having just checked up on Jess, she was glad to see Rey and Kylo seemed
to be in a good mood. Jess wasn’t doing so great, looking rather depressed in-between her fits of
morning sickness.

By the time breakfast began, Jess still wasn’t present, and Lor San grumbled about it.

“Whenever I want to sleep in, I’m always tossed out of the bed. She’s been sleeping in for over a
week. I don’t think that’s fair. She isn’t sick – we all see she’s fine in the evening.”
As Rey sat next to Lor San, she didn’t think that was entirely true. “She isn’t sleeping in though. She’s really sick. I’ve heard her vomit in the toilets several mornings already. I think she’s in a lot of pain – she cries a lot.”

Though Rey’s voice was rather soft, everyone had heard her, including Phasma and Hux, who shot each other an anxious gaze as they realized this was one of the things they had not told the male patients about Jess.

Kylo was quick to deduce what was actually going on, remembering all too well how Jess and Poe had stumbled out of the forest a few weeks earlier. And it made sense now that Phasma and Hux had been present a lot more – and that Jess’s mother had come for a visit. He immediately turned to look at Rey’s table – though he wasn’t looking at Rey, who had no idea that Jess wasn’t “just” sick and who just continued eating her sandwich as though she hadn’t said anything at all.

It was Finn he was looking at, and he could see how he sat frozen in his seat, not moving as he still had his sandwich in his hands, his eyes slowly looking for Poe’s.

Poe didn’t dare to look up, hoping that if he kept his head down, no one would suspect him of anything, but as he thought of Finn and Jess, he couldn’t stop the tears that came to his eyes. He hoped no one saw it as he wiped them away, still not daring to look around.

But Finn had seen, and it felt like a punch to his gut. Part of him wanted to storm out and go to his room – but that would be suspicious and he hadn’t wanted anyone to know about him and Poe. Now he wished he could take him and Poe back – all of it – even if he felt how the thought alone already broke his heart into a million pieces.

Several people looked up when Phasma’s phone suddenly rang, and as she reached out for her mobile that she kept in the back of her pants, she frowned as she saw who it was.

“Kanata,” she softly said to Hux, who nodded as a signal that she could go and hear what it was about while he’d watch over the others.

As Phasma headed into the hallway, she answered her phone.

“Hey Maz,” she said immediately. “Anything wrong?”

She already feared the answer, knowing that Maz was unlikely to call so early in the morning unless something was up.

“I’m afraid so. I just got a call from the director. Apparently Jess’s parents are at the main building right now, sorting Jess’s discharge.”

Phasma was paralyzed for a moment. “Discharge?” she repeated after a few moments, feeling completely numb as she stood still in the hallway now. “They’re taking her home?”

“I’m not even sure. I assume so, but I have no details yet.”

“What about the baby? Or Poe?”

“Phasma, I wish I had more news, but at this moment I just want to give you a head’s up. I heard that administration is stalling a bit to give you some time to get Jess ready for this. But these people don’t like to be kept waiting and they’re already quite annoyed that they’re being kept sitting around while others arrange their paperwork.”

“Ok,” Phasma said immediately, figuring that she could not lose any time then.
“I am coming over, but I need at least twenty more minutes before I’m there. I’m going to try to intercept her parents before they leave the main building. You make sure that Jess is ready to travel and her bags are packed.”

“Will do,” Phasma said, her mind made up that she would do the best she could in these circumstances. As she hung up the phone, she immediately headed back to the living room, telling Hux with nothing more but a gaze that she wanted to talk to him in the girl’s corridor.

As he got up and followed her, he shot her a questioning gaze, and she told him what Kanata had told her.

Unlike her, he didn’t seem to feel an ounce of panic, his gaze determined as he received this news.

“What about Poe?” he asked though, realizing that closure would be difficult for his patient if Jess was to disappear from their lives completely.

Phasma didn’t know what to say and just shook her head, and as Hux realized how much she hated this, he once more put his hands on her shoulders.

“It will be alright,” he said once more. “You go to Jess and get her ready. I’ll tell Poe the moment they’re done with breakfast. Go.”

She nodded bravely, glad for his words of encouragement as she made her way to Jess’s room, where she knocked twice before she entered, seeing that Jess was surprised by her visit at this time.

“I have some news for you,” Phasma began, offering Jess a hopeful smile, and she saw how Jess responded positively to that smile, her lips curling up as well as she looked at her Keeper.

Phasma hated the thought that what she now brought as good news could turn out to be a horrible mistake.

“Your family is arranging your discharge right now.”

Jess’s mouth dropped, but then she suddenly smiled widely, tears of joy coming to her eyes.

“I’m going home?”

Phasma gulped – not sure what to say – and in that one moment of hesitation, Jess’s expression dropped.

“Where am I going?” she asked, her gaze stern now.

Phasma shook her head honestly. “I don’t know, to be honest. I only know your parents are here right now, and you won’t be staying with us any longer.”

As Jess recognized the sadness in Phasma’s eyes, she turned quite sad in return. “When will they be here?”

“Soon. In about an hour, is my guess.”

Tears were streaming down Jess’s face now. “But what about Poe and the others? Won’t I see them again?”

“Maybe one day,” Phasma offered hopefully. “When they get discharged… But you can always call them in the evenings. Your parents have the number to the ward.”
Though Jess had wanted to leave so often – this was not how she had imagined it – and she suddenly found herself walking over to Phasma, hugging her tightly as she cried.

“What about the baby?” she asked. “What’s going to happen to us now?”

Phasma wished she knew, but she honestly had no idea what was going to happen next, and she just embraced Jess tighter because of it, hoping with all her heart that things would turn out just fine.

As Jess cried, Phasma gently stroked her hair, hoping the girl would be alright despite everything. As she gently pushed Jess back by the shoulders after a few minutes, she said: “Let’s pack your things, alright? And when we’re done, we’ll go and tell the others.”

After breakfast, Poe had returned to his room straight away, rushing out of the living room before he could have looked at Finn, and when he suddenly heard a knock on his door just a moment after he had arrived, he grunted. He didn’t want to talk to anyone right now, and so he kept quiet until the door opened regardless, and in some way he was relieved to see it was Hux.

“We need to talk,” the Keeper announced, walking in straight away. “Jess’s parents are here. They’re at the main building now, but once they arrive here, they’re taking her with them.”

Poe honestly had not seen that coming. “She’s leaving?”

Hux just nodded, watching Poe wrap his head around this.

“Is she getting an abortion?” he wanted to know immediately, knowing that that was what Jess had feared – that her father would push for one. At the same time, he could not deny that he actually felt some relief at the thought, though it was simultaneously the saddest thing he had ever experienced.

“We don’t know,” Hux replied truthfully. “But once we do, we’ll let you know. But if there is anything you still wish to say to Jess, then now is the time to think of it, Poe. You might not get another shot at this for a long time.”

As Poe realized how little time there was left for a proper goodbye, he felt very sad. Jess had deserved better.

When Hux left again, he gazed out his door, realizing that Finn’s was closed now – while it had been open when he had passed it a moment earlier. It meant that Finn didn’t want to talk to him – and perhaps that was a good thing, though the ache in his chest felt like the worst thing in the world to him.

But he forbade himself to think of Finn for now. Jess was leaving – and she was taking their unborn child with them. It was such a strange thought, but it hurt none the less.

He waited on his bed with the door open until he heard female voices in the corridor. It were Jess and Phasma, and they were saying goodbyes. He could hear Wexley and Lor San talking to her, wishing her well, and the moments of silence as they hugged each other.

Poe heard Kylo’s deep voice next, wishing Jess the best in a sincere tone, though he sounded a bit relieved as well. He had never been a fan of Jess – and Jess hadn’t been a fan of Kylo either, just like Poe had never really liked the guy.
Then they came to his door, but they skipped it, even though it was open, in favor of saying goodbye to Finn instead.

As Phasma explained that Jess was leaving, Finn’s voice sounded firm and unemotional – which made Poe realize just how badly he had fucked up.

“Rumor has it you’re pregnant?”

“Afraid so.”

“And Poe knows?”

“Told him yesterday evening.”

Poe buried his face in his hands – wishing for the silence that followed to end. Eventually it was Finn who spoke.

“Are you keeping the baby?”

Now Jess was quiet, before Phasma replied in her stead: “The decision hasn’t been made yet.”

“I wish you all the best, Jess. I truly mean that. Whatever comes next.”

“Thanks Finn.”

As they hugged, there was a brief silence, before Finn’s door closed again and Phasma knocked on Poe’s door as well. Poe was up immediately, looking rather rough as he saw Jess standing there, her bag in Phasma’s hands.

They both didn’t know what to say – even though Poe had wanted to say so much, and instead he asked: “Can I carry your bag for you?”

Phasma realized that this was perhaps a good thing. It was clear that Poe wanted a little bit more time with her, and it wasn’t like Jess’s parents had already arrived. He could keep them company and perhaps they could talk some things through some more – it could give them both closure.

As Jess looked up at Phasma for approval, the Keeper nodded, and Poe eagerly took Jess’s bag as they headed down the hallway, where Phasma opened the door with her keys.

Upon entering the smaller hallway, Poe set down the bag, not going too far away from the door while Phasma closed it behind them again.

“So your family is finally coming to get you huh?” Poe tried to say cheerfully, but his own misery was rather clear from his tone.

“Yeah… guess I should have gotten pregnant sooner,” she tried to joke, though she knew it was a horrible joke, but they both grinned because of it.

“No idea yet where you’re going?”

He also looked at Phasma, who shook her head.

“None yet,” Jess replied. “But I hope I’m finally going home… I think I’ve been behaving a lot better lately… Though pregnancy is probably going to be a struggle. Emotions are very strange when hormones act up. I hope my parents won’t grow sick of me again.”
Poe hoped they didn’t, but wouldn’t be surprised if they did.

“If they won’t have you anymore, I hope you return here,” Poe said honestly. “Not just for… you know… our times together… But just… I feel like I have so much to make up to you now. If there is anything I can do… Anything at all…”

Jess had some tears in her eyes, but smiled despite them.

“Just give me a big hug.”

As they hugged, Phasma tried not to look at them, realizing that she wasn’t really needed there – but she couldn’t let them alone either. Instead, she wished she was a little smaller so she could hide more easily.

They stood there hugging for a few minutes, until they heard a car pull up in front of the building and let go of each other.

Jess nervously lifted her bag and fixed her hair as she waited for her parents to enter the building.

Poe wasn’t certain what to do now. He had wanted to say goodbye to Jess, but he honestly had not wanted to meet Jess’s parents. Realizing he could not get out now that Phasma was not paying him any attention, he gulped.

As Kanata walked in with Jess’s parents, both still quite young, not much older than Poe at all, he realized how upset they looked.

“Mom, dad!” Jess said hopefully, heading to them both for a hug, and though her mother didn’t mind returning the hug, it wasn’t particularly warm. Her father ignored her completely and instead had his eyes on Poe.

“Are you the bloke that got her pregnant?” he asked immediately, his gaze strict, and at this Poe froze completely.

He honestly didn’t know what to say, and upon realizing this, Jess suddenly cut in: “No, dad. He’s just a friend.”

Though her father seemed to lose his interest in Poe, Poe felt some panic within. Wasn’t she going to admit he was the father to her parents? But then how was he ever going to take any responsibility towards the child if her parents couldn’t know?

Phasma and Kanata exchanged a meaningful gaze as well, both not at ease as they witnessed this.

“Are we going home?” Jess asked hopefully, and at this her parents were quiet for a while, until her mother said: “For now, yes.”

Jess paused, realizing something was up. “For how long then?”

“That depends,” her father said. “If you go for an abortion and you’re stable, you can stay with us as long as your behavior is alright.”

Jess hadn’t expected such an honest reply – and frankly it wasn’t something she had wanted to hear.

“And if I’m not stable?” she asked in a small voice. “I return here?”

“Jess, you’re never returning here,” her mother said strictly. “We hoped that these people could
sort you out – and now look what mess you’re in.”

“But I am sorted out!” Jess said fiercely. “I’ve been clear of any drugs for as long as I’ve been here – and I’m honestly fine without them!”

“But you still have bipolar disorder and poor judgement and character. How else would you have gotten pregnant?” her mother argued, though it was in a soft tone, though the message was harsh enough.

Help came from an unexpected corner as Poe suddenly spoke up again, hating the tone in which these adults spoke to Jess. “She is so much more than just the collection of the things she was ever diagnosed with. She’s funny and witty and brave – and more loving towards her parents than they deserve.”

“Mind your tongue,” her father warned Poe, but Poe never managed to heed any warnings in time.

“Why?” he asked harshly. “Are her parents here then? All I see are two people who are eager to dump her in her next institution the moment they think they can blame her for it – so that they can have some peace of mind and not be consumed by guilt about it.”

“My!” her mother said, unable to say more as she was too baffled by how rudely Poe addressed them, and Jess’s father was fuming.

Jess herself was crying, though she wasn’t sure if she was grateful to Poe or not for reminding her of the truth. Believing that her parents actually wanted her back was still what she preferred to believe herself.

Maz and Phasma, however, kept quiet, secretly enjoying how Poe managed to voice everything that they could not get away with.

“She is an adult, whether you like it or not,” Poe added. “And the decision whether she keeps the baby should be hers – and not something she makes in order to stay home with you guys. I bet that the moment you’re alone, you’ll tell her that if she doesn’t get rid of the baby, she needs to go back to an institution. I can already guess what she’ll choose, and I can also already guess how you guys won’t keep her around for long regardless of any of that.”

“What gives you the right?” her father suddenly shouted, his face red as a tomato as he looked at Poe.

“Poe, that’s enough,” Phasma now said, realizing that if she didn’t cut in, aggression could possibly follow sooner than they could deescalate. She honestly didn’t want her patient to walk around with a black eye for the rest of the week.

Poe respected his Keeper enough to listen to her, but now it was Jess’s turn to calm down her father as well, and she said: “Father, I’ll get the abortion if you think that’s what’s best for me.”

Poe couldn’t believe what he was hearing, and though her father seemed to calm down at those words, his anger only grew.

“But that’s emotional blackmail!” he spoke up, and Phasma was now opening the door to the ward, realizing that this had not been the best of ideas – to put the man without a filter with those people that already hated the entire institution more than anything for getting their daughter pregnant.

“That’s enough, Poe,” Phasma said once more, holding the door open for him, and though he headed towards her, he turned around once more, looking Jess straight in the eye.
“If you’re going to fall for your parent’s emotional blackmail again, you haven’t learned anything from being in here.” He was angry with her for this, and she was angry with him for talking to her like that.

“What I’ve learned from this place is that this is no way to live at all,” Jess replied in an annoyed tone. “Family will always be family though – and I wish to spend my time with mine.”

“At what cost?” Poe replied. “Besides, if they’re so fond of family, why do they insist you get rid of the one member of the family that you have made yourself?”

“Poe,” Kanata cut in strictly, and she took him by the elbow as she guided him back into the ward as quickly as she could. She immediately closed the door behind them and as her strict gaze fell away, she shot him an honest and compassionate gaze instead. “You’re brave for speaking up,” she said in a low voice. “And I certainly don’t disagree with certain parts of your assessment… But I don’t want you to get punched in the face, alright?”

Poe nodded, still angry, but understanding the doctor’s point of view as well. He regretted not being able to say anything else to Jess’s family, for he certainly had a lot more he wanted to speak up about.

“Go cool down a bit,” she suggested, and as Poe nodded again, she returned back into the hallway, where she was witness to Phasma and Jess saying goodbye with an emotional hug, and then to her parents leaving without a word to either Phasma or Kanata. No thanks – not even a goodbye – not for the people who had spent years taking care of their daughter instead of them.

Jess waved and smiled bravely, but Kanata wondered if she had learned anything at all during her stay here. These parents weren’t ready or willing to give her the attention she wanted, and if Jess couldn’t get positive attention, she’d make sure she’d get negative attention soon enough. Maybe she wouldn’t turn to drugs this time, but to something else that was equally destructive. It just didn’t feel right to Kanata, and Phasma felt the same.

As she linked her arm with Kanata’s, they could both feel how tense they really were. These weren’t the best of memories that they were making today.

“This isn’t going to end well, is it?” Phasma asked softly, not really wanting an answer, and so Kanata remained quiet for a while. Eventually the doctor sighed and muttered: “We can’t fool ourselves, Phasma, these things never have fairy tale endings.”

Chapter End Notes

Yes, yes, I know. It's been years. No, I don't think my updates will be regular again, if many more will follow. This particular chapter was written back in 2016 as well. But I was rereading the story and then I got curious about what else was left in my word file and I saw this one was finished, so I decided to post it. I must thank you all for the warmth of your comments that you left on each and every chapter. Terribly sorry about abandoning the story. I have too many long stories that are WIPs. The "short" stories, less than 50 000 words, usually always get finished. But those that are over? Man, it's like I'm cursed. I have so many I wish to finish, but it's hard. Wish me luck, please don't be mean, that doesn't encourage me either, and cross your fingers that the muse will return for this story.
“… and they lived happily ever after.”

As Kylo closed the picture book, Rey sighed happily, looking at him with a dreamy gaze.

“I really liked that story,” she admitted. “The way she was able to fall in love with a monster, who then turned into a handsome and loving prince, and the way he understood her like no one else…”

“It is quite romantic, in a way,” Kylo admitted playfully, his eyes twinkling as he looked into Rey’s, seeing how she seemed a little shy to talk about this story.

He liked to read fairy tales and other stories of romance to her while they sat outside in the afternoons and evenings. Discussing romance wasn’t easy for her, but he quite liked to expose her to these sorts of stories, hoping it would strengthen the romantic feelings between them in return – and so far, it seemed to be working – at least for him. He fell more in love with her with each passing day.

“You’re like the Beast, in a way,” she said softly, her smile quite shy as she didn’t dare to look at him. “The way you can get angry sometimes, but not at me…”

“It is true,” he agreed, shrugging lightly. “A part of me fears that I’ll lash out at you at some point, but it is the last thing I want in the world. And like Belle did to Beast, you calm me and give me meaning in life. I’ve been here for years, but only since I met you have I believed I can actually get out of here if I work hard enough… In that way, you have broken a curse.”

Rey smiled proudly, taking the book from his hands as she opened it and looked through the pictures.

“I am a little bit like Belle, I guess,” she continued. “I do like books. But unlike Belle, I’m not so good at reading.”

“Oh, but you will be!” Kylo encouraged her. “You are learning so fast! And there are still so many great fairy tales to read. I’ll read them all to you, but you can also read them along with me, if you like. I wouldn’t mind listening to you as you read.”

She had a small blush on her face as he praised her so, and she rather looked forward to reading with him. For now, however, that had to wait, for doctor Kanata opened the door to the courtyard. As always, she had a radiant smile on her face – which they returned with gentler smiles of their own.

“Kylo, could you join me in my office? It’s time for our weekly talk.”

He immediately nodded and got up, but not before he had offered Rey a playful wink.

“See you soon!”

“Good luck!” she replied, already missing him.
Doctor Kanata’s office had never been one of his favorite places in the ward. It still wasn’t, but for once, he was smiling as he sat in the chair opposite the doctor’s desk, and Kanata noticed it.

“You seem in a good mood today,” she began, her gaze bright in return. “What has lifted your spirits?”

Kylo was practically blushing as he averted his eyes, but he realized that lying would not work, not to Kanata at least.

“Rey. But I guess you already knew that.”

“Oh, how so?” she replied innocently, but Kylo knew her a bit longer than today.

“Because you’ve been asking me about her since the day she arrived, and you know I care for her, and you know I’m in love with her.”

Though Kylo had admitted to having feelings for Rey before in Kanata’s office, it was the first time he had spoken it out loud in such a self-assured and certain way, and the doctor truly was proud of him for doing that.

“And just love is enough to lift your spirits?” she asked him, and though Kylo hesitated at first, he nodded afterwards.

“I think so. Because I think it’s mutual, in some way.”

“In some way?”

Kylo realized that he should not have said that. Kanata always mirrored his own words back to him, confusing his intent each time, and it was something he didn’t really appreciate. It reminded him of Snoke, though Kanata was quite the opposite of Snoke at the same time. She didn’t instigate him in the same way. At least she always tried to calm him instead of anger him.

“I think she feels the same for me as I feel for her,” he continued. “But I’m never quite certain. I mean, you would need to ask her.”

“You would not ask her yourself?” the doctor wondered, and Kylo immediately shook his head.

“No, because I don’t think she’s ready for that yet.”

Doctor Kanata remained quiet for a few moments as she looked at him from behind her glasses, her expression rather neutral, though Kylo thought he saw a familiar twinkle in her eyes.

“Ready for what?” the doctor eventually asked, and Kylo sighed.

“For talking about her own heart’s desires. Nor should she be pushed in that, I think. I want to give her time to figure out what she wants. I just hope – that when she figures it out – I’m part of that.”

“You fear you’re not a part of her vision for the future?”

“I fear I’m not a part of anyone’s vision for the future,” Kylo said darkly, not looking at Kanata as his fingers traced the edges of the wooden armrest of his chair.

“You truly believe that? That Rey does not want you in her future?”
He shrugged. “I don’t know. I wouldn’t be surprised.”

“I think you’re being too hard on yourself again, Kylo. Is this Snoke who is putting those thoughts in your mind?”

“Snoke’s been quiet lately,” Kylo admitted. “I don’t hear him as much as I used to. And he seems to behave rather well now. This… thought… isn’t something Snoke just told me.”

“It is something you believe yourself then?” Kanata continued. “That you’re unwanted in anyone’s future?”

He didn’t hesitate for a second.

“Yes.”

He sat there quietly, his earlier smile completely gone now. He wondered what the use was of coming into Kanata’s office. He had been happy. Now his thoughts were dark again.

Kanata noticed how she had been partly responsible for the drop in her own patient’s attitude and part of her felt guilty for it. But at the same time, she needed to get to the core of all matters with her patients – and people’s cores weren’t often happy places. It certainly wasn’t for Kylo, though she saw hope there now. She hoped she could restore that by the time he left her office.

“I don’t believe that’s true,” Kanata disagreed with him. “I do think people want you in their lives. Rey is one of them.”

“The only one then,” he muttered darkly.

“I’m still not certain about that,” she tried bravely. “You may insist that your parents don’t want you, but as someone who has never spoken to them I want to give them the benefit of the doubt.”

Kylo’s fists were now clenched and he looked at the doctor with a menacing gaze.

“I will not talk about them and you know this,” he reminded her sternly, and though she was slightly intimidated by that gaze, she realized that there had been progress.

She remembered all too well how she had had to call in reinforcements one of the first times she had asked, and he had smashed nearly half her office. She had learned to ask the question with more tact after that, but he had always dismissed anything that related to his parents.

Though she hated to admit it, his childhood was so unclear to her that it was frustrating. Even Rey’s childhood was clearer to her, and Rey had hardly told her anything.

She had puzzled together a few things though. He was American – something which he never seemed upset about admitting – and something she had seen in his writing as well, when he had spelled specific words in an American way. Though he was often dressed rather poorly as a result of the meager donations he received, he had a sense of style that betrayed that he had had at least a middle class or even higher upbringing. And for some reason, speaking of his parents was off limits to anyone.

She could not help but wonder if Rey had learned more about his parents than she had.

“Let us talk about something else then,” she decided. “About Jess’s departure. You realize why she had to leave?”
Glad for the change of topic, Kylo calmed down again, and he nodded in response to her question.

“She was pregnant with Poe’s kid.”

Kanata turned her head slightly. “I won’t deny that she was pregnant. But why would you say it’s Poe’s doing?”

Kylo only hesitated a brief moment, but he honestly saw no reason to keep it a secret. The damage had already been done, and Jess was gone and so there was no reason to assume that it would happen again.

“I know Poe and Jess spent a great deal of time in the forest together. On the Saturday afternoon before Valentine’s. And not in the mall.”

Kanata had often assumed that patients could use those afternoons off for such things, she had just assumed it unlikely, especially in the middle of winter when it had been so cold outside. She supposed that lust was greater than fear of discomfort or cold.

“Rey will soon be allowed to go out with you,” Kanata continued. “After what happened to Jess, I must admit that we are worried about this situation repeating itself.”

As Kylo realized what the doctor was insinuating, his mouth dropped slightly.

“Doctor, I would never…”

As the doctor’s gaze met his, he was too stunned to continue, and she smiled in an amused way.

“Never fuck her?”

He frowned, clearly upset with this accusation and the crude choice of words.

“Not in a forest, no,” he said stubbornly, averting his eyes as he tried to hide his pink cheeks. “Besides, we’re nowhere near that.”

“No sexual feelings whatsoever?” the doctor wondered, and Kylo kept on frowning as a result.

“I know how to suppress them,” he said. “I’m not like Poe, unable to keep my dick in for a month.”

His disdain for Poe was obvious from his tone, but at least he was honest. As Kanata remained quiet, he was the one to continue talking.

“I’ve survived this long without any sexual relationships. I’ll survive a while longer.”

Kanata smiled. “I think that’s very noble of you, Kylo. But just in case, I do hope you realize you can discuss any questions you may have on that subject with me, or with Hux, in case you feel uncomfortable discussing this with a woman.”

Kylo raised an eyebrow and had to try not to laugh. “With all due respect but I value your opinion on about anything that has to do with human beings more than Hux’s. And I will keep in mind that if I really have questions about sexuality, you can provide me with answers. But for now, I’d say it’s not relevant.”

“Even then,” Kanata said, and she opened her drawer and pulled out a small box which she put in front of him on the table.

He frowned until he realized what it was.
“Condoms?” he asked, hardly believing this was actually happening.

“Are you comfortable discussing your sexuality?” Kanata wondered, and Kylo sighed.

“No, but I didn’t consider my issues to be of a sexual nature and was unaware we needed to discuss that aspect of myself as well,” he replied sarcastically.

She raised her eyebrow in an amused way. Sometimes the way he was able to word his thoughts was very intelligent. Another reason why she thought he’d had a middle-class or higher upbringing.

“Then let me just do the talking for now,” she said gently. “Do with it as you please. I just want to give you the advice to try out a few of those condoms before you actually have sex with someone. Read the paper that comes with it. See if you can put one on. Test what makes a condom rip – so that when you finally have sex – and let’s make it clear, I’m not pushing you, just doing my job – you will at least know what to do with a condom.”

Kylo just stared at her for a few moments, before he said: “You guys are really afraid someone is going to end up pregnant again, aren’t you? Jess must have put you all in a lot of trouble.”

Kanata tried to shrug it off, but even psychologists weren’t always able to hide the truth from their patients, and Kylo wasn’t stupid either.

“If it makes you feel better,” Kylo said darkly. “Rey and I don’t have parents that will sue your asses off in case she gets pregnant.”

Kanata wasn’t laughing – but that was just proof to Kylo that he really knew what was up. He hated being right sometimes.

Kylo hadn’t told Rey anything about his conversation with Kanata – he never did. Nor did Rey ever tell him what she discussed with the doctor. That sort of thing was always private, but he could not help but wonder if Kanata had also told Rey that she needed to be careful not to get pregnant.

Though part of him thought it was ridiculous, another part truly understood the fear that the Keepers had to be feeling now. Jess had been pulled from their care because they had failed her – and now she was most likely going to have to go through an abortion or a pregnancy that she wasn’t ready for. If the child was aborted, that responsibility was on their shoulders. If the child grew up in a horrible family situation, that was on their shoulders as well.

He honestly hoped Jess would abort the kid. He believed children deserved loving parents who wanted to spend time with them – and who were able to take care of the child’s needs. He didn’t think Jess or Poe would qualify as good parents. Not now, at least, and not with each other.

When Rey returned from Kanata’s office, her cheeks were still flushing and she hardly dared to look at him as she sat down on the couch beside him. He had a pretty good idea what had been discussed in Kanata’s office, but didn’t know what to say. He was relieved when she spoke first, though the question surprised him.

As she looked suspiciously at Wexley and Lor San as they sat on the other side of the open space, playing checkers together, she kept her voice down while she asked: “Did you know Jess was pregnant?”
Rey seemed so outraged by the idea alone that Kylo could not help but chuckle. He guessed that he probably should have told her, but he hadn’t wanted to destroy her innocence in any way.

“Yes,” he admitted, keeping his voice down as well. “It was what you said at breakfast that made me realize… When you told everyone Jess had morning sickness.”

As he saw Rey frown, he explained further: “It’s a common thing for pregnant women, to get sick early in the morning. Not sure why it happens, but it’s apparently normal.”

She seemed a little offended by the fact she had not known. “Well I can’t help never having known any pregnant women,” she muttered, and Kylo took her hand to ease her mind.

“Don’t be so harsh on yourself,” he said kindly. “You’ll learn these things in time… You’ll learn everything in time.”

She was surprised by the gentleness in his gaze. She had no idea why, but he was always so terribly kind to her. It was so strange because she was used to cruelty and indifference. Sometimes she wondered if it was just all pretense, and that he was really after something that she did not know about yet.

Doctor Kanata had talked to her about sex – about how she could get pregnant and how she could avoid getting pregnant – and though Rey had not wanted to talk about any of that, she had paid attention as well as she could.

But now that she was with Kylo, she wondered if perhaps he wanted sex more than she had ever realized. Perhaps that was the only reason he put up with her – because he wanted to have sex with her – and the sweet kisses were just something he gave her to ease her into it.

Though she hated that idea, she hated the idea more that she was so curious about it that she would give into it. She had already pulled off her shirt for him once. Out of curiosity. Who knew what she’d do next time?

“I got some good news from doctor Kanata earlier,” Kylo announced, noticing her silence and hoping he could distract her thoughts.

“Oh?”

“Starting tomorrow, I can go to Statura for about two hours a day, for more training of my on the farm.”

Though he was happy about that, all that Rey heard was that she was going to have to miss him for two hours each day, and her expression fell.

He noticed it immediately and inched a little closer to her, taking both her hands in his as he forced her to look into his eyes.

“Don’t be sad, Rey… This can be a very good thing for us. If I can keep on doing this and learn all I can, then I’m one step closer to a job once I get out of this ward.”

She was still mostly upset for herself, though she realized that that was very unfair to him, and she tried to smile instead. She had noticed how he had said it would be good for them – plural – not just for himself – and now she felt even more selfish.

“And to make up for the time apart, we can spend Saturday afternoons together now,” he said hopefully. “I’ll take you to the mall. We can go have ice creams and waffles.”
“Just that?” she asked quietly, not looking up at him as she looked at their joined hands.

“What else?” he replied, and as he saw her shrug, he could not help but wonder what was going through her mind.

“Apparently people have sex on Saturday afternoons. Patients, at least.”

Kylo raised his eyebrows, wondering what on earth Kanata had told Rey.

“Rey, we’re not going to have sex in the forest just because two idiots did that sort of thing,” he whispered, hoping Wexley and Lor San couldn’t overhear any of that.

As she looked up at him, she saw that he was serious, and it relaxed her a little bit.

“Poe got Jess pregnant, but that’s not us,” he assured her. “They were like… into sex and that stuff before they even came here. To me, it’s not important, and I don’t want my first time to be in the middle of a cold forest.”

The more he spoke, the more he relaxed her, and Rey felt relieved to hear him say these things out loud. She had been wrong to doubt him. He was still the same Kylo she had gotten to know, and Kanata had just made her fear that perhaps he had other intentions with all her talk of protection and consent.

“Good,” she decided, keeping quiet for a few moments before she suddenly said: “But I will miss you when you are gone. I want to come with you.”

Kylo hated to admit it, but he loved hearing those words. It made him feel wanted, and that was rare to him.

He pressed a kiss to the side of her head and smiled.

“The reason I get to go to Statura is because I really want to learn more about farming and taking care of animals and such. Kanata said it’s good to pursue my passions. And you just need to find your passion. They might be able to find you a job or something so you can get some experience.”

She was quiet at those words. Talking of passions was always frightening to her. There were several things she liked to do, like reading – and some she loved to do – like running. But that didn’t mean that she thought she could get a job involving those things, least of all on their small domain.

He noticed her silence and realized that talking about her passions always ended with her sitting there very quietly. He had to stop bringing up that topic of discussion. She hadn’t figured those things out yet, and he honestly did not know what he could do to help her on this journey of self-discovery.

Trying to distract her, he asked: “So… are we on for ice cream and waffles on Saturday?”

Rey smiled at that question, immediately squeezing his hand. “Of course! I can’t wait!”

Chapter End Notes

Gonna try and finish this story. Been working hard on continuing it. Chapter 23 might
be a while. I'm at 8000 words for it, which is too long, so I'm gonna need a lot of editing and maybe putting some stuff in chapter 24, not sure yet. But let's hope the muse sticks this time, and that I can progress the story with another 50K words or so - that would already please me. If I can do that, I should be able to see it through to completion, though it might take a while. Wish me luck!
Phasma had to admit that the mind-blowing sex was perfectly capable of keeping her mind off graver matters.

As she rolled off him, she was still panting, her brain incapable of consistent thought. The first thing she noticed was how Hux had already wrapped his arms around her – and how satisfied his gaze was as he looked at her. She’d seldom seen him happier.

He was the perfect lover – even if she didn’t entirely understand his submissive side, and as she thought about that, it seemed like he picked up on it.

“What’s on your mind?” he wondered quietly, smiling at her. “You’re frowning.”

She couldn’t help but smirk.

“Just thinking about you.”

“With such a frown?” he asked teasingly. “Have I upset you?”

Though the question sounded playful, his gaze was serious, and she leaned in to give him a sweet kiss on the lips, which almost left him purring.

“No, you haven’t upset me in a long time,” she said honestly, reminding how often he had driven her up the wall when their relationship hadn’t been… this. “But I have to admit…”

She was quiet for a few moments, trying to get her thoughts together, but he was impatient.

“What?”

She looked at him apologetically.

“I don’t really understand why you’re always leaving me in charge of this. I mean… I always need to give you approval and stuff – and it’s not like I haven’t noticed that it’s only in our relationship that you’re like that.” She gulped before she bravely continued: “I have the impression that you love bossing people around outside of the bedroom, and that you have no trouble taking the lead in any other situation. But in bed… It’s not something I’m used to. There’s not really much room for surprises if you always ask me everything in advance. Why don’t you trust your instincts? I’m sure I’d love whatever you would choose to do.”

She hadn’t looked at him during most of her response, but now that she did, she noticed how his gaze seemed far away, and his expression was cold.

“It’s just my preference,” he replied briefly, almost as though that concluded the conversation, but her frown was back in full force at that.

“And my preferences don’t matter?”

At that his strict gaze broke again, and he seemed a little afraid as he looked at her – afraid to lose her.
“Of course they do! They mean the world to me. That’s why I make sure you approve of everything I do.”

She calmed at that, but still something nagged at her. “But like… every time?”

“Every time,” he insisted stubbornly.

She was quiet at that, and he looked at her for a few moments.

“Are you mad at me?” he asked.

She shook her head, sighing. “No, how could I be mad at you? You’re the perfect boyfriend. What you’ve done the past weeks – after Jess left…”

“Hey,” he said a little stricter. “No work-talk in the bedroom.”

She chuckled at that. “I know, I won’t start. It’s just… It’s been a rough couple of weeks. And you’ve cooked for me and helped me clean and you let me stay at your place and you always pick the right movies to watch and the right things to say and you’ve just… You’ve been a true tower of strength to me.”

He was beaming at those words, and as he kissed her cheek, he whispered: “You’ve always been mine.”

She could not resist kissing him in that moment – feeling like no man had ever been more right to her than Hux had been. She regretted not being able to take this relationship out in the open – not yet, at least. Maybe once all the Jess-drama died down a bit, and things got back to normal, she’d feel comfortable telling Kanata and Thanisson about it. Right now it would shake things up, and the situation at work was frail and stressful enough as it was.

Though she didn’t know all about it, she had heard the news that Jess’s parents were suing the institution. Though it was unlikely that it would cost them their jobs, it could cost Kanata’s, since she was the one in charge of their group. And Kanata was as good as they came – and so Phasma was offended by the idea of losing one of her beloved colleagues due to the stubbornness of some adults that had never even visited their daughter but were now blaming everything that had gone wrong on the people in charge of the ward. It infuriated her.

He could see her mind wander off, and noticed how she started to worry again. To stop her from those negative thoughts, he kissed her cheek, and he whispered in her ear: “Shall I make you come again?”

She chuckled at his playful tone.

“Hux, you don’t need to ask each time!”

He took it as a yes.

The mornings in the ward were getting back to their usual rhythm. All keepers knew it wouldn’t last though, because with Jess gone, another patient would soon enough get assigned, and one never knew what to expect. It would shake things up again, and group dynamics would inevitably shift.
Rey’s arrival hadn’t had too much impact on the group – but it had turned Kylo’s life around in a very positive way. Her calm personality also made it unnecessary for sensitive patients like Finn and Lor San to respond badly to her. Whether the next patient would have an equally positive effect on other members of the group, remained to be seen.

While Hux sat at the Keeper’s table, writing notes in the journal as he observed his subjects, he heard Kylo tell Rey about his new job, and he couldn’t help but glance up as he saw how they sat together in the sofa, close enough to hold hands – but not particularly clingy in other regards. They were the epitome of innocence to him, and he knew that Phasma got a big kick out of that sometimes.

“It’s all very interesting, and hard work at times,” Kylo told her with a small smile. “Cleaning out the bunny cages is hardly any work compared to taking care of the goats. But it’s good work. I like it. It makes me stronger and goats are great.”

Rey smiled encouragingly.

“Next time I’ll show you!” he offered eagerly, but she winced at that.

“I still don’t like goats,” she said apologetically.

“That’s alright,” he said warmly. “Spring is on its way, and soon enough there will be baby goats. You’ll love the babies, I’m sure of it. Besides, you don’t need to be afraid of them. They can’t really hurt you. No one has ever died from a goat, I think. Not even from a big or angry one! We’re stronger than them.”

She considered that, and hesitated before she admitted: “Most animals I encountered before I came here were dogs. I don’t like them. At all. They bark and sniff and try to bite – and some run faster than me.” She shivered as she thought about that, and Kylo sat a little closer to her in the couch.

“Dogs have nastier bites than goats, so I don’t think your fear of dogs is silly – at all – they can be scary and dangerous. Statura says he would love to invest in some sheep and get a proper shepherd’s dog, like a border collie. That would be a nice dog – not vicious or dangerous. But I don’t think that’s really going to happen though.” He sighed, clearly disappointed.

“Why not?”

“Money,” he replied wisely. “It’s not like this institution is swimming in it. It would be a big investment.”

“Are they that expensive?”

“The dog? Not sure, but they’re not cheap. As for the sheep, they aren’t that overly expensive. Like… I dunno. Seventy pounds a head, maybe? But veterinary bills are high, and they would need a decent shed or stable – and it’s the latter that would be too expensive to build, and the rest of the farmhouse is rather full.”

As Hux listened to Kylo, he figured how good it was that Kylo had found a passion – and someone to pursue his passions for. Rey was encouraging him and the first person Kylo seemed to want to leave the ward for. He had never been motivated to go out before or to push his comfort zone, but thanks to Rey, he could not wait to get better.

Lor San, for example, had never desired to leave the ward – he had never had a reason to. It was nice to see that Kylo would not follow in his footsteps after all.
Hux wondered if Kylo wouldn’t make it out before Rey now. Though Rey had an easy personality, she had no particularly useful skills in the outside world and hadn’t progressed in a notable way. She was still closed – still secretive about her past – and only opened up to Kylo. While Kylo was expanding his knowledge and experience, Rey wasn’t, and it was something that bothered him a bit. Rey never took the lead – except when she ran – and she was quiet and submissive in order not to draw attention to herself. Nothing negative could be said about her, but she wasn’t standing out or improving either.

He would most certainly talk to Phasma about it.

He startled when Lor San suddenly tapped him on the shoulder. The man – old as he was – could sneak up so quietly that it often left Hux jumping, though Hux didn’t need to guess why he was there.

“Time for your cigarette?” Hux asked, and Lor San gently grumbled.

“It’s ten. It’s ten,” he mumbled, pointing to the clock, and Hux got up from his seat and walked to the large cupboard.

Finn was reading a newspaper nearby, not looking up from it, but not really turning any pages either. He was tapping his foot rather nervously – like a man anxious to run, and Hux wondered what was up with him lately. He’d been doing alright before Jess left, but seemed downright depressed these days. Maybe his medication wasn’t working properly anymore? He made a mental note that Kanata needed to be informed of this development. She could up whatever he was having.

Hux was always grateful that Lor San’s cigarettes were rolled by the Keepers of the night shift – something which Madame Connix often did when she was done sorting laundry or labeling new clothes. He was quite disgusted by the stench of nicotine, and glad that he wasn’t the one that needed to roll the cigarettes. When he took the metal cookie tin which held Lor San’s reply, the old patient reached for his smoke so frantically that Hux clumsily dropped it from his hands, and it clattered so loudly to the floor that several of the patients gasped. Lor San grumbled loudly as the cigarettes rolled over the ground.

Though everyone in the room had looked up at the loud clanging sound, one person had had quite a different response, and Finn suddenly jumped on Hux, causing him to bang with his face into the cupboard rather painfully, and he couldn’t move away from the cupboard as he felt Finn’s arm holding him in a chokehold. Somehow, and he was glad that he had - the moment he’d been jumped, he had managed to put his fingers between his neck and Finn’s arm, and he was trying his hardest to hold him off.

He knew that if he pushed the button of the alarm on his belt, another Keeper would come and help him – but what he feared was that he wouldn’t be able to let go of Finn’s arm long enough to press the button – there was just too much pressure on his neck and he was already no longer seeing his surroundings clearly. Darkness was falling. He had seconds, and was glad when he heard Rey shout for Phasma – her voice in a panic.

The next moment, he was yanked away – but only because Finn was also being yanked away by Kylo.

“Finn, stop!” Kylo shouted, but Finn didn’t let go. The former soldier seemed to think it was a matter of life and death, and as he continued to choke Hux, Kylo punched Finn hard in his arm, but when that didn’t get a response, he instead punched Finn in the back, and at that, the man suddenly cried out in pain, and he let go of Hux long enough for the Keeper to fall to the floor, gasping for
air as his breath rattled, feeling too weak to even get up.

Finn was convinced Kylo was the enemy now and roared as he turned towards him, but Kylo had the advantage that he was calmer in this situation, and he punched Finn in the face before Finn could return the favor, causing him to drop to the floor.

Hux was able to press his assist button at that time, and as the loud alarm rang, Kylo stood between Hux and Finn, who were both lying on the floor. Lor San had already knelt down by Hux’s side. Not to help Hux, but to put his cigarettes back in the tin.

Finn was groaning as he held onto his nose, seeming very disoriented now.

Phasma ran in with Rey by her side, and as she looked at Kylo standing between one almost unconscious and one barely breathing man, while Lor San was frantically grasping at the hundreds of cigarettes that were spread all around, she wasn’t sure what had happened. Judging from Kylo’s rather calm demeanor, she figured that he hadn’t caused the drama. Finn looked confused, like he had just had an attack, and Hux was rubbing his neck, and Phasma immediately sat down by his side as he stopped the alarm again.

“Are you alright?” she asked, nothing but worry in her tone as she looked at his neck, checking for any bruises, but she could see none - yet.

Wexley and Poe had left their rooms at the sound of the alarm, and as Poe saw Kylo standing next to Finn, who wasn’t looking so good, he immediately felt anger rise within.

“What did you do?!” he demanded to know, but Kylo raised his hands defensively.

“It wasn’t me. He was choking Hux!” he explained immediately. “Thought it was the war or something, I don’t know. I had to punch him to get him off Hux.”

Phasma listened, her hands slightly shaking. She felt angry from frustration – not with Finn or Hux or Kylo – just with the entire situation where they were always undermanned, always in danger, and always left to clean up their own mess.

Hux looked up at Kylo, though he still sat on the floor, feeling a bit dizzy. “Thank you,” he said, his voice hoarse, and as Kylo saw that the gratefulness was sincere, he wasn’t entirely certain how to respond to it.

Poe had in the meanwhile knelt down by Finn’s side and was checking his face for any bruises, noticing how his nose was swelling up a bit. Finn looked away from him though, wanting to ignore him, even in his confusion. As Hux seemed to be alright, Phasma left his side and checked on Finn as well, hearing backup arrive from the corridor.

“Finn, are you alright?” she asked, and though he had tears in his eyes, he nodded once.

Madame Unamo and Mister Canady from forensics ran in, both a little out of breath, and as they saw Finn and Hux on the floor, they immediately wanted to know what had happened.

It was getting a little too crowded – or at least Phasma thought so – and she wanted her patients to disperse from the site of the drama. Hopefully it wouldn’t be hard to get them to leave.

Turning to the one who had kept the coolest head in this situation – ironically – she offered him a smile. “Kylo, are you feeling alright?”

As Kylo nodded in confirmation, she noticed that he really wasn’t shaken up by what had
happened, and she was glad for it.

“It might be best you leave for the farm then. Statura’s waiting for you and I wouldn’t want you to be late.”

He nodded, and as he passed by Rey, he gave her a kiss on her forehead that caused her to smile, and that was another good sign to Phasma.

“Rey, may I ask you to go to your room until we have the situation under control here? You have some books to read?”

As she nodded, Phasma was glad that she was so easy, and she only needed to look at Wexley before he said: “I’ll go to my room, no worries. Take care of Finn.”

Lor San and Poe were another matter though. The former was annoyed, and was still gathering his cigarettes, frustrated that time was ticking and he still hadn’t had his smoke. He was mumbling to himself in frustration.

Poe seemed unwilling to leave Finn’s side, and even had small tears in his eyes. Phasma found that strange since he had missed about everything that had happened. Not just that, but Finn wasn’t mortally wounded, he was alright. Apparently the sight of Finn’s injured nose affected Poe more than seemed logical.

“Lor San, come, I’ll give you a cigarette. Two even, for the delay. Is that alright with you?”

Picking up the cigarettes was forgotten now, and as he crawled up from the floor rather stiffly, Phasma supported him as she walked him outside, where he clung to one cigarette in each hand.

“You have a lighter?” he asked, and as Phasma assured him that she did, he was more than happy to go outside with her.

As she lit his cigarette at the door, he went to sit on the bench on the other side of the courtyard, and she rushed inside again, seeing how Poe remained near Finn as the other Keepers were also looking at him. Canady was a nurse, and was looking at Finn’s nose, not getting to touch it as Poe put his hand on the Keeper’s arm, holding him back.

“Is he going to be alright?” Poe asked, his voice shaky, and Canady gave him a strict look which caused Poe to let go of him immediately, gulping as he realized Canady wasn’t the type of Keeper you wanted to lay hands on.

“Does it hurt badly?” the old Keeper asked Finn, who nodded very weakly.

“Yes,” he said as his fingertips ghosted over his nose. “Is it broken?”

As Canady gently moved his fingers over Finn’s nose to check it, Finn hissed in pain.

“I’m not sure,” Canady said. “It’s bleeding, but not too severely.”

A small drip of blood ran to Finn’s lip, and Unamo took a tissue from one of the dining tables, offering it to Finn so he could hold it against his nose, wincing from the pain the moment he did.

“I would usually recommend someone to pinch the bridge of their nose, but I think you might pass out from the idea alone.” Canady chuckled at his own joke. “Are you feeling dizzy?”

“Just tired,” Finn replied.
“Might not be a bad idea to call doctor Kalonia,” Unamo suggested, and she didn’t just glance at Finn, but also at Hux, who didn’t seem as attentive as usual as he touched his own neck, wincing from the pain as well.

Phasma had followed her gaze and nodded immediately, and with that Unamo was off to make the phone call.

“Think you can get up?” Canady asked Finn, and as he nodded, Canady offered the young man his arm, which Finn gladly leaned on. “Want to wait in the sofa?”

Finn only glanced at Poe for a millisecond, but it still stung Poe as he said: “Rather in my room.”

While Canady walked off with Finn, Poe bit his lip in frustration, not even noticing how Phasma helped Hux up – or how Hux held the cupboard to steady himself – or how she squeezed his hand affectionately while they moved to the Keeper’s table. Once he was sitting there, she left his side to head to Poe.

“Are you alright?” Phasma asked curiously, putting her hand on his shoulder, and he immediately grasped it, squeezing it tightly, as though he needed the support more than anything.

“If I had been here, maybe I could have prevented it,” Poe muttered, but Hux sighed, his voice still strained and quiet while he spoke.

“I doubt it. It happened in a flash. I dropped the tin can, he immediately jumped on me and tried to strangle me. Kylo tried to pull him off – which didn’t work initially. If he hadn’t punched Finn, I’m not sure I would have been conscious right now.”

Hux slowly tried to move his head from left to right and back – relieved that it seemed all was fine for now, but he wasn’t feeling fit enough to get up yet – still a little dizzy from the lack of oxygen a few minutes earlier.

“Poe, maybe you should return to your room as well for now,” Phasma said gently, and though he seemed to want to protest for the briefest moment, he was able to restrain himself before he sighed and headed back to the hallway.

With the patients gone from the living room for the moment, and Unamo and Canady taking care of Finn, Phasma moved to her lover again.

“Are you alright, my dear?” she asked softly, and from the way he glanced at her, she knew that he didn’t want her pity – or to be called ‘dear’ at work – though he didn’t seem upset about it. “I’ll let doctor Kalonia have a look at you too, if you don’t mind.”

“I don’t mind,” he agreed. “I’m sure she’ll affirm I’m alright and that I might feel a bit stiff for the next days.”

She rubbed his shoulder briefly, once again earning a gaze from him that said he did not want that kind of affection at work, and she let go of him with a sad smile.

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“I don’t mind,” he agreed. “I’m sure she’ll affirm I’m alright and that I might feel a bit stiff for the next days.”

She rubbed his shoulder briefly, once again earning a gaze from him that said he did not want that kind of affection at work, and she let go of him with a sad smile.

“I’ll cook tonight,” she whispered, not wanting anyone to accidentally overhear. “I’ll spoil you.”

He did smile at that. “You always spoil me.”

“No, you spoil me,” she argued, winking.

Though she wanted to stay and comfort him, she couldn’t leave the other Keepers alone to look
after her patients, and she returned to Finn’s room.

“Doctor Kalonia is on her way,” Unamo announced from the other side of the hallway, putting her phone away, and as Phasma entered Finn’s room, Canady got up from his seat by the side of Finn’s bed.

She was hardly able to ask Canady how Finn was doing, or another alarm sounded – but this time from further away.

“Fuck,” Canady whispered under his breath. “That’s forensics.”

“Situation’s under control here. Let’s go,” Unamo said, and though Phasma seemed to want to join them, Canady made a sign for her not to move.

“You stay here,” the older Keeper grumbled. “Just in case Hux needs more help – would be unwise to leave him alone. We got this.”

“What kind of a shitty morning is this,” Unamo muttered before she ran off again, and Canady hurried after her.

Phasma wasn’t at ease as she listened to the alarm, but when it turned off a minute later, she felt a little better. If it had endured longer than that, she would have ran to provide assistance as well.

As she sat on the chair next to Finn’s bed, she saw he was holding his head down, with a tissue underneath his nose, not really looking up to her. He appeared to be too lost in thought to even really notice her.

“Are you feeling a little better again?”

As Finn looked at Phasma, she noticed how teary he looked at her.

“I could have killed Hux,” he muttered, nothing but guilt in his tone. “I could be sent to forensics for this.”

Phasma put her hand on his leg and shook her head.

“Finn, we know you’re one of the good guys – not a criminal.”

He didn’t seem to agree and looked miserably at his Keeper.

“But if I had killed him, I would be.”

Phasma shook her head again.

“You didn’t kill him,” she reminded him. “You just had an attack. This is just a setback in your recovery – but you’ll get there!”

He sighed and closed his eyes, not believing that right now.

“I’ve been here for over a year,” he muttered. “I should be getting better – this is worse. For a moment, I wasn’t here. I was there.”

She knew what he was talking about – about a war he wasn’t able to leave, no matter where he went.

“Because of the loud noise of the tin can falling to the floor?” she asked empathically, but Finn
shook his head.

“Not just that,” he said hopelessly. “But Lor San grunted. Like a dying man.” He didn’t wait for Phasma to respond to that and added: “For a moment I thought they’d killed my best friend again – and I just wanted to make them pay.”

The last word had hardly left him, or he started sobbing, and Phasma immediately crawled onto the bed next to him and hugged him tight. He held onto her for a long while as she cradled his head in her hand, and he suddenly looked for some distance as he realized he was bleeding on her shirt now.

“Oh, oh, I’m so sorry,” he said as he put the napkin underneath his nose again, but Phasma honestly didn’t mind.

“It’s alright, don’t apologize,” she said, noticing that it wasn’t a lot of blood. She had washed worse stains from her work clothes.

She sat with him for a long while – assuring him that Hux would be fine – that he would not need to leave the ward – and asking him about the music he liked to listen to. She just wanted to distract him, and luckily, it seemed to work.

When the doorbell rang at the end of the hall a while later, Phasma got up again.

“That must be doctor Kalonia, I’ll let her in.”

Finn nodded and looked at Phasma as she stepped into the hallway, and on the other side he saw Poe’s open door. No doubt about it that he had been listening in on all of that – even if he kept hidden from sight. Finn felt an unnerving mix of anger and sadness whenever he thought of Poe, and he turned his head away as he forbade himself to think of him. That jerk didn’t deserve his thoughts right now, or ever again.

Chapter End Notes

So glad with all your comments, sweeties! <3 Keep them up - I’m feeling the love!

In case anyone wonders what to comment and doesn't know what to say about the story, what I always love hearing is when you read. Are you reading in bed, the hour before you're going to sleep? Are you in a bus heading home? Or are you just reading at work and hiding the browser from your boss? Knowing that, to me, always brings a smile to my face.
Caring Patients

While doctor Kalonia checked up on Finn, Phasma remained with him in the room, and Hux was still waiting in the living room, for once too dazed to get up from his seat.

Never before had he been unable to work. Sickness had never held him back – and he’d never been injured before either – but he felt a little drained right now, and hoped that with some good night’s rest, he’d feel better again. The last thing he wanted, was to fall ill.

Luckily, it was Friday, and he would have two days off anyway, so he hoped he’d be back to his old self by Monday.

Though none of the patients had been given approval to do so, Poe returned to the living room, and he saw how Hux was still seated at the Keeper’s table – like he hadn’t gotten up in a while, and this even struck Poe as odd. Hux wasn’t one for lazing about. Without asking, Poe sat down in the chair opposite him.

In other circumstances, Hux would have demanded of him to leave that chair – since it was for Keepers only, but maybe it was a sign that things weren’t ‘normal’ as Hux didn’t protest.

“Are you alright?” Poe asked, looking at the other man’s neck and seeing how his bruises were turning rather blue. “That looks painful.”

“I’m not feeling super,” Hux admitted – and that too, was a first.

Poe also knew that the Keeper had never had a sick day before, and he wondered if that miraculous day was around the corner then. Though he wanted to joke about asking Phasma to take good care of him, he didn’t. Hux was his Keeper – meaning that if he behaved well towards Hux, Hux would write kind things in his file. If he teased him, Hux could make his life a bigger hell than it already was.

Though he wasn’t a fan of the ginger Keeper, he didn’t wish him ill either, and Poe suggested: “Maybe you should keep your neck warm or something? Do you want me to get one of my scarves for you? It would give you some support.”

“Thank you,” Hux said in a quiet voice, raising his hand a little as a sign he didn’t need to get up for that. “But let’s wait what the Doctor says. If she recommends warmth, I’ll gladly borrow a scarf from you.”

“Even if it clashes with your outfit?” Poe teased him, and at that he earned a rare smile from Hux.

“I know you have a very stylish gray one. I don’t want the brown one,” he said, and Poe mostly noticed how soft his tone was – like it was hurting him to speak louder than that. It almost made him seem kind.

Apparently Poe hadn’t been the only one that had grown a bit bored of his room, and as Rey entered the living room again, even she noticed that Hux wasn’t his usual self. Not sure what else to do, she walked up to his table – though she didn’t sit down as Poe had done. She wasn’t that comfortable yet.

“Are you alright?” she asked, and though she didn’t sound overly empathic, she was polite and seemingly willing to extend some help.
“It’s fine,” Hux replied.

“Can I get you something to drink perhaps?” Rey offered, and at this Hux was rather surprised. Both Poe and Rey weren’t acting like patients in that moment. For a moment, it seemed like they were the Keeper now – if only for a second. It was a strange realization that they were willing to provide any sort of care to him.

“Not sure if I can drink something right now,” Hux said softly.

“Or maybe it will make your throat feel a little better,” Poe offered.

“I’d rather wait for the doctor’s advice.”

“We could get some tea ready,” Rey suggested – having learned the skill of brewing some decent tea from Kylo earlier that week.

Poe nodded eagerly, wanting to do something useful, and as Hux recognized that in his two patients, he gave them a short nod. It would keep them busy – and it would give him an excuse not to talk to either of them. His throat was aching, and he preferred not to use it for now.

Glad to have an occupation, both Rey and Poe headed into the kitchen, where one looked for the kettle and the other took a few mugs.

When doctor Kalonia came in, with Phasma right behind her, Hux made an effort to stand up. He didn’t want to raise the impression that he was helpless or dizzy – even if he was, a little bit, and it was he who suggested: “Maybe it’s better if I join you in the Keeper’s room?”

Kalonia had heard Hux on a few occasions – and there was very little left of his strict and clipped tone. It was obvious that he wasn’t feeling a hundred percent, and as he walked past her towards the Keeper’s office, she noticed how he wasn’t walking as firmly as usual. His strides were smaller and his neck was even stiffer than before.

Poe and Rey watched from the doorway of the kitchen how the Keepers disappeared again into the hallway, and Poe muttered: “Well, if they’re not back to drink the tea once it’s done, then we should.”

Rey agreed – she wasn’t going to let any tea go to waste. As she watched the kettle and listened for the water to boil, Poe looked at her for a long time. Nowadays, she seemed more relaxed than before – no longer as on edge or afraid of people who weren’t Kylo. Not even he seemed to terrify her anymore, and she had seemed to dislike him a lot during her first months.

She had never voiced it to him, but her dislike had been obvious. He had noticed. She had never sat next to him or willingly shared an empty room with him, and he appreciated that she wasn’t running away this time.

“Are you getting used to your life here?” Poe asked her as he leaned against the counter on the other side of the kitchen, and the question seemed to surprise her a bit.

“I guess,” she replied, not sure what to say. “You?”

He chuckled at that question. “I’ve been here for a long while. I can hardly remember what life was like before I came here.”

“Do you remember anything, from before?” she asked curiously, and he was flattered by her interest in him.
“Do you know why I’m in here?” he asked her, and as she shook her head, he was kind of surprised. “Kylo never told you?”

She didn’t seem to find that strange and shook her head again. “It never came up. Did you arrive when he was already here?”

“We arrived around the same time,” Poe told her. “He hadn’t been here for long when I was brought in. Maybe he didn’t really care about why I came in. I wonder if he doesn’t know. It’s not really a secret.”

Curiously, Rey waited for him to continue.

“Before I came here, I used to be a pilot,” he told her, a hint of pride in his tone. “Unfortunately, I had an accident.”

She frowned. “A crash?”

He nodded. “That was a few years before I got here, actually. Engine malfunction, crashed over a forest, woke up in hospital a week later – and my brain hasn’t been the same.”

Rey was frowning, looking at his face for any sign of scarring or injury. “But you seem alright.”

He chuckled at that remark. “Well, physically I may seem alright, but I still had a rather severe concussion. As a result, my brain’s just… weird now.” He shrugged it off as he continued: “They say it damaged my frontal lobe.”

As he saw Rey frown at those words, he explained: “Front side of my brain. Anyway, I was a different person before the accident. I had better control – I was smarter. Now I just do stupid things, like sleep with fellow patients or make Kylo angry, as you already know. It’s not like I don’t realize afterwards that that’s really stupid, but in the moment itself, when I’m excited, it’s like I get really dumb.”

“Did the cops put you in here?” she wondered, not understanding how everyone had come to live in the ward in the first place.

He shook his head. “No. My family said that maybe I should look for help. The first years after my accident, I was a mess. Lost a steady girlfriend I had back then, wasn’t able to look after my finances by myself, got into a lot of fights in bars, slept with everyone who even looked at me appreciatively – I just followed every impulse I got – especially the stupid ones. My family became very, very frustrated with me. They tried to help, but I was like… a loose cannon. Did a lot of things that embarrassed them. My fuckups succeeded one another so quickly that they just couldn’t keep up with me. I came here in the hopes of relearning some control, but I don’t know… I feel like the past month has only proven how little I’m able to think ahead.”

“Because you got Jess pregnant?”

He nodded. “Among other things.”

Rey was quiet, thinking over his story, and startled a little when he asked: “How about you?”

“Me?”

“How did you end up here? You lived on the street - which is kind of obvious, but what’s your story?”
She thought about it for a moment, and simply replied: “I don’t think I have a story.”

“Everyone has a story,” Poe replied with a charming smile, meaning every word of that, and Rey couldn’t help but smile back. His grin was contagious.

She decided that she could try to tell a bit about her past.

“I grew up on the street, but I can’t remember what happened before that,” she said. “For some reason, I don’t know my parents. I can’t remember them. And I must have had someone take care of me as a toddler, but all I remember is when I was five or six and I lived with these other homeless people, but they weren’t my parents. I didn’t have a real house. We squatted in several buildings, but always moved out after a few months. In summer, we didn’t always squat, but slept on the street or in parks or in deserted parking lots. I was taught to steal – small things, from shops – and was taught not to beg, because if you’re a child and you’re caught begging on the street, the system will find you faster. I learned how not to stand out, until I finally got caught.”

She was quiet for a moment before she added: “When I looked younger, I’m quite sure that plenty of shop owners saw me steal as well, but nobody wants to arrest a little child for that or call the cops on her. I guess I must have finally looked like an adult or something.”

“You do,” Poe said, looking her over appreciatively, but the moment he saw Rey’s disapproving frown, he quickly lifted his hands defensively. “Just… just saying – not… not doing anything!”

She supposed she could forgive him for looking at her like that.

“So you never went to school?” he wondered.

Shaking her head again, he whistled.

“That’s tough.” As he saw how she didn’t understand why he would say that, he explained: “Because you won’t have it easy getting back into society without a grade of some sort, even if it’s a really low one. You don’t strike me as stupid though.”

She took that as a compliment.

“I don’t think I am,” she said. “I basically taught myself how to read – even if I’m not very good at it – but I am getting better.”

“Thanks to Kylo,” Poe said with a smile, and at the mention of his name, she cast away her eyes a little shyly.

“He’s your first boyfriend, right?” he asked, but he didn’t wait for her answer. “I love seeing the two of you together. It’s so innocent. I’ve never had anything like that myself.”

As the water had started boiling, she took it off the fire, and Poe offered to pour the water in their mugs while she looked for a nice flavor of tea to try.

Though she hadn’t asked about it, Poe’s mind was already reminiscing, and so he did not keep quiet about it. “Even as a young teenager it was more about getting to the result as fast as possible instead of enjoying the moment as it was. Lost a lot of girlfriends – and boyfriends – that way… The moment the goal was achieved and it wasn’t what I wanted, I looked for a new adventure.”

At the mention of ‘boyfriends’, Rey had raised her eyebrows, and Poe chuckled as he noticed that.

“I swing both ways,” he added, and as he saw she wasn’t certain how to respond to such an
announcement, he joked: “No worries, Kylo’s safe from me. Not my type!”

Her smile was appreciated, and he didn’t mind her silence at all. She was a good listener. He could see her eyes respond to whatever he told her, even if she didn’t verbalize her thoughts. She wasn’t too hard to read.

“He’s been doing great since you’ve come into his life. Sometimes it almost seems like it fixed nearly everything that otherwise bothered him. It’s almost like he doesn’t hear voices anymore.”

“He still does,” Rey assured him. “But he can ignore it better now – and because he is happier, he says that the voice isn’t as angry as it used to be.”

“Like the voice is happier too?”

She shrugged. “I think so.”

“Wish I had someone like that,” Poe sighed as he took his mug and smelled the tea. “Someone who could love me and make me better.”

As they both sipped from their tea for a moment, Rey was the first to speak.

“You have to love yourself first,” she said quietly, thinking about it. “I know my life isn’t worth much – to others. I don’t have a grade – or a family – or any belongings – but I can be kind – and I can help. In helping Kylo, I have learned to love myself unlike I ever did before. That may not be much, but it’s nice no longer being an enemy to myself. And having Kylo is pretty great too.”

“You love him,” Poe said with a warm smile, and Rey smiled warmly in return.

“I think so,” she admitted with a small nod. “I’m not sure if it’s really love though.”

Poe was confused by that statement. “Why are you not sure?”

“I’ve never loved anyone before. How do I know that I love him and that it’s not something else that I feel?”

Poe chuckled at her innocent question. “When I see you look at him, I think that’s love. You’re so kind and patient with him – and you willingly spend nearly all your time with him. You enjoy the little kiss on the head that he gives you when he leaves for the farmhouse in the morning, and you both dote on each other like I’ve never seen anyone dote on anyone. And it’s not about the physical stuff – the sexual stuff – so that’s gotta mean that it’s about what you get from it emotionally – from how it makes you feel even when you aren’t doing an awful lot together. You both seem so content together. So loyal to each other. And sometimes it almost seems like the two of you aren’t even here, in this hellhole, but in a far better place, free of all these rules and regulations, where you can simply enjoy life. I think that looks a lot like love.”

Rey hadn’t heard anyone spill it out to her like that before, and she had listened with a small smile on her face, and by the time he was done, that smile only widened.

“That does sound like love, when you put it like that,” she agreed, and as she drank from her cup again, they both smiled.
Doctor Kalonia’s examination of Hux’s neck was done in the presence of Phasma – and though the doctor had wondered why Phasma had been so near, almost like Hux was one of the ward’s patients instead of another Keeper, what had surprised her most was that Hux didn’t mind at all.

“From what I can tell, you’re going to be fine,” doctor Kalonia concluded. “Physically, at least. Though you might still be in pain for the next few days. I’ll prescribe some painkillers and I also wouldn’t recommend driving at the moment, as you aren’t able to move your neck a lot.”

“I’ll give him a lift home,” Phasma immediately said, and doctor Kalonia approved of that.

“I’ll also give you a week off, so you can recuperate at home. If you feel like you’re still aching by the end of the week, I’ll gladly give you a second week off. It’s in your hands.”

“But I can work,” Hux insisted. “I’ll be in a good enough condition to work by Monday.”

Doctor Kalonia raised her eyebrows, wondering if he was always as stubborn. “You might think differently in the morning. And resting is necessary in order for you to heal properly. Besides, you’re working in a psychiatric ward, you never know when another patient might need a physical intervention that you would be unable to give in your current state. A week off – and don’t you dare come back to work in a week if you’re still feeling any aches. Should it get worse, definitely call me and I’ll make sure you can go to the hospital for pictures.”

Hux seemed very upset about that, but none the less thanked the doctor as she printed some prescriptions for painkillers and a note for the HR department.

When Kalonia had left again, Hux got up, and though he wasn’t feeling super, he wanted to get on with his job, until Phasma stopped him.

“And where do you think you’re going?” Phasma asked him, holding onto his arm as she sweetly raised her eyebrows at him. “You’re staying here until I can drive you home in the afternoon. I’ll go check up on the patients for you. Work on a file if you wish to make yourself useful. You heard Kalonia, it’s not wise to put yourself in a situation where you would be at risk.”

Hux frowned. “I don’t like leaving you alone.”

Phasma chuckled. “That’s sweet, but I can take care of myself. Besides, if something were to happen to me right now, maybe we could both have the week off.” She winked mischievously at him. “It could be our first holiday.”

He did smile at that, and she offered him another wink before she left the room, and he sighed as he did what she had told him and grabbed Poe’s file. He supposed that he could work on some paperwork instead.

Though he had punched Finn in the face, for once it had been done without the usual rush of adrenaline, or without Snoke encouraging him to pull the punch. He had calculated the move – quickly – and judging by the way that Hux and Phasma had responded to it, it had been a good calculation. They hadn’t locked him up or anything, but had just let him go to work.

Though ‘work’ wasn’t paid and more of a voluntary internship, it gave him purpose. He couldn’t be upset with the animals he handled, and though Statura wasn’t a warm person, he was a correct one – and at times he was even eager to teach Kylo all that he knew.
Kylo knew that Statura had once punched him in the face during one of his episodes, but he held no grudge for that. He hoped Finn wouldn’t begrudge him either for his actions earlier that morning.

As he arrived back at the ward, the lunch truck had just pulled up and he slid inside while the door was still open. Wexley was already waiting to push the cart to the living room.

Before he had even said “hi”, Kylo immediately asked: “Is Finn alright?”

“Yeah, he’s fine,” Wexley said casually. “Doesn’t need to go to hospital.”

That was a relief for Kylo to hear, and as he looked into the Keeper’s office, he saw Hux sitting by the table, writing on one of the patient’s files – but from the way he held himself so stiffly, he did seem to be in quite a bit of pain.

As Kylo knocked on the door and Hux – slowly – turned his head, he couldn’t help but ask the Keeper: “Are you alright?”

His lip almost twitched up into a smile, wondering what the world was coming to if Poe, Rey, and now also Kylo, were all interested in his well-being.

“I’m alright,” he confirmed. “Though I won’t be back for the rest of the week after today. Doctor’s orders.”

“Oh…” Kylo wasn’t sure what to say to that and needed a moment before he said: “Get better soon.”

“Thank you,” Hux said graciously.

“It’s time for lunch,” Kylo announced with a lot less grace, pointing to the corridor. “Ehm… Will you join us?”

Usually Hux was perfectly on time for lunch, but it appeared that this time he had forgotten all about it – and that was only logical since there was a lot on his mind. As he got up, he followed Kylo through the hallway, and once they arrived in the living room, Rey ran up to Kylo to hug him. She stiffly stopped her movement the moment she spotted Hux behind her boyfriend though.

The Keeper couldn’t help but chuckle as he passed by Kylo and instead moved to his table, and he witnessed how they did give each other a brief hug the moment he was a little further away from them. As Hux looked around, he saw how nearly everyone was ready for lunch – except for Finn, who walked in with Phasma the moment Hux realized he was missing – and Lor San.

“Rey, won’t you get Lor San?” Hux suggested, figuring that the man was probably napping outside or just enjoying the weather now that spring was around the corner.

She thought he was just trying to get her away from Kylo, and shot her boyfriend an apologetic smile. She had missed him – even if she had still spent a reasonably good morning in the company of Poe, who winked at her as she passed him by to look for Lor San outside.

Kylo was distracted by Finn as he entered the room, and he immediately moved towards them with a grave expression on his face. The Keeper’s smile assured him that he didn’t have much to fear though, and he gulped before he blurted out: “I’m sorry for punching you earlier. Are you alright?”

Finn didn’t seem mad at him as he replied: “It could have been worse. I’m just glad you stopped me from murdering a Keeper – without punching me into the hospital.”
They were both relieved to see that the other didn’t want to hold a grudge over this, and as they both smiled at one another, they realized that no friendship or camaraderie had been lost that morning.

Their smiles faltered immediately though, when they heard a shriek of terror come from the courtyard, and Kylo’s heart stopped for a moment.

“Rey,” he muttered, immediately rushing outside, and Phasma was right on his tail, wondering what on earth was happening now.

Hux followed them outside, going as fast as he could in his current condition, and he was just in time to see Rey run into Kylo’s arms, sobbing. While Rey hid her face against Kylo’s shirt, he was too stunned to even wrap his arms around her.

Phasma had come to a shocked halt by their side, and looked at Lor San as he lay on the ground, motionless, with his eyes wide open.

The cigarette she had given him earlier was still clenched in one hand, while the one that had been lit was stuck between his fingers – so short now that it had burned his flesh.

Phasma’s heart pounded in her throat. She hadn’t checked up on him – not since what had happened shortly after ten. And now…

“He’s dead…”

Though they all heard Rey’s whisper, none of them acknowledged it.
It was hard to grasp how suddenly this had happened, and they were all paralyzed for a moment
before Hux said: “I don’t think sounding the alarm would be respectful. I’ll call for backup.”

He didn’t move back inside, but took his cell phone and distanced himself a little from the others –
knowing that if he went inside, he’d draw even more attention to the situation.

Though there was hardly any doubt about it that Lor San was dead, Phasma still knelt by his side,
hoping that if she put her fingers to his pulse, she would feel a sign of life. Unfortunately, there was
none. He was cold, and there was no breath or heartbeat left in his body. The way his eyes had
glazed over was particularly hard to watch, and as she closed them, she tried to hold in a sob.

Death was a part of life – but it was the first time she lost a patient on her watch – and she felt
swarmed by guilt. She closed her eyes for a moment and took a deep breath, reminding herself that
there were still other patients around, not in the least Rey, who had to be a little traumatized from
having found Lor San this way.

As she turned to look at the young patient, she was just in time to see Rey rush inside, with Kylo
right behind her.

Though Phasma wanted to follow them in, she had no idea what to say to the other patients – and
she waited for Hux to conclude the call before she turned back to the window.

Poe was already looking at them from behind the glass, his gaze grave as he watched Lor San from
distance, a regretful frown on his face. It seemed like he knew perfectly well what was up.

“Unamo and Canady are coming again,” Hux said. “Unamo’s calling Thanisson and Kanata. It
might be best that they come in early. Canady’s calling an ambulance and he will take care of the
body.”

As he said the words ‘the body’, he noticed how miserable Phasma looked, how she even seemed
upset about calling Lor San such.

“We’ll have time to grieve,” he reminded her softly. “But not now, okay?”

Part of him wanted to hug her – but with patients watching, he would not. He had to admit to
himself that it stung more than he had ever anticipated.

Realizing that Hux was right, Phasma nodded and took another deep breath before she went inside,
ready to break the news, and to be there for the patients that still needed her.

Nobody had stopped Kylo as he had ran after Rey into the girl’s corridor, and when she had turned
and headed into the bathroom, he had been several feet behind.

By the time he caught up with her, she was already emptying her stomach over one of the toilets,
and he winced at the sound as he took a deep breath and tried not to get upset from it himself. He followed the sound to the first cubicle where she was now sitting on her knees, and he took a deep breath through his nose in order to keep his own cool.

Looking around, he saw something that would come in handy, and he stepped away from her to take a few paper tissues that stood by the sink. Moments later, he was by her side again to offer them to her.

She didn’t look at him as she took them, but crawled up slowly as she wiped her mouth. Though she wanted to go back to the rest of the group, the memory was too fresh, and she shuddered from the horror as she remembered touching Lor San again. She couldn’t believe that for a moment, she had thought he had just fainted or fallen asleep. His cold skin and lifeless eyes had terrified her.

Though part of her wanted to talk about it, her stomach got upset again, and it didn’t take more than a few seconds before she was back to vomiting. Kylo winced again, not sure what sort of support he could offer her, besides getting more paper tissues for her.

While her hair was up in a ponytail and not really in the way, he still lifted it, and when Hux walked in and heard the retching noise coming from Rey, he pulled quite a disgusted face.

Kylo almost had to laugh as he watched the Keeper’s expression, and it wasn’t hard to see that Hux would rather not be there.

“We’ll be there shortly,” Kylo said solemnly, and as he saw Hux nod – or attempt to nod, as his neck was still sore – he realized that he was really beginning to inspire trust in the Keepers. Part of him even felt proud of it, though another part saw it differently.

Pride is a nasty emotion at a time like this – why would you rather feel pride than sadness at a time like this, Kylo? You’re really fucked up.

“I’m not fucked up,” he muttered. “This is normal. Stages of grief. I have yet to accept it.”

As Rey heard Kylo talking to himself – something he hadn’t done in a while, she tried to get up again – and as there wasn’t much left in her stomach, it wasn’t too hard to stay up now as she flushed the toilet and wiped her mouth again.

“What are the stages of grief?” Rey asked – not wanting to think about her unpleasant encounter with a corpse of a few minutes earlier. Any topic would be good to keep her mind off that.

“When someone dies, you go through a few stages before you come to accept someone’s death. Sadness, denial…” He thought for a few moments, trying hard to remember the other stages. Kanata was the one with a degree in psychology, not him. He’d just read it in some magazines.

Rey walked to the sink and let the cold water run over her hands, trying not to recall those same fingers touching Lor San. The thought upset her.

“What else?” she asked, wanting him to keep on talking so she could be distracted.

“Oh, anger, I think,” he said. “You might get angry – at God or at the Keepers or at Lor San himself.”

“So everyone goes through a stage?” she asked, splashing her face with some water and drinking some in order to wash the foul taste from her mouth.

“I believe you’re supposed to go through all the stages. Anger, sadness, denial…” He was quiet for
a long while, trying to remember the others. “…and bargaining! And then comes acceptance.”

Trying to figure out what fit him, he said: “I’m in denial.”

“And what am I then?” Rey asked, and instead of going back to the others, she headed towards the hallway and then to her room, where she headed straight to her toothbrush by her sink, still disgusted by the taste in her mouth.

“Not sure,” Kylo said as he entered her room and looked around. He quickly decided to lean against the wall near the door, trying not to impose too much on her private space. “You look sad and you cried when you found him, maybe sadness?”

As she brushed her teeth, she didn’t seem to pay him attention, but he was watching her, waiting for her to be finished so he could take her back to the others – or to give her a hug. He wasn’t sure yet what she needed most.

When she was done and turned around, he had his arms open for her and even a small smile on his face, welcoming her into his arms, but she seemed upset with that.

“Why are you smiling? Lor San just died!” she said with a frown.

He chuckled as he stepped closer and wrapped his arms around her, regardless of her frustration.

“Your phase is definitely anger,” he said softly, and as she leaned into him, she calmed slightly.

“No, it’s not,” she said stubbornly.

It took about half an hour before Phasma came to check up on them again, and as she told them to get their jackets because they were going outside, they did.

For a moment, Rey feared they would go outside to look at Lor San again – even if she couldn’t find a good reason why that would be so – but it turned out they were heading to the farmhouse instead – where they’d have their lunch in the bar.

Rey didn’t fully understand why, but Kylo knew it was so the ambulance could take away Lor San’s body without having to go through a living room or hallway full of curious patients.

Hux stayed behind – probably because of his neck still – but Phasma joined them as they walked there. The food cart had already been taken there by the kitchen truck – and their plates were still reasonably warm. Mitaka helped Phasma in distributing the platters and medication, and it was eerie how silent everyone was.

Phasma and Mitaka didn’t talk either, and for once Kylo was seated with Rey, and he saw how slowly she was eating. She wasn’t really hungry – and that was a rare thing because she usually ate as though she was starving.

By the time they were done, Kanata arrived, and she headed to Phasma first.

“I came as soon as I heard,” she said softly. “How’s everyone doing?”

Since no one had been talking, everyone had heard.

“Better than Lor San,” came Poe’s reply, and he winced as he realized what he had said. Part of
him had not wanted to be disrespectful, but another part of him had been unable to stop himself.

“We’re fine,” Kylo said, and Poe quickly nodded in agreement.

“Though you’ve all been very quiet,” Phasma remarked, and Finn was the first to respond to that.

“You guys haven’t said much to us either. Besides, any topic seems disrespectful within the first hour that you find one of our own dead.”

Kanata walked over to him and put her hand on his shoulder, and he gently squeezed it in response, not being truly upset, but just sad and irritated by Lor San’s death.

“I can’t believe he’s really gone,” Wexley said with a heavy sigh. “It always seemed like he would be around forever.”

“In a way, he was,” Kanata said kindly. “He was there before I even started working here. He seemed part of the furniture, if you know what I mean.”

“It won’t feel like home without him,” Finn agreed.

Kanata squeezed his hand again – maybe more because she was moved that he thought of the ward as ‘home’ than because of his sentiment towards Lor San.

“Will we get a new patient to replace him?” Poe wondered, and Kanata nodded.

“Yes. Possibly two, now. We had already begun some intake interviews after Jess left – there were two patients in particular that needed new living arrangements. With Lor San no longer part of our team, they might both join the ward shortly.”

Rey tensed a little at that, and Kylo noticed it. She had gotten used to these people – but that was it. She still wasn’t eager to make new friends, or to get a change of scenery.

“When can we return to the ward?” Wexley asked, not liking the old bar of the farmhouse they were now seated in. It wasn’t nice either when it felt like you couldn’t go home.

“Hux will call,” Phasma replied.

As Kylo saw Wexley’s unease at remaining seated while they waited for permission to leave again, he suggested: “Maybe you guys would like to see the goats? I can show you what I’ve been doing here since I started working here in the mornings.”

Kanata feared for a moment that his fellow patients would react with disdain, but instead, all of them immediately got up – save for Rey, who still didn’t feel inclined to visit any animals.

“I’ll go with them,” Mitaka said, and he added with a wink: “You girls stay here.”

Rey frowned at that and watched as the men left, and as Phasma and Kanata started cleaning up the plates, the latter asked: “Won’t you help us, Rey?”

She didn’t verbally respond to that, but got up and brought several of the plates back to the food cart, which would be sent back to the kitchen, where everything would be washed again. The only thing they needed to wash up themselves, was the cutlery and the glasses.

As Phasma let the water pour into the sink, she told Kanata: “It’s been a very hectic morning, to be honest. Finn had an attack – and he tried to choke Hux. That’s why he isn’t here.”
Kanata seemed a little shocked by that, but didn’t want to say too much with one of the patients around.

“Is he alright?”

“Doctor gave him a week off,” Phasma said, not feeling happy about that, and neither was Kanata. Rey took a towel as she waited for Phasma to start the dishes, but she kept quiet at the same time.

“Hopefully Finn’s nose won’t start hurting too badly. Kylo punched him in order to get him off of Hux.”

As Kanata drew wide eyes at that, once more not daring to say too much with Rey there, Phasma added: “We were lucky Kylo was there. It was a calculated move. Without it, Finn might not have snapped out of it as quickly and Hux might have been in hospital now.”

“And Lor San?” Kanata asked softly.

Phasma shrugged. “I wish I’d gone outside – but I assumed he was just sitting there, enjoying the sun. I think he must have had some sort of attack shortly after he went outside for a smoke. He never finished his cigarettes.”

They were all quiet at that, doing the dishes for a few moments before Rey opened her mouth and looked at Maz. The Doctor wasn’t looking at her, but she needed to know. It took her a moment before she suddenly said: “I touched his dead body.”

Maz pulled wide eyes at that and immediately turned to Phasma, who quickly said: “Oh, yes, I asked Rey to get Lor San inside for lunch.”

“He was cold,” Rey added matter-of-factly. “I threw up. It was gross.” She was referring to the dead body more than to her vomit, though that wasn’t entirely clear to Maz.

“I’m so sorry,” Maz said empathically. “Are you alright now?”

“I washed my hands,” Rey said, and she was quiet as she continued drying off the glasses.

While she focused on that, Phasma and Maz shared a long look with one another. Rey was the quiet type. If she spoke about this – without being pushed to talk – then that meant that she was opening up on her own accord – and that the experience had left an impact on her. But they also knew that it most likely hadn’t been a positive one.

“Would you like to talk about it?” Maz asked gently, but Rey shook her head.

“I just did.”

By the time they returned to the ward, the ambulance had already passed by, Canady was gone, and Hux and Thanisson were waiting in the Keeper’s room. While Hux had filled in his younger colleague about everything that had happened, he had seen the fear in Thanisson’s eyes.

Though he was a good kid, Thanisson didn’t like crisis situations. That day, nearly everything had been a crisis, and he was clearly worried about what that meant for the rest of his shift. Not to mention that Lor San had been his patient – and a very easy one at that – and it was very likely that
he had to take in a new case.

When Phasma returned, she was eager to go home, and to take Hux with her. Kanata and Thanisson said they would take it from there, and so they were dismissed – two hours later than they should have actually left.

As Phasma drove, she looked at Hux from the corner of her eye, and the way he sat very rigidly next to her worried her. He had an even fouler expression than usual on his face.

“Does it hurt?”

“Like hell,” he admitted, his voice rough.

She figured that her question served little purpose – for she already saw that he wasn’t feeling okay, and the doctor had told him to stay at home for at least a week. She hoped she could at least lift his spirits.

“You can have a nice shower when you’re home – I’ll give you a massage – and I’ll make you something to eat if you don’t mind? Maybe something easy to swallow, like mash?”

He didn’t protest, though he didn’t reply either. She missed his voice, but also felt guilty for trying to get him to talk.

“You’re right, you should spare your throat. I’m sorry for not allowing you to rest your voice, sweetheart.”

She didn’t often call him that, but his hand reached out for hers and she immediately reached back. As he squeezed her hand, she smiled. She knew he loved her, like she loved him.

Though Hux stayed at home during the weekend, Phasma didn’t. She hadn’t originally had a shift, but it seemed only right to be there with her patients while they were mourning Lor San. She took them out for a nice walk in the forest, spent some time around the therapy table with them, drawing and coloring and talking with them, and when Kanata came in to take over, they spent some time in the Keeper’s room together.

“They were supposed to go to the mall today, but none of them asked,” Phasma said. “They all preferred to stay here.”

“I’m not surprised,” Kanata said. “They all feel his absence. I’m especially worried about Wexley. He always used to go to the mall with Lor San. That went so well. Do you think Finn would take him?”

“Without a doubt,” Phasma said. “We only need to ask him and he’ll keep an eye out. Did you hear from Lor San’s family?”

“I spoke to his younger sister on the phone yesterday. She seemed relieved more than anything. She will pay for the expenses of the funeral, but would prefer to keep it simple.”

“Will she be present for the funeral?”

“No. She hasn’t seen Lor San in over twenty years. Didn’t seem particularly moved by the news.
She gave us free reign to do what we thought best. We’ll bury him on the grounds.”

Phasma frowned. “What, in the forest? I thought nobody had been buried there for decades.”

“Actually, the cemetery has remained in use, though there have only been about three patients buried there the past ten years. The priest will come for free for a short service around the grave – Tuesday morning.”

Phasma knew that it was a sad place to be buried – a haunted and forgotten place, which made it almost sound romantic by those old enough to remember the place existed. But mostly anyone who lived nearby had forgotten that such a place existed between the trees, not too far from the domain.

The truth was that Lor San was not going to be missed terribly. Though the other patients had been sad, hardly any of them had shed tears. And while Phasma hadn’t felt great about it, she hadn’t cried either. She wondered if she was becoming hard if she was actually glad for Lor San to be dead. Certainly wherever he was was now could not be worse than the ward. Maybe he still had friends waiting on the other side – or his parents who he’d lost when he was still very young. But what joys had he known in this life, but the six cigarettes he’d been given each day? Maybe it was better this way.

“The good news is that we’re getting an intern on Monday,” Kanata continued in a lighter tone. “Which will especially be welcome while Hux is out. She’s a third-year anthropology student, so I imagine she’ll have some maturity. It will be good to have an extra hand around. You have the morning shift, right?”

“I do!” Phasma was a little baffled by the news. They hardly ever got assigned any interns. Most of them got assigned to tougher wards, where there were more short-time stays of the patients or where the patients were physically more demanding.

Kanata was glad to hear it. “Great! She’ll start with the morning shift for the coming two weeks. I’ll be here at 7 as well, so I can teach her the ropes and you can focus on your own routine.”

Kylo’s relationship with Rey had always been sweet – but after Lor San’s death, he also felt how fragile it was. She hadn’t smiled that weekend, and as he walked to the eating area on Monday morning, he wondered if today would be the day she would experience some happiness again.

To him it seemed like being in her presence was enough to lift his mood. He had lived with Lor San for years, and though he missed the man, it wasn’t like his death would stop him from enjoying his day. Rey was the reason he got out of bed in the morning, and he wondered if the other patients didn’t have a reason to, for he was the first one up and awake, and so he headed into the kitchen to make some coffee.

When he saw Kanata in the presence of another woman, whom she was telling where to find the coffee and how the machine worked, he frowned in confusion.

He never really knew if new people were patients or Keepers, and as he looked at the woman’s waist line and saw that she too had an alarm strapped to her belt, he knew she was a Keeper.

“Hello,” Kylo said dryly. He was always suspicious of new Keepers, and Snoke was even worse.

*She looks very young – probably doesn’t know what she’s doing yet. You want to watch out for her.*
She could make your life a living hell if you terrify her. If you scare her, you’ll be in isolation faster than you can call for Rey.

Kylo bit his tongue in order not to reply to Snoke.

“Oh, hi Kylo!” Kanata said in her usual warm voice the moment she noticed him in the doorway. “May I introduce you to Korr Sella? She is our new intern.”

Kylo looked from Maz to Korr, comparing their dark skin tones. For a moment he wondered if they could be related, but he figured that would be rude to ask.

*They probably are!*

Snoke was very insistent on that.

*That’s how you get a job in a sector like this. You need to know people that already work there. Family always gets picked first.*

“She’s not even working here,” Kylo muttered. “She’s an intern.”

Both Maz and Korr had heard that, and the new girl seemed to be suspicious about the patient who talked to himself, a small frown on her face as she turned to the group’s psychiatrist.

“What does Snoke think of her, Kylo?” Maz asked playfully.

He was glad that he didn’t have to hide Snoke from Maz. Like Rey, she too was able to talk about Snoke without judging him. He wasn’t sure the intern would do the same.

“He wonders if the two of you are related,” Kylo admitted.

Both Korr and Maz smiled at that.

“If we are, then I wonder why I haven’t ever seen doctor Kanata before!” the girl replied with a small smile, not offended by the question.

Kylo was relieved to hear that, and as Korr extended her hand to him, he hesitated a moment before he shook it.

*Well this is just awkward.*

Snoke didn’t like it when he touched strangers.

“It’s nice to meet you, Kylo! You may call me Korrie.”

He nodded and even attempted a relaxed smile to mirror hers. It came out more like a twisted grimace instead.

“I’ll leave the two of you to make coffee,” he said, hurrying out of the room as fast as he could.

He was glad that neither the doctor nor the newcomer followed him and he sat down on the sofa, looking at some of the magazines that Connix from the night shift had left there. Though he loved reading psychology magazines, Connix never had any. Sometimes he got some from Kanata. It helped him understand himself a little better.

Connix’s literature was… definitely feminine. But Kylo didn’t really mind. He liked looking at the travel reports and recipes. He enjoyed travel reports because they gave him a window to places
he’d never go. Not only because he was broke and unlikely to get rich anytime soon, but also because he didn’t particularly enjoy the idea of having a mental breakdown in a country where he didn’t speak the language.

When it came to the recipes, he liked to think that reading all those recipes would make him a better cook whenever he would be released. And if he was going to take care of Rey, he was going to have to learn how to cook for her. So far, he had taught her how to brew some tea – but she was far from preparing a meal for them.

As Rey walked into the living room, Kylo immediately sat up and put his magazine to the side, a small smile on his face as he looked at her. Her hair was down again today, and when she saw him, he hoped that he hadn’t imagined the way her lip had curled up for a moment.

“Hey,” she said softly as she sat down by his side, and he moved a little closer to give her a ‘good morning’ kiss on the cheek. She didn’t mind, but he noticed that her heart wasn’t fully in it.

“Are you alright, sweetheart?” he asked carefully.

“I don’t know,” she admitted in a whisper, not looking at him but at her own hands as they lay folded on her knees. “This place is making me sad. I just… I don’t wanna live here like Lor San, and die in the courtyard. The past days, I’ve wanted to run more than anything.”

Though Kylo never liked it when she talked about running, he could understand the sentiment. And this time she wasn’t keeping it from him.

“Well. If you want, I can ask if we may go to the track later this morning. You’ll get to do some running then,” he tried to lift her spirits.

“It’s not of running on the track that I dream,” she admitted, and to show her that he cared, he put his hand on hers.

“Rey, we’ll get out of here. Sooner than you might think. I’m working on my skills, I haven’t had an outburst in well over a month, and I’m determined to give you a good life!”

He smiled warmly at her, but she looked terrified more than anything.

“I don’t know, Kylo,” she said, withdrawing her hand from his, and Snoke was nearly screaming in his ear at the gesture.

“You don’t want a life with me?” he asked, tears in his eyes, and at that she was nearly crying too.

“I don’t know what I want, Kylo.” Her lip trembled. “I know I should be working on my dreams and on myself, but all I’ve dreamt of since I came here is running. Away.”

He gulped away his tears. “And waffles and ice cream and pretty dresses?”

“I can do without,” she said coldly, and he felt his ears burn. It was almost like someone had punched him in the face and he felt a little dizzy.

“I can do without everything,” she added, frowning now, and she looked angry, though she kept her
voice down. “I don’t need any of this. I don’t need to be here. I can just go to the street, and it would be fine.”

He had hoped they were long past that point. In the months she’d been here, she had hardly made any progress at all, and now he realized that she had truly made none.

He was crying when Korr and Maz came from the kitchen again, and Maz immediately said: “Good morning, Rey!”

A look at the girl and Kylo made her realize that it wasn’t a good morning at all, and wanting to offer a listening ear, she proposed: “Would you like to have a talk with me later this morning?”

“No,” Rey said immediately, harshly. “I don’t want anything.”

She got up from her seat and headed back to her room as Kylo sat there in shocked silence, still crying.

Korr Sella looked at him and raised an eyebrow at Kanata, who only had eyes for Kylo now.

“Would you like to talk, Kylo?” she offered, but Kylo got up and headed back to his room.

“What does it even matter,” he said angrily, and he stomped away as quickly as he could, hoping that no one would stand in the way to his room. He wasn’t certain he wouldn’t punch them out of the way.

As Phasma came out of Wexley’s room after waking him properly, she was just in time to see Kylo storming into his room, and from his heavy step and the way he slammed the door behind him, she knew enough.

He was about to have another one of his attacks.

The past months, Rey had calmed him down from a few, but somehow she felt like maybe Rey was the cause this time.

She couldn’t explain it by logic. Never before had she gone into Kylo’s room during an attack. In fact, she would have described that as the stupidest thing a Keeper could do. But maybe his few good months had reduced her fear for his anger outbursts. Or maybe she just wanted an excuse to join Hux on his sick leave for the coming week.

As she entered his room and closed the door behind her, that was something else she never would have done before. She would have kept the door open, allowing an escape route for them both, and though she felt some adrenaline as Kylo punched his wooden cupboard as hard as he possibly could, she didn’t flinch.

“Kylo, sweetie,” she said sadly, shaking her head slightly. “Talk about it, don’t hurt yourself.”

He wanted to punch the cupboard again, even with his fist already aching and his knuckles red from pain, but Phasma’s words did calm him somewhat.

She wasn’t panicking, nor was she judging him. Like Rey had shown before, she was approaching him with compassion and understanding, and though he was shaking, he was also crying.
As he looked at her, his gaze wasn’t angry or frustrated, it was immeasurable sad.

“Talk to me,” Phasma said as she closed the distance between them and grabbed hold of his hands, but he shook his head, crying ugly tears.

“I can’t,” he whispered, his voice all choked up.

As she hugged him, she wasn’t sure what she should have expected. Never before had she taken such an approach with him, and never before had she been able to stop an anger outburst either. Maybe it was just luck, or maybe Kylo was a hugger.

He embraced her so fiercely that she could feel how he was trembling all over, his breathing still uneven as he nearly seemed to squeeze her to death.

As she rubbed his back, he slowly seemed to calm down, and when she felt a long minute later how his trembling had lessened, she took his hand and led him to sit on his bed. She sat down next to him, and softly said: “I know we don’t talk much, Kylo. And maybe I haven’t expressed how proud I’ve been of you the past months. I’m so sad to see you so miserable this morning. What’s wrong?”

There were tears in his eyes and he didn’t dare to look at her, knowing he probably looked like a mess.

“Everything’s wrong.”

“Probably not everything,” Phasma said hopefully. “Is it Rey?”

“She hates me,” he sobbed, hiding his face in his hands, and Phasma immediately wrapped her arm around his back.

“I bet she doesn’t hate you. I think she likes you more than she likes herself.”

He calmed a little at those words, though he couldn’t stop crying.

“Don’t you remember how you were your first years here?” Phasma asked him with a smile. “You hated yourself so much – you had no dreams or hobbies or anything that you didn’t fight against. You wouldn’t even put your clothes in the cupboard for the first six months. You tossed them on the floor and waited for us to do that.”

He calmed a little at those words – and also felt like a massive jerk as he remembered that.

“It took time for you to calm down. Rey isn’t as far as you are at this point. You know this too. But she isn’t as far as you were back then either. But she probably needs time.”

“But I love her,” he whispered. “And it’s not mutual.”

Phasma bit her lip for a moment, choosing to pick her words carefully.

“You don’t know that for certain. She probably doesn’t know it either. Do you know what love is?”

He hesitated for a moment, then nodded.

“Can you put it into words as well?” she challenged him with a small smile.

Hesitantly, he opened his mouth a few times, before he shook his head in defeat. He didn’t know
how to voice it.

Phasma was glad for the opportunity she got to share her story with him. “When I was younger, I had a professor in theology that asked the class the same question. And he said that love is time.”

As she saw his confused frown, she explained: “When you love someone, you spend time with them. You can’t wait to see them again. Sometimes you might need a little distance, but before long you want to spend more time with them again. And sometimes you can’t be with the people you love. Sometimes there’s distance in-between that prevents you from being with them, but then the time you spend thinking about them proves your love for them. Or the time you spend calling them or writing them or talking about them to others. You’re here, talking about Rey with me now. Spending your time on her, if not with her. That’s love too.”

He understood, but he also said: “I bet she isn’t talking about me right now.”

“But she might be thinking about you. Just… give her time. Another thing you should do when you love someone.”

Kylo nodded slowly, though he still hated the situation he was in. As Phasma squeezed his shoulder before she left his room again, he couldn’t help but cry. He would not stop loving her – not yet – and he hoped he meant more to her than she had made him believe.

Chapter End Notes

A few things I’d like to say!
In my word file, I’ve crossed the 100k mark for this story - and writing is going well at the moment! :-) I made a Phux edit for that occasion that I’d like to share with you all. http://cartoonjessie.tumblr.com/post/176786279850/to-celebrate-having-reached-the-milestone-of

If you like to support the story, leave a comment, a kudos or bookmark the fic. When you see me posting edits or similar things on Tumblr, feel free to reblog in order to spread the word about the fic, and mouth-to-mouth recommendations obviously also help. :-) My birthday is coming up soon, and I’ve commissioned 2 mystery drawings for the fic for the occasion. I really don’t know what will be on the drawings, so it will be a surprise for me as well. I’m really looking forward to it. So keep an eye on Tumblr on the 23d of August, it should be shared there by then. :-}
Rey spent most of her time in her room. She slept, she cried, she stared at the walls, and she ignored the fact that people were expecting her to be a part of their group.

Kanata had tried talking to her a few times – but she hadn’t paid the dear doctor a great deal of attention. Though she didn’t dislike the woman per se, she disliked where she was. She was only able to hold her tongue because the kind Keeper didn’t push too hard to get her out of her shell.

Inside, she was seething with hatred and rage for the situation she was in. She tried not to be too harsh on the people around her, but anyone who did not leave her alone, was treated to a snappy comment. And she didn’t feel sorry for the attitude.

She knew that Kylo had noticed that sooner than most, and part of her was glad that she didn’t need to direct her snappy comments at him. He was keeping his distance, and seemed to be the only one wise enough to do so. He was also being very thoughtful, so much so that he even offered to take over her chores for her – even if they usually did them as a team.

Poe was the worst of the group – trying desperately to cheer her up with silly humor that didn’t work on her – not when she wasn’t in the mood – and he bore the full brunt of it.

“She called me a cunt,” Poe admitted to Kylo the morning of the funeral, while they both stood in front of the bathroom mirror, shaving. “And Korrie was nearby and didn’t even remark upon it.”

“She’s new,” Kylo defended the intern. “And are you sure she heard?”

“Yeah!” Poe replied a little louder. “She even looked at Rey as she left the room. I’m certain she heard.”

Kylo put down his razor and grabbed his towel to wipe his face. “Well maybe she didn’t know what to say about it…”

Poe shook his head. “I don’t suppose you can suggest to Rey to apologize for her rude tone? A simple ‘sorry’ is enough. We’re just trying to be there for her. We all knew Lor San way longer than her. She can be more considerate and less of a drama queen.”

“I know,” Kylo replied as he put his towel away again, his voice calmer than it usually was, and Poe shot him a strange gaze.

“You’ve been so… unmoved by all of this. You don’t even talk to her anymore. Don’t you care at all?”

Keeping his voice completely in check, he replied dryly: “I cry myself to sleep every night.”

Poe laughed, before he suddenly stopped. “You’re not joking?”

Kylo chuckled. “No. Wish I was. But during the day, I’m exercising control now. I hate this situation, but if I lose control, I might lose her forever. If I give her space, I might figure out a way to make it okay again. And maybe she just needs time. She’s lost more than Lor San the past months here. I’m not sure how to comfort her – but hope time will sooth her again.”
“I hope you’re right…” Poe sighed as he put away his razor. “And once she’s cool again, I will gladly accept her apology.”

Hux had joined Phasma to work that morning – though she had kind of forbidden him from doing any actual work, or from mingling with the patients. It was just for the funeral - and he respected that, even if he couldn’t wait to get back to work.

It wasn’t like he was that addicted to his job – but he simply loved working with Phasma – and being there for her when she needed it. When she was alone at work, he thought about her all the time, hoping she was alright and that she was having a pleasant day.

While Phasma and the new intern were waking up the patients, he sat at the desk to read up on the Keeper’s journal.

He was quite amused to read Korrie’s first notes about the patients and their daily routines. She was meticulous in her observations, and the moment she stepped inside, he looked up with an intrigued smile.

“Hi!” she said cheerfully, extending her hand to him. “Phasma told me you were here. I’m Korrie!”

“Hux,” he said as he shook her hand and studied her – though he did so without drawing any attention to it. She was thorough alright. She looked flawless – not a stray hair that came out of her bun – manicured nails – perfect skin – and a radiant smile.

For someone who had just started working at a psychiatric ward that was rare.

He’d seen the interns of the other groups sometimes – and he had always loved to study the new ones – sometimes with sardonic delight. Their disheveled states had betrayed how much the weight of the work had pressed down on them. And their voices had often been like screeches or wails as they had spoken to the patients – like they weren’t certain how to behave themselves yet. Their frowns had often indicated how little they felt prepared for the field work and thesis that accompanied it.

Either Korrie was completely unaware of the work that awaited her – or she was on top of things. And Hux felt like it was the latter.

“If I may ask, Korrie,” he said smoothly. “What are you studying precisely? You were a third-year?”

“Yes,” she replied immediately. “I’m studying anthropology.”

He frowned immediately. He’d never even heard of an anthropologist working at a psychiatric ward.

As she saw his gaze, she grinned. “I’m specializing in sociocultural anthropology.”

Even if that still didn’t make a lot of sense to him, he honestly admitted: “That sounds like a fun field of study!”

“It is! What did you study?”
“Please, don’t make me talk about my education,” he immediately said in a disinterested tone, rolling his eyes. “But what you’re studying sounds great. I didn’t study anything as prestigious – nor was that time something I like to be reminded of. But I love my job, here and now. Despite…”

He indicated his neck, and Korrie bowed down a little to look at it from a better angle, frowning as she saw some bruises.

“Yikes,” she admitted, offering him an empathic smile.

“Don’t worry about it,” he assured her, once more offering one of his own rare smiles in return. He was intrigued by her – mostly by her field of study – and incredibly curious about the work she would do for the ward. “Any idea yet what your thesis is going to be about?”

Korrie had been standing all the while, but now took a chair and sat down at the table, leaning closer as she confided in him.

“I originally wanted to make a comparison between life in the ward and life outside, sort of as a way to measure if a ward is actually preparing people for the life outside of it, or if it is flawed by design and thus doomed to fail its patients.”

Hux was intrigued and had a diabolical gaze in his eyes.

“That sounds pretty good!” He didn’t mind a little anarchy. “But are you sure Kanata would approve of that? It wouldn’t put our ward in a good spotlight if your results would be negative.”

“I’m not entirely certain that they would be, from what I’ve seen here. But – I have to say – I think I’ll go for something else. I am incredibly intrigued by the homeless girl.”

Hux frowned in surprise. “Rey?”

She nodded ecstatically. “Yes! Raised on the streets? That’s like getting a chance to study Mowgli or Tarzan, except…” Her excited gaze fell for a brief moment. “…They were raised by animals.” She shook that thought away and continued smiling. “On the streets, it’s a different jungle. Who really knows how people behave that don’t go to school or don’t have parents or aren’t raised in the system? I mean, assumptions can be made, of course, and she must have had some sort of a parental figure in her life, I assume. But I’m really curious to see what she’s made of, and if reintegration is possible for her, or if she’ll forever be stuck in the system.”

Hux was quiet for a few moments, but nodded.

“That sounds pretty ambitious – and it would be amazing,” he admitted. “For Rey – and for your study as well. I’d love to read that thesis.”

Feeling encouraged, she shot him another radiant smile.

“Well, wish me luck then. I’m going to see if I can maybe… form some sort of bond with her. Get her approval on this.”

“Today?” He stared at the Keeper’s journal and raised an eyebrow. “I fear your timing might be bad. She’s been in a horrible mood.”

“Maybe not today,” Korrie admitted. “But hopefully by the end of the week or so.” She got up from her seat, before she smiled again and said: “Wish me luck!”

He couldn’t help but chuckle. “Good luck, Korrie!”
As she left the room, he turned back to the Journal and continued reading. Apparently Rey had been insulting people the past few days – that was new – and she’d been rather rude to the Keepers too. Frowning, he muttered: “You’ll probably need it.”

Rey didn’t want to get up. She didn’t want to go to the stupid funeral, but Phasma had been quite strict with her. If she didn’t get up, she wouldn’t be allowed to go out on Saturday.

That had been the only motivation that worked. If anything, it would be her first window to try and run away. For good. She’d be done with this stupid ward then.

As she headed into the bathroom to brush her teeth, the new intern popped up not much later. She was so optimistic that it was hard not to sneer at her, and Rey tried, toothpaste running over her chin rather inelegantly. Korrie didn’t notice – or pretended not to.

“I talked to Maz yesterday,” Korrie told her – not even asking Rey if it was alright if she talked with her. “She told me you grew up on the streets. I must say that that’s very fascinating!”

Rey continued brushing her teeth, glad it gave her an excuse not to reply.

“I mean, it must be hard for you – living in a group like this – needing to work together with a bunch of strangers and not having the liberty to go where you please, like you used to. But I was thinking, maybe I could help? I’m probably going to be around until November or so. Maybe there’s some things I could help you with? Or things you can teach me about yourself?”

Rey frowned and ignored Korrie, continuing to brush her teeth. She noticed Korrie was about to say something when she heard Phasma’s voice from the living room.

“Korrie, have you made some coffee yet?”

“Whoops!” Korrie smiled warmly as she realized she’d forgotten something. “Must be off. Think about it, alright? I’m not going anywhere and eh… neither are you!”

She pointed her index fingers at Rey in a joking way, but Rey didn’t think it was funny at all. As Korrie left, she spat out the tooth paste in the sink. It had taken all her self-control not to spit it over the intern herself.

After breakfast, the group headed outside. All their Keepers were there by then, and as they walked through the forest, Rey lingered at the back of the group, her hands tucked warmly inside her pockets, her gaze down.

Kylo turned his head to check if she was alright, and with her gaze turned so strictly from his, he felt a familiar ache in his heart. He missed her – more than he had ever missed anyone – and he blinked hard in order not to cry, before he focused once more on following Thanisson, Kanata and Korrie.

Snoke was trying to convince him she hated him now, but he was trying his hardest not to let that get to him.
The forest was beautiful at this time of year. Young leaves colored the place green, and the way the light fell through the branches was soothing and beautiful – too pretty and light for a funeral day.

When they arrived in the open clearing, the patients looked around curiously. None had ever been there before.

Old crosses and graves were scattered throughout the grass – some hidden by massive weeds and layers of moss – others not yet as plagued by the same natural decay. Some graves seemed ancient – and the majority of the graves were from the 60s and before. Apparently this graveyard had once served their ward well.

A few men were lowering a coffin into the ground while a priest stood nearby, a bible in his hand as he waited for the small group to arrive.

The priest welcomed them and urged them to stand around the grave as some patients didn’t seem eager to move closer, and once they were all there, he started his litany.

Rey had never been in a church – and didn’t understand most of the things the priest talked about. She had a frustrated frown on her face during everything he said, her hands still in her pockets.

The men, it seemed, had all folded their hands together – as had the Keepers. She looked at them from the corner of her eye, realizing that everyone looked serious – but no one was crying. She had always thought people cried at funerals, but it appeared that Lor San wasn’t worthy of any tears.

That thought itself stung more than Lor San’s absence, and a single tear ran over her cheek.

Nothing that was said sounded like it couldn’t have been said about any other random old guy that had died like Lor San had. There was no mention of family – though sometimes the word “friends” was used. Rey felt her stomach twist at that word. She doubted that any of these people had been friends to Lor San. She hadn’t been. And Keepers weren’t friends. And though she had thought that maybe some of the patients had been, she now doubted that. How could they not cry, if they had been friends?

At the end of the service, as the priest dismissed them, Finn got out his cell phone and said: “Please, let us play this one song for Lor San. One last time.”

As the priest nodded, Finn pressed play and though the quality of the music was rather bad, it wasn’t too hard to make out the first notes of “Hotel California”.

While everyone listened in silence, Rey was still frowning, some more tears streaming down her cheeks as she tried to focus on the lyrics instead. That wasn’t any better, for once again she didn’t really understand what anything was about. She felt utterly lost – and it almost felt like drowning.

When it was over, Finn took his phone again, and the strange men that had at first lowered the coffin were now getting shovels to cover the coffin with dirt. None of them staid around to witness it, and instead their group headed back to the ward.

This time, as they left again, Rey walked at the front, considering for a few moments how easy it would be to run right now. No one would be able to keep up with her – not even Hux in his current state. She saw how he still seemed a bit stiff – and knew that she could actually make it out if she tried. She wanted to run more than she ever had before.

Escape was so close – so in her grasp – and it would guarantee that she wouldn’t turn out like Lor San.
She considered running a million times in the minutes that followed. Each step could be the first of her escape, but not a single one actually was.

And once the door closed behind her and the others, she realized that she was a coward, and that, maybe like Lor San, she could never leave.

He saw her sit on one of the benches in the courtyard, her gaze down and depressed, like he’d seen her more often the past days. He knew that others had tried approaching her already that morning and afternoon – and all had returned very quickly after she had expressed how little she liked their company.

To the Keepers, she hadn’t snapped in the same way, but she hadn’t spoken to them, and none of them had stuck around long enough to strike up a successful conversation with her.

He wondered if maybe it was up to him then. And if it wasn’t, then at least it would be interesting to see if she would treat him like one of the patients, or like one of the Keepers – or perhaps he had a category of his own.

As he closed the glass door to the courtyard behind him, he knew that she hadn’t looked up, and with his hands in the pockets of his jeans, he headed closer to her.

He stopped a few steps in front of her, and as she realized someone was standing still nearby, she glanced up for a brief second, just long enough to know who it was.

“Hey,” he said softly.

“I’m not in the mood,” she replied briefly, like that was that.

He considered it a small victory that she hadn’t called him a cunt just for talking to her, like she had Poe.

“I know,” he said, sitting down on the same bench as her, though not as closely as he always had in the past. “You don’t need to talk.”

“Good,” she said stubbornly, her jaw clenched as she kept her gaze away from him.

“Is it alright if I talk to you though?” he suggested softly. “I know you don’t want to reply – and you don’t have to. But may I just speak?”

She was quiet for a few moments, still not looking at him, though he saw how the corner of her mouth twitched and how she blinked harshly.

“It’s a free country,” she decided, not in particular demonstrating any passion about hearing him talk.

He didn’t know where to begin. He wanted to say so much to her, and he was quiet for a while before he eventually admitted: “I miss you.”

He looked at her, but got no response.

Sighing sadly, he blinked some tears away. “I know it’s not mutual. I know you’ve been… feeling a wide variety of emotions the past days – none of them love or happiness. I’m sorry for that. I
wish I knew how to help with that - in the way that you’ve helped me so much since you arrived.”

He didn’t look away from her. Now that she refused to talk, he hoped to read from her face what was going through her mind, and as he saw a tear run down her cheek, he felt so horrible for her that he didn’t know what to do with that.

“I don’t know if you ever chose to help me – if it was ever a conscious choice or not. Maybe you were just in the right place at the right time. Maybe you weren’t trying to help at all, and maybe it still helped all the same. I wish I could return that favor. I would.”

As he saw how she wiped some tears from her face now, he hoped she would finally talk, but she just sniffed and lowered her head, gazing miserably at the ground.

He sat in silence for a few moments and was just about to give up, already getting up, when she blurted out: “I’m sad.”

He immediately sat down again, his eyes wide as his heart skipped a beat and he waited for her to continue.

“And angry,” she added with a frown. “Both. And I can’t help you if I can’t help myself.”

“Rey…” He moved a little closer to her on the bench, hoping she’d look at him, and when she did, he felt his heart flutter, even if she looked miserable. “Maybe this time I can help you. It’s not up to you to fix everything all the time – to save the world – or just me. Sometimes good people need saving too. Maybe you need a hand this time. Just let me help.” He gulped heavily and extended his open hand to her, hoping with all his heart she would dare to take it. “Please…”

Her lip was trembling as she looked at him, then at his hand, and soon she was crying again, but this time she did reach out for him, and when her hand finally rested in his, he moved the last distance between them and hugged her tight. When he felt how tightly she squeezed him in return, he couldn’t help but cry as well.

For him, it weren’t just tears of sadness – it were tears of relief too.

“You’re not alone,” he told her, pressing a comforting kiss to the side of her head.

She was quiet for a moment, before he heard her soft reply: “Neither are you.”

Closing his eyes, he held her for a long while. It was so like her to try and comfort him at a time that she was the one that needed it more. She had arrived all those months back and had always taken care of him – instead of the other way around. It was about time he returned the favor.

Rome wasn’t built in a day – and so Kylo didn’t push Rey too hard to speak up about what had been bothering her. Not in the afternoon, at least. In the evening, she had taken out her mp3-player and they were sitting together, outside, even if the air was chilling them a bit. He held her hand as they listened to the music, and when she turned down the volume a bit, he knew she wanted to talk.

“No one cried at Lor San’s funeral,” she said, the frown on her face indicating that that was something she didn’t understand.

Not sure why she seemed offended by that, he tried to explain it: “Maybe we were all cried out
already? Lor San lived with us for a long while, but he wasn’t very talkative. Didn’t make many friends. People talked to him, and sometimes he talked back. But it’s not like he was very close to us in other ways. He didn’t reveal much about himself – about anything.”

She was quiet again, taking that in.

“I don’t talk much,” she said eventually, and his eyes widened a bit as he realized why it had bothered her.

This wasn’t about Lor San. It was about her.

“Are you afraid that you’ll end up like him?” he wondered.

Her small nod didn’t surprise him.

“Well… I think that’s a good thing,” he tried to comfort her. “Now that you know that that’s not what you want to be, you can try to be different.”

She sighed hopelessly. “How can I be different? I don’t know how I’m ever going to make it out of here. It’s like that song of the Hotel California that he always liked. They say – you can check out any time you want, but you can never leave. That’s like us. We might leave the building, or even the ward, but we can’t stay away from it. We can’t leave it. We’re stuck here.”

“We’re not stuck here,” he assured her warmly. “Yes, we’re here for a long-term treatment. We can’t get out in a few weeks, like some folks in other psychiatric wards. We have no one on the outside to help us – so we need to learn a whole lot more before they feel comfortable letting us go. But they will let us go. Lor San never wanted to leave – but that’s not me – and I don’t think that’s you either.”

“It’s not,” she said, though she didn’t sound entirely certain about herself.

Nodding bravely, he continued: “And you won’t be alone if you don’t want to be – my offer still stands, we can live together and live a good life – outside of this ward.”

She had always believed that story in the past – but it had somehow gotten harder to accept.

“I don’t know,” she admitted. “I think you can make it out. In fact, I hardly have a doubt about that. But I don’t see it happening for me. I see myself dying here, like Lor San, with no one even crying at my funeral.”

“I bet I would cry,” Kylo said darkly. “Heck, you weren’t even dead the past days and I’ve cried every night about you. More than I cried for Lor San.”

She seemed terribly moved by those words and gently stroked her thumb over the back of his hand.

“You cried for me?” Her voice sounded small. “I don’t think anyone’s ever cried for me,” she whispered, trying to let that sink in.

“Well, I have,” he said with a goofy smile. “I’d rather not have – but I care for you. The idea of going through with my recovery without you was… unbearable. I tried though – I tried so hard.”

“I barely noticed you were suffering…”

He took it as a compliment and offered her a reassuring smile.

“I’ve gotten a little better at controlling my emotions. But I felt like a wreck on the inside. I’m glad
we’re talking again.”

She looked at him and even smiled back at those words.

“I’m glad as well.”

“So…” He bit his lip for a moment. “We need to work on a plan to get you out of here. I don’t really know where to start.”

Rey was quiet for a few moments, frowning as she thought about it – until she suddenly remembered what Korrie had said to her that morning. Her eyes lit up.

“I do!”

Chapter End Notes

A few small announcements!

- to celebrate reaching 100K words on the story (in my Word file at least, I think we'll actually reach 100K during chapter 27), I wanna hold a little The Only Exception Q&A. If you have questions about the story, about me or about how I write, feel free to ask them in the comments here on AO3, or on Tumblr by messaging me, CartoonJessie. I'll respond to them all in one go to celebrate this milestone, and then it's on to the next 100K!

- I might be taking on a betareader soon to make this story better. I won't go back through the first 100K for that - but hopefully you'll notice an improvement in future chapters. I still have a lot to learn.

- I'm currently also posting a short story (10K words) with Reylo set in the universe of Avatar: The Last Airbender. It's called Legends, and you can find it on AO3 already. I would to hear your thoughts about it! Here's the summary: Eager to help the earthbenders in their war effort without giving her identity away, one waterbender takes on the guise of an ancient Legend. Little does she know that a certain firebender has a very similar idea to hers, and they're about to meet.

- And then last, but not least, I commissioned 3 arts for The Only Exception for my birthday on the 23d of August - and they should pop up on Tumblr somewhere during that day, so keep an eye out for them! I can't wait to share them with you all! Make sure to send the artists some love if you like what they've done.

Have a great day all!
Rey was up rather early the following morning, and when Korrie knocked on her door to wake her, she was all ready to head into the bathroom.

“Good morning!” Korrie sang cheerfully.

“Good morning,” Rey replied – trying to match the Keeper’s cheerfulness but not entirely succeeding. She sounded a little pathetic, and didn’t waste time on small talk. She immediately blurted out: “You want to teach me things?”

It wasn’t entirely a question and the intern frowned a little.

“What sort of things do you mean, Rey?”

“Things I need to know so that they release me from the ward?”

Korrie tried not to look too surprised – even if this wasn’t the conversation she had imagined having first thing in the morning.

“You seem eager to leave this ward,” she remarked, and Rey immediately beamed and nodded.

“Kylo is doing really well. And I want to be able to leave when he does. But I don’t know anything. I need to learn a lot. Can you help me?”

It was a vague question and Korrie wasn’t entirely certain what it entailed. Not to mention, that - even though she had yet to ask Maz for approval - she had played with the idea of making Rey an integral part of her research in the ward. She now realized that perhaps she had given Rey too much hope, too soon. What if she couldn’t do what Rey asked? What if Rey was putting too much trust in her already?

“I want to,” Korrie admitted. “But I would also need to check this with doctor Kanata, and make sure that I am doing the right things to help you. What would you like to learn specifically?”

Rey’s gaze was rather blank as she considered that question, and Korrie realized that she really didn’t know.

“Do you know what kind of job you’d like to have once you’re out here?”

Rey shook her head – once again a blank expression on her face.

“Anything you’re good at?” the intern tried.

“Running,” she said immediately, but as she saw Korrie’s frown, she said: “But there’s no job that requires people to run.”

“Did you ever go to school?” Korrie wondered.

As Rey shook her head again, the intern bit her lip.

“Well, school is where you see where your talents lie. Maybe we can start with giving you a basic
education?” Korrie was frowning though. “I need to check it with Maz. But once you have a basic degree, we can work from there.”

Rey nodded eagerly. “And then they’ll hire me for stuff?”

Once again, Korrie wasn’t certain. “Well, it would improve your chances on the market.”

“I don’t want to work on a marketplace.” Rey frowned and Korrie chuckled.

“The job market – it means anywhere that there are jobs.”

“Oh.”

“But I’ll look into it. And I’ll let you know, alright? Now go get dressed. We’re heading to the track after breakfast.”

Rey nodded and even managed a small smile. The idea of going for a sprint was always a fun one.

As Kylo and Poe stood in front of the large mirror of the bathroom, once more grooming themselves for the day that awaited them, Kylo said: “I think Rey’s bad mood is over.”

“Yeah?” Poe asked, combing through his hair. “Think she might apologize?”

Kylo wrinkled his nose. “Not sure she realizes that she was rude.”

Poe sighed. “Well you better tell her.”

“Me?” Kylo frowned. “Why don’t you tell her yourself? She was rude to you, not me.”

“She’s your girlfriend,” Poe argued. “She will take that sort of feedback more easily from you than she does from me!”

As Finn entered, Poe nearly dropped his comb, even if the former was completely ignoring Poe as he looked at Kylo and said: “Good morning.”

“Morning!” Kylo returned the greeting, and he noticed how stunned Poe seemed to be.

While Finn walked into one of the shower cubicles, Poe could not drag his eyes away from where he had disappeared, and it wasn’t difficult for Kylo to notice.

“You know what,” Kylo said softly once the sound of the streaming water in Finn’s cubicle could be heard. “I’ll talk to Rey about her behavior. I figure you’ve got your own case to talk to.”

As Poe looked at him with large eyes, not understanding how he even knew, Kylo rolled his eyes.

He kept his voice down so Finn couldn’t overhear them. “I know he liked you, and that you still like him, but that things went wrong once Jess turned out pregnant. You gotta talk about that. Resolve the tension and such.”

Poe nearly had tears in his eyes from the thought alone.

“I don’t know how,” he admitted, looking utterly lost.
“You can do this.” Kylo patted him on the shoulder. “You’re not a bad guy.”

That confused Poe only more, and he looked dejected as Kylo left the room. Though he was already done and no longer needed to be in the bathroom, he remained in front of the mirror, trying to think of what to say to Finn, and listening and waiting for him to finish showering.

When Finn finally emerged again, wearing sweat pants and a tank top, he visible startled as he saw Poe was still there, turned towards him as he anxiously waited for him.

Raising his hands, Poe immediately said: “I’m sorry if I scared you!” The last thing he wanted was to trigger another PTSD attack.

Finn’s surprised look changed into an angry one, and Poe gulped as he realized this wasn’t going to be easy.

“I’m sorry for a lot of other things as well!” he said, his hands trembling. “I… I know I hurt you – but that was the last thing I wanted to do. I meant what I said – I love you – no matter how much you hate me now. I’m so sorry.”

Finn was still frowning, and Poe realized that those words weren’t enough.

“Yeah, you should be,” he said angrily. “You lied to me.”

“But you knew I was sleeping with Jess,” Poe added woefully. “I mean, you’d seen us come out of the forest… I just… I had no idea why you were so upset about that back then. It makes sense now. I loved Jess too – but in a different way – just as friends. But you… It was different with you!”

Finn wasn’t certain why he was still listening, but he remained rooted to where he stood, his gaze slightly less angry as he listened to Poe talk.

“In what way was it different?” he asked, stubbornly crossing his arms.

Poe didn’t know what to reply for a moment. He hadn’t thought about it.

“I just feel it,” he said. “Like… Jess was to pass the time. To make it go faster. To forget the pain and drag and boredom of being here. But you…”

He hesitated as he looked for the words… as he tried to recall the feeling of being in Finn’s arms.

“With you it gave me hope that I could be truly loved. That I could get better again. That it was just a prelude to a better future – for the both of us. Not just a way to pass the time.”

Finn’s frown had disappeared nearly completely now, and his gaze was almost as miserable as Poe’s.

“Well, you shouldn’t have lied to me about Jess,” he said in a slightly calmer tone. “You already knew – and you didn’t tell me.”

Poe burst into tears at that, nodding. “I know – I’m so sorry.”

As Finn looked at Poe standing there so forlorn, so utterly lost, he closed the distance between them and hugged him. Poe clung so tightly to him that he felt his heart skip a beat and the familiar nauseous feeling returned to his stomach.

Who was he kidding? He still loved Poe – despite everything.
Tightening his embrace on Poe as well, he whispered: “I know you can’t always help that sort of thing. But it still hurt.”

“I know,” Poe sobbed against him. “I’ll try harder. I’m so sorry.”

Feeling his heart ache as Poe sounded so utterly wretched, Finn desperately wanted to cheer him up and he pressed a light kiss to his cheek, which immediately caused Poe to look at Finn in mild confusion – but also with the hope that they could be together again.

“Don’t look at me like that,” Finn said strictly. “I’m not sure if all is alright – okay?”

Though he was still perplexed, Poe bowed his head slowly.

“If you break my heart again, I’m not forgiving you next time,” he added severely.

Poe nodded faster at that, still crying. “I never wanted to break your heart.”

“I know,” Finn admitted, realizing that Poe had somehow felt as downhearted about their breakup as he had. “We have to work on that.”

As Poe smiled through his tears, so did Finn.

He stared at Poe for a long while, his heart fluttering as he realized that he could attempt to love this man again. He’d missed him so much. And he didn’t want to miss him for one second longer.

As he pressed his lips to Poe’s, he felt how Poe almost swooned against him – the act catching him completely by surprise – and though he had intended it to be a brief kiss only, it was too good to stop.

They were almost completely lost in time and space when they became aware that the door had swung open, and as they immediately broke apart and turned to see who it was, they felt lucky that it was only Wexley, though he stared at them in mild shock.

Neither Finn nor Poe knew what to say, but Wexley suddenly walked past them towards a shower cubicle, muttering: “Homosexuality is no longer a sin – that sort of thing is normal now… No, I didn’t know Finn was gay either... Maybe he’s bisexual? … I don’t know, Jude! I don’t want to know how long this has been going on.”

As the cubicle door closed behind him, Finn and Poe looked at one another with wide eyes. Though Wexley was a good guy, he had moments that he talked to himself and his voices a lot. If the Keepers overheard him and found out… They didn’t want to imagine what that would mean for them.

Upon their arrival at the track, Phasma felt a little bad for Wexley. Usually he walked together with Lor San, but this would be his first time without him. She almost wanted to ask Korrie to walk with him, when Finn and Poe already turned to her.

“Hey,” Finn said, trying to sound lighthearted. “Should Poe and I walk with Wexley today? I mean, not together, but separately? Keep him company?”

Poe quickly nodded in agreement, and Phasma was a little perplexed.
“Eh... Sure! That's actually a good idea. Maybe next week one of the new arrivals can walk with him, but for today it's fine. Which one of you would like to begin?”

As Finn raised his hand and Phasma nodded, he immediately strolled towards Wexley, who was glad to see he didn’t need to walk alone, and they began their lap.

Poe rushed over to Rey and Kylo as they were warming up, and Kylo shot him a knowing smile.

He'd seen Poe and Finn walk next to each other that morning, talking again, and he had known they had made up again. He hadn't known quite how much they had made up – but as he saw Poe’s wide grin he had an impression that they were back on together.

Rey was oblivious as always, and the moment her warm-up was done, she teasingly said: “Try to catch up with me!” – before she darted off.

Poe and Kylo started their run at the same pace – and though Kylo could run a little faster, for once he didn’t.

“So all good again with Finn?” he asked when they were far enough for the Keepers not to overhear.


Kylo was surprised by that. “What then?”

“If a new arrival arrives. And if they flirt with me or something. Stop me from doing stupid things.”

Poe was already panting – talking and running at the same time didn’t go well for him – and Kylo chuckled. Poe’s question only showed how much he cared about Finn. Of course he would help.

He figured it was time to pick up the pace and leave the man to a peaceful jog on his own – so he wouldn’t end up with stitches in his side.

“If you misbehave, Snoke and I will gladly punch you in the face,” Kylo promised with a wink, and though Poe looked a little alarmed, Kylo just laughed and ran off – eager to prove that he was the second-fast runner on the track.

Trying to catch up with Rey was near impossible, but during his second lap, she was suddenly by his side, slowing down just enough to poke him in the side. While he tried to poke her back, she was too fast as she ran off with a giggle. He did try to sprint after her, but there was no catching up to her and he only ended up exhausting himself – though with a wide grin that was impossible to wipe off his face.

As Phasma and Korrie looked at them from the side of the track, Korrie decided to confide in her new coworker. As she told the older Keeper all about her idea for studying Rey, and how Rey had asked her to help her with an education, Phasma listened intently.

“To be honest, we don’t have the time to teach her,” she admitted, and as she saw Korrie’s alarmed expression, she smiled reassuringly. “By ‘we’, I mean the Keepers that are usually around. But you’re an extra hand. If you want to invest your time in her, and if your school agrees, then you might just be what Rey needs. Hux and I have talked about her as well the last weeks. She’s not making useful progress – and sending her off to an actual school – even a second-chance school for adults – would be a liability. We’d be giving her too much freedom, and we don’t even know if she wouldn’t run off at the first sign that things get rough. She doesn’t talk much when she feels bad,
and so by the time we figure out something’s wrong, she could already have escaped.”

Korrie nodded, understanding Phasma’s sentiment. “Not to mention that it must be incredibly scary for her – the idea of going to a school away from the ward – meeting new people. At least she has some friends here.”

Phasma agreed. “I dare say Kylo’s a bit more than a friend these days. But I think the other patients have her back too. More than she realizes. I hope Maz agrees with your project – it would certainly benefit Rey.”

On their walk back to the ward, everyone seemed elated. The run had been fun, and even Wexley hadn’t minded walking with Finn and Poe.

They had separately informed him about the relationship and asked him to kindly not mention it to the Keepers. Finn had been most honest about it, saying he didn’t want to get separated from Poe for loving him. Wexley had answered that no one had tried to separate Kylo and Rey, but Finn had argued that maybe they thought differently about gay relationships. Luckily, Wexley had promised to be a good friend and to keep their secret.

Once they were back in the ward, they headed back to the living room, where doctor Kanata and Thanisson were waiting in the company of two new patients.

Rey seemed to hide behind Kylo completely as she looked at the newcomers with wide eyes, yet she did notice that one of them was a Chinese girl who was sobbing uncontrollably as she sat next to doctor Kanata, who had put a box of tissues between them.

The man by Thanisson’s side was a bit older – probably in his late 40s or early 50s – with dark, short hair and a rough stubble on his cheek. His eyes seemed small as he grinned at everyone who entered and he looked rather shabby. What was most peculiar was that he was wearing a hat indoors, but he took it off for a moment as a sign of respect to those who entered.

Kanata was the first to speak as she got up and motioned everybody to the therapy table.

“Maybe we could all sit down and have a drink once everyone has put their gear away?” As she looked at Korrie, the intern immediately nodded.

“I’ll get some glasses and water.”

As patients went to put their jackets and sporting shoes in their rooms, the two newcomers sat next to each other at the table, even if they didn’t really look at one another. The girl only looked at the blank space of the table before her, still sniffing, but no longer crying as badly, while the man was investigating everything – the furniture, the ceiling, the windows and not in the least the Keepers – but only when they had their backs turned.

As the other patients entered again, they moved to sit across the table – though as usual, no one dared to sit next to the newcomers. There was always a fear that someone was going to do something strange, or something dangerous, and while no trust was gained, people usually kept their distance.

Korrie started pouring everyone some water, and while Phasma and Thanisson sat down next to the newcomers, Kanata took a seat between Poe and Wexley.
The new girl still had tears in her eyes, though she was trying very hard to stop her crying now, and Kanata decided to start talking to make the silence less awkward and to give Rose something else to think about.

“I’d like to introduce all of you to Rose Tico and to DJ,” Kanata began, but at the mention of the name “DJ”, some of the patients frowned.

“Don’t you have a last name?” Poe wondered loudly.

“I d-do,” the man stuttered with a charming smile. “It’s J-Johnson.”

Poe frowned at that. “So that’s what the J stands for. What does the D stand for?”

“Dick,” Finn muttered without missing a beat – a small smile on his face – and Poe cracked up immediately, putting his hand on Finn’s shoulder as he tried to steady himself so he wouldn’t fall out of his chair.

DJ looked annoyed.

“T-that’s right,” he said, earning a perplexed look from Finn and Poe as they looked at him in small shock.

When the newcomer smiled, they immediately grinned again, and as Finn realized his guess had been correct, he couldn’t help but shake his head.

“Man, I get why you prefer to be called DJ.”

The patient tipped his hat at that, and Poe was still wiping tears of laughter from his eyes, trying not to burst out again.

“Well then,” Kanata said dryly, accepting that keeping DJ’s name just an abbreviation hadn’t even worked for a minute. “Maybe you could introduce yourselves as well?”

While they all exchanged names with the newcomers, Rey didn’t look at DJ or Rose as she gave her name, and luckily Kylo gave his so fast after hers that she didn’t feel watched either.

When they were all done, doctor Kanata turned to DJ again.

“Now, DJ, you wanted to tell the group something about how they could help you out?”

The man didn’t seem particularly eager to share, but it seemed like he had very little to say in the matter.

“My p-problem is with gambling,” he informed them. “And long ago also d-drugs. I don’t do that anymore.”

Kanata addressed the patients further as she said: “In order for DJ not to relapse, we must support him as a group and make sure we don’t trigger him into placing bets or wagers. It’s a habit he is trying to get rid of, so we must try and support him in this while being mindful of possible new addictions.”

DJ tipped his hat again in gratitude, and as there was a moment of silence, Rose took a shaky breath before she asked: “Am I next?”

She sounded anxious and unprepared, and Kanata was a little surprised. Before she could tell Rose that it was up to her whether she wanted to say something, and that it was not required of her to say
Without looking at anyone and with as little emotion in her tone as she could muster, she began: “My name is Rose Tico. I’m 23 years old and I grew up in the system with my sister Paige. I worked as a car mechanic before my sister died in a crash and I’ve been unable to cope with that since it happened seventeen months and two weeks ago.” She rushed through her story. “I got very depressed. Lost my job. Became suicidal and was taken into a psychiatric hospital for a while, but they thought it was better to return to the system for my recovery, even if I still feel very depressed and have a lot of dark thoughts regardless of where I am.”

She had hardly taken a pause during any of that, and the moment she finished, she took a shaky breath, started crying again, and most people around the table sat there in mild shock.

Phasma gave Kanata a meaningful look, after which the doctor said: “Thank you for telling us, Rose. That’s very brave of you that you dared to speak about it so openly. Maybe it doesn’t feel like it, but that openheartedness will help your recovery.”

“I grew up in the system as well,” Finn suddenly admitted, and Rose looked up at him, her gaze curious despite her tears. “My parents died when I was very young. I didn’t have brothers or sisters, so I was alone. I went to two different homes before I turned 18. Life was very structured there – despite the chaos of having new kids join your house every now and then. When I was 18, I enlisted in the army. I quite liked it. The structure was something I recognized and appreciated. But unfortunately, a few years later, I was sent to Afghanistan – witnessed the brutal murdering of some of the best friends I’d ever had in my life.” His voice choked up for a brief moment, but he continued fearlessly: “And I left the army after that. I couldn’t get used to a normal, civilian life. It was so loud, and everything triggered my PTSD. Mental breakdowns were becoming a part of my daily routine. I lost a lot of weight and felt like a wreck of a person, until after a short time in a psychiatric hospital, they assigned me to this ward instead.” He took a deep breath, before he said: “It’s not always easy, but it’s some sort of home. There’s a structure here that I find comforting. And I’m making friends again, despite the fact that I still have an episode sometimes. So eh… Don’t try to surprise me or jump me or something – I respond badly to that.”

Rose immediately nodded, grateful to hear that he had a story that was similar, it gave her the hope that maybe this was the right place for her.

“Last week he nearly killed our Keeper, Hux,” Poe added with a grin, trying to impress the newcomers.

While DJ seemed impressed, Rose looked terrified.

As Poe saw the disapproving gazes of Phasma and Kanata, he quickly added: “Also, I have no filter. That’s my problem. I often say stuff before I think it through and I’m impulsive.”

Though no one had asked anyone to say anything, Wexley looked at Rose and said: “I’m schizophrenic. I have many voices in my head and without the proper medication I wouldn’t even be able to listen to other people. Sometimes they’re so loud. They’re quite pleasant voices though, in general, but the problem is that I’m distracted most of the time and many of my past medications stopped working at some point, and then I became very absent. It’s going really well at the moment, and I have a sister I can visit every few weekends if I’m doing alright. My mother died a few years ago, but all in all I’m happy to be here.”

Rose smiled appreciatively, before her gaze shifted from Wexley to Rey, who was sitting next to him. She felt her heart pounding in her throat, not sure what to say. For a moment she considered not saying anything, but she felt pressured by the presence of the other patients and keepers, and
quietly spoke up.

“I grew up on the street. I’ve never been in the system until I arrived here a few months ago. I don’t know if I like it, but... people here have been good to me.” She stopped at that, and felt Kylo’s hand squeeze hers underneath the table.

Knowing how hard it was on her to say more, he said: “She’s my girlfriend. I also spent a lot of time on the street – thought I never knew her from there. Like Wexley, I have schizophrenia, though of a rather different kind. I only hear one voice. And it’s not a pleasant one. I was very aggressive when I first got here and also... much later than when I first got here.” He scratched his head a little awkwardly. “I feel like I’m controlling it better now. I work at the farmhouse – a few hours each day – and I hope that when I get out I can continue working with animals.”

Maz couldn’t help but smile at all those honest confessions and Phasma seemed to be beaming with pride as well.

Thanisson cleared his throat as he said: “Well... now that we’ve all gotten to know one another, I propose that we prepare the table for our midday meal – and we can also already prepare the therapy table for this afternoon. I intended to make some collages in a spring-theme with you all. Focusing mostly on colors you like. With maybe a few images you find in magazines that remind you of spring.”

“It’s our kitchen duty,” Kylo said as he immediately got up, knowing the schedule by heart, and Rey eagerly followed him away from the therapy table and the new people she’d rather not socialize with.

In the afternoon, Korrie was able to talk to Kanata about Rey, but the doctor had some problems with her idea.

“Though I don’t dislike the idea of Rey getting an education, your thesis should handle more than just the education of a young woman who grew up on the streets. How are you going to translate that into a study that is relevant to anthropology? It seems more appropriate for someone who would be studying pedagogics.”

Korrie bit her lip, thinking about that. “It’s kind of difficult because there are only a few people in the group, and everyone has such different issues and backgrounds. I’m not entirely certain how to make it relevant, but I can’t say that other cases I considered were easier to integrate into my studies.”

“Well, you don’t study individuals – you study populations,” Kanata said slowly, thinking about it. She desperately wanted to help Rey as well and Korrie’s proposal would be great for Rey, but horrible for Korrie if she couldn’t translate it to a thesis that would work for her professors.

As Kanata stood up, she walked to a large filing cabinet and slid open a drawer. As she picked out two files, she moved back to her desk with them. Going through the first one, Korrie thought she recognized DJ on an old picture, and she looked at the doctor as she bit her lip before going into the second file, where it seemed to be Kylo who was pictured.

“Alright,” doctor Kanata said slowly. “Not just Kylo and Rey have experience with living on the street. DJ does as well. And they all have in common that they don’t have a grade either.”
Korrie’s eyes lit up. “I can compare their cases! They’re a group!”

Kanata smiled. “Not just that, but you could help all three of them with getting a grade. And you could even see where their strengths and weaknesses would lie. Maybe they’re all exceptionally bad at geography. Maybe they’re good in certain aspects of math. Maybe they pick up on a foreign language faster than most. Maybe they have a lot of trouble with a certain subject, which would make a case for more groups that grow up without a proper education.”

The young intern nodded eagerly. “It needs some work, but that’s a good place to start. And a good way to help Rey, as well as DJ and Kylo. They never went to school?”

The doctor didn’t seem sure. “I’m positive Kylo went to school – and even that he was a decent student – but he doesn’t mention it and he doesn’t have a grade. Kylo’s probably not even his real name, but no one has ever managed to get him to talk about his life before he lived on the streets. As for DJ, he flunked out of school when he was about sixteen and didn’t return. So I guess you could say that those two have a massive head start compared to Rey. But by comparing their cases to those of people who have gotten an education, you might have some way to make the education of Rey your main priority while you’re here.”

Korrie nodded. ‘I’ll think about it. Thank you for your assistance! I’ll get to work about it this afternoon once I get home!”

Maz smiled as Korrie got up. “Good luck!”

Chapter End Notes

Massive thanks to BlueRaven for beta-ing this story! (You can find her here: https://archiveofourown.org/users/Raven_is_blue/pseud/Raven_is_blue/works)
Yes, it’s a new thing - I never had a beta before for this story - but boy, I suppose I could use one! Lots of weird things were pointed out to me, and I realized I was literally translating some Dutch sayings into English. And I use - too much, as I already demonstrated in this paragraph.

Also, thank you so much for all the questions you sent in for the Q&A! There were some really great ones! I’ll post the answers on Tumblr within the next days, and next chapter I’ll link to it so you can read. There were a few fun ones - asking about spoilers and certain characters that haven't been mentioned yet, and I can't wait to tease you all about it. If you have more questions, feel free to send them in as a response to this chapter.

I also received some lovely arts for my birthday - and made some graphics myself! It's actually too much to share here, so I'll just link to my tag where you can find all the artworks for this story: http://cartoonjessie.tumblr.com/tagged/the-only-exception

Don’t be a stranger! Say hi and let me know what you thought of this chapter!

Next chapter will have some smut! (Not sure whether to up the rating from Mature to Explicit or not - I'll check with some folks which one it is.) Take care, and thanks again for all your lovely comments! <3
Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!